,...Later in his career, Mollenhauer came to see that we cannot not engage in upbringing (in the same way that “we cannot not communicate”; see: Winkler, 2002, p. 12; Watzlawick et al., 1967, p. 49). In the preface to Forgotten Connections, he is uncompromising in his argument that even “the most radical anti-educationist cannot avoid embodying an adult way of life in front of children; like any adult, he or she powerfully exemplifies one way of life or another for a child.” Through the books published immediately after Forgotten Connections, Mollenhauer worked out understandings of education that focused less on current political conditions of education, and more on children’s own experiences, including the aesthetic dimensions of education. As Winkler explains, Mollenhauer came to “insist on the real life situations of children, including their powerlessness as [being a] part of the characteristic structure of education... Although they are certainly located within social conditions, [Children] cannot simply be explained away as a social function” (2002, p. 58).

Forgotten Connections and the Content of Culture

These and similar realizations led Mollenhauer to reaffirm the importance of the human science tradition of his advisor Weniger, and to return to the philosophical anthropology of Plessner. For example, in an interview late in his career, Mollenhauer was asked: “Are there key pedagogical writings for you; pedagogical classics, of which you would say: these are texts that one must repeatedly open oneself to?” Mollenhauer responded by saying: “Although I am somewhat embarrassed to answer directly, I will say The Education of the Human Race by Lessing, the Letter from Stans by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and
the lectures [on education –trans.] from 1826 by Schleiermacher” (Mollenhauer, 1991, p. 73) It is these deeply humanist texts, rather than, say, Karl Marx’s class analyses or Kant’s rationalistic critiques, that Mollenhauer finally came to see as having lasting importance for education. In the same interview, Mollenhauer reflects on how his return to the tradition of human science pedagogy – specifically as manifest in *Forgotten Connections* – relates to his earlier interest in emancipation:

I don’t think that this book [*Forgotten Connections*] is a denial of the concept of emancipation; for me it is rather a different path that I first had to take one more time in order to arrive at a more substantial concept of emancipation. In addition, the problem of language played a big role for me. ...So I thought, in order to find another language [other than a social scientific vocabulary], I would have to realign my object of study. I found I was able to arrive at a better language for studying education and upbringing when I read more, say, of Franz Kafka’s educational text (Letter to his Father). Or the extraordinary care that Augustine takes in his writings. These are exercises in the Bildung of the self (*Selbstbildung*). (Mollenhauer, 1985, p. 81)

Mollenhauer, in other words, did not lose interest in the notion of emancipation, but he became deeply dissatisfied with the language of the social sciences that is usually used to frame it. This language of abstract processes (e.g., interaction, reproduction, socialization), and of general institutions and structures (e.g., class, family, state) seemed to him inadequate for talking about the meaning of upbringing in one’s own life, or about what one’s hopes might be for a child. An example of this type of sociological abstraction is provided through a systems diagram,
below, which is translated from *Theories of Educational Processes*, the last book Mollenhauer wrote before *Forgotten Connections*:

![Diagram: System and Components of the Pedagogical Field](Mollenhauer, 1972, p. 20)

This diagram includes notions that are of central importance in *Forgotten Connections*, such as spontaneity, reproduction and tradition, the relationships between the older and younger generations, as well as the idea that education spans family, traditions and educational institutions. At the same time, this diagram is a far cry from the kind of biographical descriptions of upbringing and *Bildung* that Mollenhauer finds in authors like Augustine and Kafka – and also from similar descriptions that students of education seem to readily provide when asked.

In general terms, the tendency that Mollenhauer was combating – the use of a purely formal and abstract jargon in place of attention to the concrete person or situation – is arguably much stronger and more widespread now than it was in his own time. A focus on transferable “competencies” and a deliberate de-emphasis of any particular content that might be associated with education has recently been prominent in school reform in Germany and elsewhere in the European Union. North American schools,
meanwhile, have been subjected to something rather similar in the form of high stakes testing of reading, math and related skills. In the context of these reforms – again speaking broadly – education becomes a matter of identifying and operationalizing the most efficient techniques for developing measurable competencies and skills, rather than being about “ways of the self,” the sharing of cultural contents or even human concerns of lasting importance.

Mollenhauer came to see that any one persons’ experience of their own upbringing and Bildung is not just a process and a set of structures, a set of abstract probabilities that is to be statistically derived, say, from their parents’ IQs and incomes, or the rankings of relevant schools and colleges. This experience is instead particular and embedded in biography, culture and history, often being decisively shaped (for example) through a relationship with an especially engaged teacher, parent, counsellor or grandparent. This understanding of Bildung as a social-biographical “way of the self” means that Mollenhauer’s attention in Forgotten Connections is not only focused on cultural content in general, but on particular instances of “ways of the self,” and on particular descriptions and accounts of these different “ways”:

When we describe pedagogically relevant connections and questions, we should not just present documents and historical sources that almost without exception are preferred in intellectual discussions and theories today – texts dominated by abstract and theoretical language and argumentation. It is necessary to have a certain starting point for our thinking, but if we want to develop general theories we need a broader selection of cultural material. This is exactly what I intend to do with [Forgotten Connections]. (Mollenhauer, 1985, p. 81)
However, working with this broad variety of cultural materials involves a rather different method or approach than applying abstract terminology and argumentation. This begins with the recognition that Mollenhauer’s concrete cultural and artistic illustrations are not intended as mere “examples” to highlight particular concepts, or to enliven an academic discussion. As one reviewer of *Forgotten Connections* put it,

Mollenhauer does not illustrate, he interprets. He needs to take detours by way of the products of [the] arts and literature in order to see things that are otherwise unnoticeable. [In this way] he is able to enlighten us about education. (Levering, 1987, p. 272)

The passages Mollenhauer quotes and the image he offers form the very core of his text, the reason, basis and inspiration for Mollenhauer’s own writing and interpretation. In this sense, Mollenhauer’s own writing in *Forgotten Connections* is secondary. It is the reader’s encounter with van Gogh, Kafka, Menocchio the Peasant, Sister Pirckheimer and others that is primary. Mollenhauer explains how he engages textually with this material – and how he hopes to re-establish the connections leading from, to and in-between these examples and his own interpretations.

To take a text from Augustine, when you interpret it, you cannot speak as if you were talking of sociological theory; the text would simply disappear. That is related to my thoughts on hermeneutics… For me, hermeneutics means first of all the understanding of, in some way, documented connections or contexts (*Zusammenhänge*), to be able to understand a source, or an autobiography…or also
Forgotten Connections

pictorial sources. Images are for me just as important as sources for hermeneutic study as linguistic resources. (Mollenhauer, 1985, p. 81)

Whether they are texts (e.g., from Augustine, Kafka, Bernhard or Kaspar Hauser) or pictures (e.g., historical engravings, famous paintings or self-portraits), these sources are provided by Mollenhauer with the intention of suggesting and documenting connections that have otherwise been forgotten.

“Hermeneutics” refers to the art and science of interpretation, an approach first formalized by Schleiermacher, one of Mollenhauer’s “classic authors.” Hermeneutics works to develop an understanding of a text in terms of the connections with its historical context and with our present-day experience. Thus, Kafka’s texts, as one example, are very much expressive of the established yet precarious situation of successful Jewish families around the 1900s in Europe – families who were later forced to flee the continent or who were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz and Dachau. By understanding this historical situation, Kafka’s texts are given a layer of significance – one that is still compelling today. At the same time, Kafka’s texts have a more general human and existential significance that takes them beyond the specific place, time and history that marks their origin. Hermeneutics takes both of these kinds of meaning into account, and interconnects them in a manner that is circular, moving from part to whole of the text, and from history to current experience and back again – in a potentially unending “hermeneutic circle.” In principle, as one key hermeneutic text explains, any source is “an inexhaustible object of lingering attention and interpretation… whose meaning cannot be exhausted by conceptual understanding” (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 58, 81). Any one
interpretation offered by the historical context and current pedagogical experience can be followed and augmented by another. This puts the reader in the position of interpreting the examples along with Mollenhauer, rather than regarding the author’s hermeneutic efforts (or anyone else’s) as the final word.

There are other implications of Mollenhauer’s focus on cultural substance or content. One is its specificity: If education is understood in terms of personal biography, as a curriculum for a given culture at a given time and place, then the experiences, curriculum and “content” associated with education will differ from one culture, time and place to the next. Some of the experiences and examples in Forgotten Connections are consequently different from those that will likely be familiar to most English readers. How can this content and substance speak to someone who may have little or no connection with Mollenhauer’s Germany or Europe?

Mollenhauer considers this very question in his preface to the 1996 Norwegian translation of Forgotten Connections, one of his last writings to be published before his passing in 1998 at the age of 70. He recognized that his focus on content and cultural substance – and specifically on examples from German culture and history – might be criticized as being “ethnocentric.” “It represents a perspective on questions related to upbringing and Bildung that could be called ‘Central European,’” as he says. Mollenhauer then explains that

During the early modern period, beginning with the early Renaissance in Italy, new thoughts regarding upbringing and Bildung emerged. It is my conviction that these thoughts… can still be developed in different regions, as well as with regard to
the future challenges of our multicultural society. (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 8)²

The values, ideas and practices associated with upbringing and Bildung in “modern” Europe, in other words, can and have taken root and born fruit outside of Europe, and in societies of non-European and mixed cultures and races. In editing and translating Mollenhauer’s text, and in writing this introduction, it is also my own hope that these insights can similarly be developed to meet plural challenges of the multicultural and post-colonial futures. I am optimistic not despite the cultural specificity of Mollenhauer’s approach, but precisely because of it.

To explain, it is helpful to look at the historical and cultural background of education as we know it today. As already indicated, in places such as the US, Canada or the UK, it is relatively common to think of education as a set of techniques or as a kind of “technology”: Public, secular educational forms – e.g., the school, classroom and textbook – are seen as presenting relatively neutral ways of reaching common, valuable goals like personal betterment and social development. This way of understanding education finds ready expression in functional, systems diagrams of the kind developed by Mollenhauer before Forgotten Connections (Figure 1, above). Seen as a general and formal system – literally a collection of arrows and boxes – it is relatively easy to conceive of education as a more-or-less efficient way of delivering help and improvement. In this context, it can be genuinely difficult to see how education could be the expression of one kind of history and culture or another.

² This translation from Norwegian is provided courtesy of Tone Saevi.
Mollenhauer’s *Forgotten Connections* repeatedly reminds us that it is not as simple as this. The book makes it clear that public, secular education – which it characterizes as constituting a separate “educational sphere” – appears at a particular time and place. This is Europe in the “early modern period,” between 1500 and 1800. Mollenhauer is not alone in this insistence. Sociologists and historians of education have consistently “show[n] that many features of modern schooling took their form at the end of the Middle Ages, the so-called early modern period, when ownership and domination of the school shifted from the church” (Olson, 2003, p. 52). Speaking very simply, what replaced the power of the church over education was *capitalism*. As one historian of education observes, it “is perhaps no exaggeration to say that, on an international scale, schooling was conceived by Christianity and raised by capitalism” (Hamilton, 1989, p. vii). Christianity, particularly Protestantism, saw mass education as a way to the Bible and the truth. Capitalism saw it, on an even bigger scale, as the way to industry and riches.

Certainly there have been teachers and teachings (e.g., Buddha in the 5th century BCE), students and tests (e.g., in 6th century Feudal China), and even classrooms and school libraries (e.g., in 11th century Madrassas) before schools and universities were established in Europe. However, it is only in Europe, starting with the Renaissance, that schools started to be organized as *secular*, rather than religious institutions, serving a *public* rather than elite community. Hamilton explains:

If the medieval church had adopted schooling merely to discipline its cadre of teachers and preachers, [other churches] …began to use schooling for a broader political purpose – the
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disciplining of the population at large... [and] the ideological incorporation of the subordinate members of society. (1989, p. 16)

Hamilton and Olson also note that research on the emergence and gradual globalization of educational forms – for example, textbooks, grades and curricula – is marked by a “weak sense of history” (1989, p. 2), leaving many questions “unexplored” (2003, p. 43). Despite this, a few researchers have investigated this chronology and have demonstrated how the “technologies” of the textbook (bound publications with a pedagogical intent) appeared in various places in Europe with the spread of Gutenberg’s printing press (e.g., Grafton, 2008). Others have investigated how the notions of classes segregated by age and ability first appeared in Paris and Glasgow toward the end of the 18th century (e.g., Hoskin, 1993), and how the “blackboard” and the “curriculum” appeared in Edinburgh and Leiden around the same time (e.g., Pillans, 1852, p. 114; Hamilton, 1989). To explore the history of these basic elements of the “educational sphere,” as Mollenhauer does in Forgotten Connections, is to get at how education is not a system of neutral techniques, but instead, a culturally and historically specific phenomenon. Through its conception via Christianity, its capitalist secularization, and its concurrent globalization, public education preserves elements of

3 Daniel Tröhler observes: “The history of education in relation to globalization is quite paradoxical. The first global phenomenon of education emerged out of reactions against the Reformation in the late sixteenth century, when the counter-reformatory Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, started to establish institutions of higher education first in Europe and later in other parts of the world. Provided in architecturally standardized buildings, the Jesuit education was based on a standardized curriculum [although not known as such at the time] developed by international experts and
this substance and specificity to this day – in the commonsensical omnipresence of elements like classes, blackboards, textbooks and curricula. And it is this substance and specificity to which Mollenhauer insistently brings our attention, and for which he fleshes out a rich cultural and historical context. The challenge or danger lays not so much in seeing education in terms of the cultural and historical context that Mollenhauer or others may offer, but in missing its cultural and historical specificity altogether. To forget this specificity and to see education essentially as a set of scientific techniques (i.e., instruction) applied to natural development (i.e., learning) is to be guilty of a blind ethnocentrism much greater than the one Mollenhauer admits to above.

Forgotten Connections – Questions, Themes and Chronology

The multicultural significance or potential of Mollenhauer’s text is given clear expression in the way it is structured. The book addresses six questions and six keywords or themes of the broadest existential relevance, with each question and theme or keyword serving as the focus for each of its six chapters. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Why do we want (to be with) children? Theme: Upbringing and Bildung
2. What way of life do I present to children? Theme: Presentation

used standardized quality rating systems to assess students’ achievement.” (2011, p. 181)