Curriculum as Shadow Play

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As the sun peeks over the dunes to greet the new day, we arrive at the camp.
Helpful hands welcome us in. We made it. We are safe.
—Suzanne Del Rizzo, *My Beautiful Birds*

S UZANNE DEL RIZZO'S (2017) *My Beautiful Birds*, a piece of children's literature about a young Syrian refugee named Sami in a United Nations refugee camp written by a white Canadian author, is an example of a story where sunlight is a force from which Sami must seek refuge. This is, of course, in addition to chemical weapons and the larger humanitarian crisis. In *My Beautiful Birds*, dawn—when shadows proliferate and the sun is but a sliver—is a respite from the brutal journey of displacement catalyzed by competing dictatorial regimes. Sami's eventual arrival to the camp in *My Beautiful Birds*, despite the story's romanticization of displacement and migration, captures this essay's central charge: look outside.

When we look outside, we see a world on fire. We see righteous anger in the streets of Colombo, Minneapolis, and Hong Kong; abandonment and famine in Afghanistan; the indiscriminate murder of children and civilians in Syria and Ukraine; a climate emergency of humanity's own making, stoking flames in Haiti, Australia, the Canadian West, and California. And while the dry leaves underfoot are a warning, they are also a reminder that much life continues to thrive in the shade.

Shadow Play

Shadowy spaces are curricular spaces, and we are interested in the shadow play that occurs in these spaces, between steps on searing concrete, beneath the sterile office lights that hide nothing, rarely allowing a moment to breathe. Curricular spaces are, inherently, sites of contestation, and prior work in curriculum theory has demonstrated this fact (Dotson, 2014; Garcia & Shirley, 2012; Giroux, 1983, 1988; Nelson & Durham, 2021; Nelson et al., 2021; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Snaza, 2019; Wozolek, 2021). Taken together, this prior work shows how curriculum—and the spaces in which it is shaped and brought to life—possess the capacity to

challenge sociocultural hegemonies and be subversive, disrupting the status quo. In this paper, we extend this prior scholarship by exploring how subversive "counterpublics" (Warner, 2010) playfully upend and (re)invent ways of being and knowing, a practice we call shadow play.

Concepts like "subversive curriculum" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969) and "hidden curriculum" (Giroux & Penna, 1979) disclose the capacities of unofficial, hidden curriculum to subvert hegemonic norms, and shadow play is similarly attuned. But crucially, shadow play aims to dwell with(in) this notion of play, a state Gadamer (1960/2013) suggests has nothing to do with subjectivity, consciousness, or—in the context of this paper—subverting particular hegemonic norms. Rather, "play" is inseparable from aesthetics and creation; for Gadamer (1960/2013), play stands in stark contrast to what he calls the domain of the "serious"—extending to the creator's conscious state of enjoying the "work" or creation. Play is a transformative experience, drawing the player "into its domain and (filling) them with its spirit" (Gadamer, 1960/2013, p. 113). In other words, a state of play is all-consuming—a mode of creation in which one is productively detached from the subjective, conscious self—freed up to experiment, riff, and invent.

Following this, we are interested in how, across cultural contexts, creative shadow play has the capacity to reveal new ways of being. At the same time, shadow play is temporary, ephemeral in its tendency to morph into something else and/or be co-opted (Clark, 2020), distorted beyond recognition, and this paper is equally interested in exploring these dynamics. After all, play is play because it ends, and it is a mode often dismissed as a marginal practice. Shadow play is necessarily playful in how it is constituted by open-ended-ness, imagination, and unpredictability. It is a shared practice. It is relational. Shadow play is cross-cultural and interdisciplinary and takes any number of shapes and embodiments. Shadow play does not aim to progress, to grow in number or popularity, to lead towards the light. The playful practices that occur in the shadows are inseparable from their shadowy context. Shadow play is critical of the mechanisms that dilute subversive movements (e.g., cancel culture, critical race theory [CRT], Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion [DEI] efforts) when they are mainstreamed and brought "onstage" into the heat of the light. Shadow play can, as a result, take on different shapes and embodiments, inviting participants to disrupt the neutralizing effects of popularization (e.g., the shift from anti-racism to DEI; the shift from CRT to a "culture war"; the shift from cancelling to "cancel culture"). Shadow play does not "aim." It neither segregates nor leads towards the light. The playful practices that occur in the shadows are inseparable from their shadowy context, an imaginative, aimless playfulness (as opposed to teleological projects) that is valuable *in and of itself*. All in all, this paper centers playful, creative practices, along with the counterpublics in which they take shape, practices we frame as curriculum because they teach, disclosing new ways of being and feeling in the shadows.

Shadow Play, Co-opted

First, we will explain how shadow play—practices that began as imaginative, fluid, and inventive—are often co-opted, lifted from shadowy spaces and drained of their subversive potentialities. Importantly, our attunement to how shadow play is frequently co-opted will resurface as a lens of analysis in our discussion of three examples of shadow play below.

Grattan (2016) argues the resurgence of American populism "emerges from, and reveals, an irresolvable tension at the heart of democracy: the fact that 'the people' is indeterminate … never at one with itself" (p. 9). In other words, "the people" is an abstract concept that imagines cherished rights and liberties, but also assumes a static national culture flows from struggle

regulated by the U.S. Constitution. We suggest the conceptual instability of the people discloses the reality that many of the people are *not* engaged in the (re)production of "a static national culture." Rather, they thrive in shadowy spaces, wherein practices of shadow play lay the groundwork for subverting any national culture. We offer conceptual frameworks like critical race theory as one example of such work (Bell, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, the co-opting of critical race theory as a partisan wedge in education—in tandem with the proliferation of diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings by corporations and universities—shows how populism and institutional normalization dilute the nuance and substance of anti-racist aims, ontoepistemologies forged in the shadowy spaces of critical legal studies.

Following this, critical anti-racist scholarship in education and curriculum studies has demonstrated the perniciousness of global anti-Blackness and legacies of settler colonialism (Busey & Dowie-Chin, 2021). However, the co-opting of scholarship-as-shadow-play (Aoki, 2005; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Tuck, 2009) often centers damage and deficits while allowing little room for lived curriculum to speak, and subversive scholars can be forced to choose between the possibility of future, subversive play, and survival in the academy (Kumar, 2022). In our figuring, shadow play is often infiltrated, a sort of sabotage that can be self-inflicted or come from without. In the end, we see the practices, imaginaries, and new relations forged in shadow play appropriated by the cultural mainstream, a dilution Wolin (1994) characterized as new "norms" in favor of stable (prior) forms.

We have seen, again and again, how this dilution occurs in relation to critical social justice praxes (e.g., CRT, DEI), new norms servicing cultural and political elites that retain a fraction of the subversive potentialities imagined during shadow play. As they are canonized and disseminated in corporate offices and classrooms alike, the compulsory power of institutions serves to normalize previously-affective, "radical" ideas. In our theorization of shadow play, institutions often shine bright lights into shadowy spaces, attempting to minimize the possibility of subversion by "normalizing" and "introducing" larger communities to previously-subversive concepts. But the mechanics of this process manage to dilute once-radical ideas into platitudes and pat, self-help-style seminars and quick reads.

In summary, the ongoing tension between shadowy spaces, shadow play, and co-opting institutions presents numerous dilemmas, but one aim of this paper is to stay *within* the shadowy spaces of education, curriculum theory, and cultural studies *as we write*. In other words, our exploration of shadowy digital spaces below is not an attempt to replicate the co-opting tendencies of the institution. Rather, we write as curriculum theorists and teacher educators committed to our own styles of subversive shadow play in the shadowy spaces we inhabit. Our hope is that any readers of this paper might take similar action.

Next, we move to the core of this paper: our discussion of three examples of shadow play in digital, shadowy spaces, highlighting curricular and pedagogical implications as we offer a cultural studies analysis.

Shadow Play in Digital Spaces: Social Media, Black Twitter, and the Dark Web

As is true of any "space," shadowy spaces can cultivate the destructive powers of white supremacy and racist hate (Clark, 2020; Parham, 2021; Steele, 2021). But our analysis of digital shadowy spaces in this article is interested in how social media, Black Twitter, and the dark web have functioned as incubators for anti-racist counternarratives. All three examples demonstrate the

potential of shadow play when it is allowed to simply *be*, existing in shadowy spaces and already-unfolding. We know play does not, by definition, continue forever, and all three examples have been encroached upon and co-opted to varying degrees. Nevertheless, we offer these examples as spaces of refuge that carry implications for curriculum. For example, the recent Supreme Court ruling (*Mahanoy Area School District v. B. L.*, 2021) further normalizes social media spaces as protected school speech, shaping an additional layer of hidden curriculum through complex social reproduction where the formal and informal creation of cultural and sociopolitical knowledge happens *outside* the traditional school setting and yet is formally protected like any other kind of speech (Giroux, 1983). Consequently, shadowy spaces possess an intentionality that can be scaffolded, or built upon, by teachers, just one of the implications we discuss at the conclusion of this paper.

Social Media

As we alluded to above, in education, students' lived curriculum is increasingly being lived in digital, virtual spaces. Therefore, we suggest it is important to show how "social media" in their diverse forms are locations of shadow play. Over the past two decades, social media spaces have nurtured counterpublics (Clark, 2020) that function as spaces in which the praxis of discursive struggle can occur (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagán, 2016). Love (2019) refers to social media practices as "techniques of the millennial freedom-fighting generation" (p. 11) and highlights the ways in which digital shadowy spaces have been a force for social change, bringing to the fore otherwise obscured survival and *thrival* stories, beyond naming the pain that communities of Color (uniquely and multiply) experience. We understand the "techniques" Love refers to as playful subversions of dominative official narratives; via contagious connectivity and virality, social media shadow play occurs in the virtual, a different but still intertwined plane from the less shadowy space of the classroom. Social media shadow play is unique because it can be ongoing wherever, whenever, and while the virality of social media can have negative consequences, we offer this form of shadow play as a complex and multidimensional assemblage rife with potentiality. In the summer of 2020, virtually-connected students demonstrated this potential by using social media as a shadowy space to organize against and resist racism and white supremacy, both in schools and outside them (Lorenz & Rosman, 2020).

Another form of social media shadow play can be glimpsed in how the rise of political populism has been exacerbated by the Internet. On social media, people encounter counterpublic discourses, and on the one hand, recent sociopolitical shifts towards political populism have cultivated collective organizing and action around anti-racism and other critical discourse in education. On the other hand, social media, as Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen (2021) recently stated to the U.S. Senate, remains "a system that amplified division, extremism, and polarization" (p. 2). What often happens, then, is that forms of shadow play imagining abolition and co-conspiracy are not only co-opted by superficial, white-centered movements that forefront allyship and inclusion, but they are rendered by outsiders as marginal, unrealistic, and overly-radical, a dynamic with political implications that move from the virtual to the real (Garza, 2016; Love, 2019).

In education, hashtags like #BlackintheIvory, #MeToo, and other social media accounts have paralleled student and teacher organizing efforts. *Anonymous* and *Confessions* accounts in particular have served as shadowy spaces for students, faculty, and staff of Color and other

historically and multiply marginalized communities to anonymously call out racism and discrimination they have experienced in their respective schools. Digital shadowy spaces are locations of refuge, protecting individuals practicing forms of shadow play that are risky and potentially career-threatening, while simultaneously demonstrating the organizing power of Black communities to challenge dominant curricular narratives, along with school operations. Moreover, hashtags like #BlackintheIvory have been sources of support and emulation, modeling organizing tactics for other communities of color. However, many of these forms of shadow play have been met with university backlash, and a number of the social media accounts active within shadowy hashtag spaces have been deleted since the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 (Bloch, 2020; Lorenz & Rosman, 2020).

Hashtags on social media remain an important tool, a device used to harness energy and coalesce a virtual community within hours—what amounts to the creation of a shadowy space—but they are also at risk of being ushered into the light of the mainstream and substantively flattened into more "palatable" acronyms (e.g., #BLM as opposed to #BlackLivesMatter, #StopAAPIHate as opposed to #StopAsianAmericanPacificIslanderDesiAmericanHate). As a result, we can glimpse an ongoing tension. On the one hand is the potential for social media as an organizing tool—a platform to cultivate shadowy spaces and engage in shadow play—while on other the hand are the dangers of its own formalization, its inevitable drift away from the shadows and towards the light of corporatocracy and obsessive visibility.

And yet, teachers and students continue to play in the shadowy spaces of social media in subversive ways. Another example is how social media platforms have been used as a means to spread counter-pedagogies and counter-curriculum in the wake of dozens of states' attempts to ban critical race theory in P-12 classrooms and higher education (Arrojas, 2022; Schwartz, 2021). In the wake of these recent bans, social media (recently affirmed by the Supreme Court as a site of educational free and protected speech) is, once again, rendered a shadowy space where teachers can playfully—and virtually—cross state lines to share resources that cut against a given state's legislation that bans the teaching of "controversial" or "divisive" topics in schools (Khalid, 2022).

In conclusion, the shadowy spaces of social media exemplify the *mainstreamification* of critical, anti-racist curriculum practices, what amounts to—in our rendering—a magnifying glass over an anthill. The constant desire, or what some might call addiction, to be amidst what Davies (2016) calls "an endless stream of grandiose spectacles" (p. 208) can be counterproductive insofar as social media can amplify the urgency of issues in a sort of affective overload. A situation takes shape in which everything is thrown into "crisis," causing users to simply move from one crisis to the next, a distorting path from the obscurity of the shadows, to virality, and back again (but in flattened form) (Haugen, 2021). However, we suggest that, within this constant firehose of information and "crisis ordinariness" (Berlant, 2011), shadowy spaces remain, spaces of refuge that can serve as effective cover for shadow play that undercuts dominant curriculum and narratives. Our analysis, here, has aimed to show how shadow play can be—and often is!—"hidden in plain sight" as social media users (teachers and students) playfully subvert and imagine new, better futures.

Black Twitter

We owe credit to and borrow from Black Twitter as important evidence of shadowy spaces and shadow play. In recent iterations, Black Twitter (while not a single formalized community)

has served as a space for shadowy communication between teachers and students and also between students themselves, akin to informal hallway conversations or formal professional development workshops that were disrupted by recent events like COVID-19 (Lamont Hill, 2018). Black Twitter, different from an organizing tool like a hashtag, takes shape through the people who use it rather than formalized ideology. But similar to the hashtag spaces we discussed above, it has also become a space for students and teachers to organize against oppressive curriculum and school and university policies (Clark, 2020). One key difference, here, is the entanglement between the racial identities of the users and the platform itself; while a hashtag is "open" to anyone (one reason it can be so easily co-opted), Black Twitter is a shadowy space specifically for Black teachers and students to engage in subversive shadow play. In other words, Black Twitter takes shape—and is ever-becoming—within the practice of shadow play itself. It is not a forum a user can simply stumble upon and join, but rather a community Black teachers, students, and others become a part of it *through* the play that can occur therein.

Jason Parham (2021), a journalist for *WIRED Magazine*, said that Black Twitter emerged in the late aughts from "community members in our houses … we were angry, upset, and we went out on the street … to document what was happening to us" (para. 7). Following the election of President Obama in 2008, Black Twitter took shape as a community practice "modeled in episodes characterized by satire, petition, and shaming" (Clark, 2015, p. 214). In this way, Black Twitter, building upon the traditions of Black bloggers in the early days of the Internet, has contributed substantially to our public discourse, "prompting real-world consequences and leading to the social construction of hashtags as artifacts that carry meaning between the virtual and physical worlds" (Clark, 2015, p. 215). In this section, we will focus on one example of how the shadowy space of Black Twitter has been co-opted, ushered into the light of the mainstream via the concept of cancelling, a phenomenon that first emerged from shadow play on Black Twitter.

Cancel Culture

Critical communicative mobilizations like #MeToo and #SayHerName have produced actions that transcend digital space, but much of the research on "cancelling" discusses cancel culture in victim-centered terms (e.g., Bouvier, 2020; Cook et al., 2021). Comparatively less attention has been paid to how cancelling was developed and subsequently misappropriated, a process Clark (2020) traces as cancelling's transmission from Black Twitter into mainstream culture (in a misappropriated form) by elites, producing a now-ubiquitous term: cancel culture. For Clark, cancelling is not simply "calling out" (Bouvier, 2020, p. 1) or "calls for sackings and boycotts" (p. 1). Rather, it is the "creation of Black counterpublics that are conspicuously absent from the American public imaginary" (Clark, 2020, p. 89); but through their "absence" from the mainstream or, as we might put it, their ongoing play in shadowy spaces, Black Twitter counterpublics aim to disrupt how elites define reality and show how subordinated groups might subvert dominant cultural representations (Tatum, 2000). This convergence between social media hashtag activism and discursive identity constructions shows how shadowy spaces like Black Twitter can lead to real world action in ways that do not center Black pain and suffering (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagán, 2016; Duvall & Heckemeyer, 2018). As Love (2019) argues, the joy produced by hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic and #BlackJoyProject can be seen as a joy that is "crucial for teaching … a revolutionary spirit that embraces joy, self-care, and love is moving towards wholeness" (p. 120). This wholeness emerges from a resistance to a white gaze that frames

"unruly discourses as 'cancel culture,' (and) has found utility among those who wish to quash any attempts to critique their social position" (Clark, 2020, p. 90). At the same time, the co-opting of canceling marginalizes the possibility of a "celebration of counter-hegemonic Blackness" (Duvall & Heckemeyer, 2018, p. 402) that is critical to the abolition of systemic racism in schools. In other words, the co-opting of cancelling—its misappropriation into a catch-all signifier like "cancel culture," a signifier with pejorative connotations—undercuts (and eventually erases) the subversive and counter-hegemonic potential of cancelling, what *was* a far different practice that emerged from Black community play in shadowy digital spaces.

Crucially, the affects of *joy* entangled with shadowy resistance practices like cancelling are lost amidst the mainstream panic surrounding cancel culture (Clark, 2020). Again, we can see how shadow play is not constituted by desires for predetermined outcomes, acclaim, or public awareness. Shadow play on Black Twitter exists for itself and is ongoing for its own sake, play that can be subversive *and* joyful, explosive in its capacity to affect change and imagine new, more just relations. And here is a double-bind, what we might call shadow play's inherent kryptonite: within the capacity of shadow play to subvert hegemonic norms, to approach conflict and resistance differently (as the example of cancelling demonstrates), shadow play is prone to being co-opted, nudged out of the shadows and into the light of the mainstream in misappropriated forms. This is a dynamic we have discussed throughout this paper, but perhaps more concerning than the confusion surrounding the genealogy of cancelling is the co-opting of digital spaces, like Black Twitter, that were once locations of joyful, unpredictable resistance (Clark, 2020).

It is likely that the outsized function of social media—its dissemination of information, its use as a communication and organizing tool—will only increase. In education, social media spaces are contested, filled with the vicissitude of purpose; any space can harbor life-giving or harmful forms of shadow play. In our view, social media digital spaces are, inherently, a living curriculum, and as we conclude this section, we want to emphasize the potential of these digital spaces to be shadowy realms of refuge, spaces in which inventive shadow play, like Black Twitter, can occur. In this, we are highlighting *an ethic of speaking back* from shadowy spaces as opposed to merely hiding from the official, luminous gaze of the institution, of mainstream culture. In doing this, we position shadowy spaces as not literally hidden but merely out of view from a particular vantage point, an idea we expand upon in the next section.

The Dark Web

The "dark web" (also referred to as the "dark net") can be defined as the parts of the Internet excluded from typical search engine results (e.g., Google, Bing, Yahoo!). Accessed by encrypted browsers like Tor, the dark web allows users to access content typically filtered or excluded from search results. Connections between the dark web and shadow play are self-evident, but we are intrigued by digital spaces like the dark web that are decidedly ambivalent in their existence beyond the reach of state power and other means of surveillance. In many ways, then, the dark web is a useful example of how shadow play can persist in spaces that are *both* locations of refuge *and* ethically problematic. Clearly, the matrix of the dark web and shadow play, surveilling state power and illicit, violent activity presents a dilemma. So, while the "light" of state power might frame this dilemma with an incredulous appeal to common sense—what would amount to an equation of surveillance with "good," with the common sense concession of a "good" citizen—we are interested in what happens when the "light" of the mainstream Internet is questioned, when the

binary between the dark and light web is muddled. After all, what makes the light web any less dark, and what shadow play practices are lost when we abandon the potentialities of the dark web to violence and hate? Thus far, we have positioned shadowy digital spaces as spaces of refuge filled with potentiality, spaces that ought to be carved out and protected. However, we have also discussed how shadowy spaces can be co-opted, and the example of the dark web shows how shadowy spaces can also breed hate speech, mass shooters, and white supremacists. Here, we will face this dilemma head on by delving more deeply into this predicament.

Janchenko et al. (2020) discuss how the dark web can be a site of anonymity and illicit activity fueled by cryptocurrency markets, a realm of desire and exchange that functions beyond state surveillance. However, the lines between the light web and the dark web are increasingly hazy, and as encrypted browsers become more common, it is unclear where meaningful differences exist. For example, mainstream news outlets welcome encrypted tips and leaks as reliable sources, and the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA, 2021) has complicated "official" narratives about end-to-end encryption browsers by positing that "Tor can be used to promote democracy and free, anonymous use of the Internet" (p. 1) while simultaneously hosting and enabling other illicit, nefarious activity. And given that much of the Internet exists beyond the scope of open access points, the folds of the Internet—what we commonly think of as the light web—evades indexing systems of surveillance, further complicating the line between the light and dark webs (Janchenko et al., 2020).

Facebook, or Meta, is another example of the insidiousness of the light web. The company's shameless spread of misinformation—fueled by their use of ad-tracking algorithms to link group recommendations—is, in no small way, creating radicalized communities, communities that are qualitatively similar to ones you might find on the dark web. Within this example, the dark web is defined by its hidden-ness, *not* its absence from any lived curriculum. What is referred to as the dark web remains dark through its maintenance of impenetrability. Here, we are not aiming to exonerate the dark web via simple comparison; rather, our point is that the dark web, because of its hidden-ness, is unable to cultivate *an ethic of speaking back* that is (at least initially) legible. So, while Black Twitter and other social media spaces we discussed above are always battling the threat of being co-opted—a threat we frame as unique to the light web—the dark web is routinely threatened, and silenced, by surveillance.

In other words, opportunities to engage in particularly subversive shadow play in dark web spaces remain. And while it is a space in which the threat of co-option by the light of the mainstream is diminished, the surveillance-desires of the corporation-police-state matrix cannot be underestimated. In short, the light and dark webs are digital shadowy spaces that are more conjoined than opposed, and both realms—while entangled—are increasingly contested and fraught. In our view, the possibility of shadow play practices to emerge from the Internet writ large will require widespread, active commitments to a freedom of inventive play and imagination that is also risky in the ever-present possibility of shadowy, unsurveilled spaces cultivating violence and hate. But we frame this risk as necessary; otherwise, shadow play will continue to be extinguished on both sides—co-option on one, silencing surveillance on the other. Crucially, a refusal of surveillance is not equivalent to ungoverned lawlessness, and we exhort shadowy spaces to explore means of self-governance, accountability, and beholdenness to the Other founded on shared values of human dignity and love, democracy and consensus. However, any invitation of surveillance, here, will only strengthen the corporate-state's paranoia, bolstering its obsessions with consumer data, surveillance, and the unknown, the hidden. Again, we believe in the capacity of shadow play to subvert these insidious aims.

Implications of Shadow Play

We have offered shadow play as a concept to disrupt common curriculum binaries and assumptions. In this paper, we analyzed three specific digital shadowy spaces to explore how subversive practices of shadow play can emerge from spaces that are shaded from the harsh light of the mainstream and the normative. Throughout, we have aimed to ground our cultural studies analysis in education and curriculum, and by considering the cauterizing economies of light that perpetuate dominant and singular hegemonies of thought in curriculum, we have shown how the null and lived curricular spaces of social media (social media, Black Twitter, and the dark web) can be a refuge, spaces that might cultivate an ethic of speaking back and of joy. These spaces of refuge are distinct from other digital spaces that incubate harmful speech, hate, and violence; one distinction we clarify above is that shadowy spaces are not ungoverned spaces of lawlessness and chaos—rather, shadowy spaces are demonstrable proof of the will to exist, learn, and *be* otherwise.

One educational implication of shadow play is to create and maintain spaces for inventive and imaginative play that are intentionally hidden from the mainstream. That is, to be away from the sociocultural mainstream is to reject, in the digital space, a logic of echo-chamber virtue signaling that reaffirms whiteness as synonymous with acceptable mainstream culture. This is especially important in curriculum studies because it challenges the white-centeredness of both DEI efforts and formal school curriculum, allowing students and teachers to engage in their own learning beyond the gaze of state standards, restrictive legislation, and administrative disbelief in response to instances of racism or bullying.

Another educational implication is to treat literacy in shadowy digital spaces, in light of recent anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-CRT legislation, as part of curricular resistances to these pieces of legislation (Chong & Markoff, 2022). For students, this means learning more than to haphazardly gaze down upon these spaces, but rather to notice the multiple curricula that are interacting and intersecting in their education. For teacher education and preparation, shadow play can be part of what we have elsewhere called humanizing co-creatorship, which theorizes teacher preparation curricula as prioritizing joy and antiracism as antidisciplinary rather than confined to single subject-areas and strands of teacher preparation (Chong & Orr, in press).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities to engage in diverse forms of shadow play have only increased. Love (2020) reminds us that the pandemic provides an opportunity to reject "a return to normal," arguing "our education system is allergic to change and comfortable with oppression, so if the system is not physically and theoretically pushed to stay in the direction of progress, it will revert back to its obsolete purpose" (para. 12). Here, Love implies that the familiar was ontologically harmful to begin with, and we will extend this argument; varied forms of shadow play were revealed with(in) the pandemic—practices and pedagogies education has long attributed to "an emergency." There is hope, here, a moment in which the official landscape is shifting, and there is an opportunity to acknowledge the complicity of the light of the mainstream with(in) the creation of the official/unofficial binary. For example, the continued push to make teaching and curriculum virtual (in an "online" sense) brings education closer to the digital shadowy spaces we discussed above, not only in proximity but in how the potential of subversive curriculum to infiltrate everyday praxis is nurtured in the shadows of the digital.

Conclusion

Returning to the epigraph above, Sami's story stems from a connection he makes with a young girl in the refugee camp. The last panel of the book describes the painting of a wall at the camp, that is, the painting of the thing that obstructs the light of the setting sun. The wall's blocking of the light preserves a beautiful painting inside the oppressive structure that is the camp. In some sense, this is an apt metaphor for this paper: the searing desert heat can be blocked by a painted boundary, a wall that creates a shadowy space in which children can seek refuge, even as they are trapped in a much larger structure of oppression. And yet, they have a space to play, to imagine. Of course, the camp also functions as a harmful, exploitive space, just as schooling and the institution of the public school can be oppressive or dehumanizing spaces (Love, 2019; Morris, 2016). And yet, within oppressive systems, shadowy spaces exist, and they can become locations for deviant, subversive movements. Rather than assume our existence must be guarded from exposure to the light the sun casts over our being(s), we suggest it is time to get a flashlight, enjoy the reprieve, and continue playfully inventing in the shadows.

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