How Can We Live Freer?
The Will to Accept Sacred Freedom to Choose

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WE, IN THE U.S., live in the relative warmth of freedom in our constitutional republic based on democratic principles. Yet in 2023, public education lies beneath (within) a heavy weight, characterized by a time in which teachers grapple for their own self-worth like never before, while proving to critics they are worthy of a salary and that teaching is a profession, rather than a technical, formulaic spot that anyone can achieve. In addition, there is constant governmental pressure to privatize what was once thought of as a public space. That space, now, seems anti-educational and undemocratic, and teachers who witness these disturbing developments are fearful. These times and occurrences can clearly be thought of as a shadowy, metaphorically dark time for teachers, at least for public educators. The existence of such difficult times requires responses that bring light to everyday practices of education. This paper serves to support our continued need to think and examine ourselves as we navigate living and teaching spaces and practice acting in conscious ways, informed by theory in lived experience

Because of his stark precedent, I begin with the words and theory of Viktor Frankl, a psychologist and who survived being a prisoner in a Holocaust concentration camp and use his words to demonstrate the possibility of living in the second shadow, even while facing the first. While a prisoner, he realized he had the power to refuse surrendering his humanity. He argues this is the only thing that cannot be taken from a person, when everything else has been stripped away (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 66). Examples such as his are worthy of inspection as he offers us consideration for internal development and preservation of the existence of choice, not merely inevitability. Afterward, I explain the possibility of abiding better in the second shadow in the following sections: The Will to Meaning; The Will to Examine; and The Will To Tarry. These sections all start with the will because this relates to our will, our choice to engage with and to do or implement within our lives and practices. I weave together a place from which to encourage teachers and educators to see themselves as key to their own creative processes to remain relevant in our present realities, alive with possibility, and encouraged through nonviolent everyday practice. I think it is significant to first acknowledge that the first, negative shadow or situation exists. While chaotic and perspicuously horrible for anyone implementing teaching, it underscores the importance for each to find the nonviolent habitation of the second shadow.

I employ the metaphors of shadow and define and refer to two types: the first is a result of audit culture and blaming we are experiencing; however, the second refers to a Jungian type (Mayes, 2005, p.174), which refers to our subconscious and the creative possibility we don't yet

realize. I use the words, the second shadow, to illustrate the space referred to in the paper, but I do not discuss Jungian theory. The first type of shadow is described in the following statements: more and more states propose regulations and policies that seek to further blame, minimize their ability to implement learning, and thereby occupy and monopolize the knowing spaces of our children and ourselves (Taubman, 2009, p. 45). While this type of pressure is not new, the continued long shadow of that difficulty translates into increasingly trauma-inducing times for educators as testing replaces altogether the art of teaching. Trauma is manifest in the constant exposure to the harsh light of hyper-surveillance and bullying tactics, further splintering ourselves in "fear that perhaps our endeavors are meaningless" yet intense measures of surveillance and control continue to amplify our uncertainties (Taubman, 2009, p. 129). Surveillance and bullying are evidenced in regulatory measures introducing confining, minimizing definitions state leaders use as reasons for regulations that further make teachers the other—within their own profession—creating doubt and confusion. The current testing culture serves not necessarily as individual development, but is now the way to "responsibilise students and teachers for the outcomes of education with assessment and examinations providing the quintessential vehicle for individualizing and responsibilising success and failure in relation to achievement and social mobility" (Torrance, 2015, p. 83). These actions from outside or within the teaching profession make teachers strangers to themselves, disconnected from ourselves by changing the culture of care and development to that of punishment and a poor use of accountability.

In the state in which I live, the state superintendent of education has adopted a questionable curriculum. It is questionable because it prohibits certain science-based teaching (i.e., evolution) and proposes banning books, and he has called teachers indoctrinators and labeled us as a problem (Slanchik, 2023). Sadly, this is not an isolated incident, as there are other states that rally against the word *critical* and the ideas of social emotional learning as unnecessary or such to be outlawed (Matt Papaycik & Saunders, 2022). The ideas of neoliberalist thought have so permeated society and thinking that educators must actively think about or cancel our own metacognition in order to preserve employment and out of fear because even those who are titled within education may be actively anti-educational. By this, I mean to say within school administration there are players who are not necessarily educators, who seek to minimize education as the means to educational decisions and lean rather on administrative strategies claiming to know better than the teachers they are tasked to lead.

I suggest that there is a potential within the notions of contour and *shadow* within our lives and experience. I refer to the place of creative possibility as the second shadow. I use the description of shadow because our decision making is internal, perhaps subconscious. As we interact with what we may not completely understand and embrace what scholars have written concerning spirituality and love within education (Aoki, 2005; hooks, 2001; Huebner, 1999), we can also learn how to hold on in times of distress (Britzman, 1998; Fowler, 2006; Wang, 2014) through nonviolence to sustain our growth. Our cognizance grows and increases our actions in our conscious lives, influencing our teaching and our students.

Choices that are positive are our nonviolent everyday actions, albeit these choices are not always easily made. In other words, while there is dark shadow, there exists, for teachers, the possibility of positive discoveries. We can learn to be within ourselves and with ourselves regardless of external pressure and pain, choosing to preserve ourselves and others, despite the imposed new mandates and realities of super surveillance that offend our humanity. Activism is predicated on thinking in nonviolent ways, because personal internal preservation and dealing with the self is necessary to effect external action.

Like the knowledge of the sun in Plato's (ca. 380 B.C.E./2009) "Allegory of the Cave," the second shadow is the dawning of possibility. There comes a questioning—much like the prisoners who are chained to the cave, unable to see the entrance. They only understand the projection on the back wall of the cave from a fire lit inside. It is only after one of the prisoners is able to turn around that he discovers the real source of light, the sun shining through an opening past the flame casting a reflection inside the cave. Likewise, not one visualized scene is solely reality. What was once thought of as the only possibility is enlightened. We may fearfully see the projection, when in truth, there are other parts of the entire scene. While faced with violence in behavior and rhetoric, we can have another existence. We begin to reposition ourselves by choosing to accept the nonviolent practice of keeping spaces open within our everyday lives; our awareness changes and shifts, transforming us. There are those who propose only one measured possibility; therefore, we who believe otherwise must hold open or occupy a space for the other possibilities, or only the dark shadow is recognized. We can do this work when we are more aware of what we think. The possibility of thinking differently grows inside of us, occupying more internal capacity to make additional choices that are nonviolent. The second space, the second shadow as I refer to it, is creative, aesthetic, internal to us as humans, and not possible to quantify, but we can know that it is growing as our thoughts, decisions, actions, and students begin to change. I will also deal further with nonviolence in other sections of this paper.

Viktor Frankl's Theory and Education

Similar to many European Jews, citizens for centuries, Viktor Frankl was made a foreigner by the Nazi government. He was diminished by governmental actions designed to make his human existence impossible. Born in Vienna, Austria, he did not escape to safety when allowed to emigrate because he was concerned about leaving his elderly parents, who would not be allowed to leave with him and, therefore, was subject to persecution and imprisonment in Auschwitz for three years. Already a medical doctor in psychology, he observed camp life and prisoners and formed the basis of his theories of Logotherapy. He endured great personal loss as well; while imprisoned, his wife, father, mother, and brother were murdered in concentration camps.

The Origins and Development of the Notion of Meaning Despite Suffering

Referencing the first part of his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1946/2006), I focus on his process of uncovering meaning, but I do not reference the second portion of the book on Logotherapy. I base my initial statements upon Frankl's (1946/2006) original notions discovered within the most extreme of human existence. During Frankl's time as a prisoner, he took great note of the daily human examples and developed his ideas on meaning, love as human spirituality, independence, and actualization. He observed power and identity in people dependent upon those with power, as weakened by those choices. "The prisoners saw themselves completely dependent on the moods of the Guards—playthings of fate—and this made them even less human than the circumstances warranted" (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 53).

Frankl (1946/2006) recognized that external power structures within the concentration camp system forced prisoners to succumb not only physically, but mentally and emotionally to destructive power systems. In the worst of human experiences, Frankl (1946/2006) posits that

human choice is viable, when only spiritual choice is left. Prisoners were like lambs to the slaughterhouse, guarded and imprisoned until their usefulness expired through extermination. The old and very young were of no use as laborers and, in many instances, upon their arrival were immediately burned in gas chambers. The others who were at least 14 years old and appeared able-bodied were kept within the camp system, slowly being killed through starvation and disease, used and labeled like chattel. Yet, Frankl (1946/2006) states, "In Auschwitz, I had laid down a rule for myself which proved to be a good one" (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 53). That rule included the desire to be alone with himself and his thoughts because camp life was crowded. He recognized that the "degraded majority (prisoners) and the promoted (prisoners who acted as guards) minority came into conflict … the results were explosive" (p. 63), and it took self-control to do otherwise and not be involved in violent recourse and hatred. If not, Frankl posits under violence, man is no more than a product. He questions, "Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances? (p. 65); he believes differently. Believing the opposite to be true, Frankl (1946/2006) makes the case for personal agency and choice in situations where choice seems illusive. He emphasized hope rather than futility, choice in spite of despair. Frankl's discoveries are in no way justification for the violence that occurred in Nazi Germany, but showcase his discipline in thinking even when suffering, disease, and starvation were normal everyday occurrences.

Suffering Does Not Define Our Entire Existence

Frankl (1946/2006) teaches that suffering is not the enemy of an actualized person, but a tool of development. In no way does this justify murder and genocide. He posits that the aversion to the lessons of suffering and the desire for a life of ease works against us in unsuspecting ways, making us suspicious of difficulty because our thoughts do not encompass the idea of suffering as essentially incorporated to our lived existence. Therefore, it may be possible to accept that our suffering is part of a galvanizing process, never a justification for suffering, lest we become hardened to others' misery.

Frankl (1946/2006) posits, "Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress" (p. 66). He observed, "some walked through huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread" (p. 66). He states that these acts of humanity were a result of making difficult choices to choose dignity rather than being molded into the form of the typical inmate (p. 66). "The type of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone" (p. 66).

Realizing Choice is Important to Being

At first, I found myself struggling to accept that in the midst of one's darkest experiences, one can still make choices. I would rather sink into self-pity. However, Frankl's notion of choice is applicable to educators who are participants in the space of education within a democratic society, yet full of powerful systems that strip us of our will to make choices. His ideas are metaphysical and spiritual and applicable to humans as we grapple in the same spaces. I suggest that part of surviving our current age of hyper-testing, labeling, and narrowed thinking is

recognizing our ability to remain separate. To see oneself as a part of a system, and yet without it, is significant.

Part of our personal journey as educators and humans is to remember our sacred freedom to choose (Frankl, 1946/2006). Within each of us is an expansive capacity to exist if we do not minimize ourselves and most importantly what we do (teach). We (teachers) are and exist beyond our jobs inside or outside a classroom with positions and titles. This way of being exists outside the bureaucracy of operations and is not reliant upon it. This is to say, we have a path of being that is outside the system of what I have referred to as the first shadow, characterized by over-surveillance that minimizes our work as educators. Frankl (1946/2006) expresses that we can own freedom as agency, locate this within the self, maintained by humans, unfettered to forces outside the self. It is recommended and desirable to occupy more of or exist further in the positive second shadow where possibility thrives.

During his captivity, Frankl observed that survival was the most important concept and that it seemed to him as episodic: the period after admission to camp, when camp life becomes routine, and then following release. Returning home to loved ones and preserving friendships surpassed the fear of the brutal Capos (the prison guards who were themselves prisoners). Sometimes, in the everyday mundaneness of starvation and overwork, he was subject to continual grief and fear, even while practicing the daily choice to be more present in the second shadow. The second shadow can be a place of quiet and rest, away from the searing heat; it does not deny that the negative exists, rather, we must acknowledge it.

How can our practice and existence as teachers and educators be "freer"? I acknowledge that our present lives and times as teachers in the U.S. are surrounded by difficulty. Many teachers succumb under the pressures of the first shadow, sickened by continual bullying. They leave the profession or stall in their own development, becoming discouraged and feeling further isolated and adrift. So, there is always that choice of remaining hidden in the first shadow. Alternatively, Maxine Greene (1995) posits that we can inspect the interstices to investigate how "beginnings have to do with freedom, how much disruption has to do with consciousness and the awareness of possibility that has so much to do with teaching other human beings" (p. 109). We must stir ourselves to begin again, having the courage to look within, utilizing the complexity of thinking and being to see ourselves as separate from the system while still teaching within it. From this point, I will focus on the second shadow as a place of the yet unknown, full of possibility and encouragement.

Similar to Frankl's dealing with spirituality, Dwayne Huebner (1999) states, "To speak of the 'spirit' and the 'spiritual' is not to speak of something 'other' than humankind merely 'more' than humankind as it is lived and known" (p. 343). He goes on to say that the language of the spiritual should be "'mined for the educator' because they (the language) contain centuries of experience and the possibility of experiencing of the supra-sensory, the qualitative, the transcendent-experiences that are stored in histories, stories, myths, and poems" (p. 344).

In the following sections, I bring awareness to the consequences of the second shadow as a place of interconnection that confronts the fracturing effect of the first shadow, for example, the blaming and dehumanizing language used to define teachers and teaching. Because knowing and learning are first and foremost spiritual, it is constantly under attack by those who seek to monopolize what it means to know, and it is significant for teachers and educators to revisit, reacquaint themselves with, and realize their own right to choose, which allows for room for growth and change, and that spiritual partnership engages our mental and physical selves. This choice requires risk because it does not provide complete safety. We are still feeling humans, yet

our individual actions are our own. We can choose to regain strength to continue to build ourselves apart from labels. We are enriched, and our existence expands in understanding, even while the first shadow exists. We can invest in our imagination to create a new space for ourselves so that we move back from trauma and expand our capabilities: personally, historically, and professionally.

Connection in Scholarship

Preserving our teacher selves is our personal responsibility (hooks, 2001) by committing to owning our internal work. Internal ownership is foundational and precedes activism, which is an outward display of an internal belief. Understanding that and exploring different ways of living in the world with ourselves can add to our love of teaching and learning. Preserving teaching as an art begins within the soul of every person (hooks, 2001) and is a buffer against powers that mobilize to make us invisible, presenting our work as unnecessary. Understanding the aesthetics of teaching is an internal process that begins with accepting that some of our processes are hidden or remain unknown, yet essential to keep us awake and alive. This is to say that our development is perhaps in unmeasurable increments, without clear pathways or buildouts. Cultivating that understanding is a nonviolent practice made in the moment of the everyday.

Greene (1995) states that accepting aesthetic parts of human development, of which teaching is part, is risky because aesthetics open our thinking to possibilities that do not have clearly defined roadmaps and that sometimes feel shaky and uncertain. We can see the multiplicity of human lives and experiences, making our understanding more intense or at least more complicated. Seeking definite answers is not simple, and finding the one right answer evades us. Dewey (as quoted in Greene, 1995) posits, “It is this kind of realization that renders experience conscious and aware of itself” (p. 21). Consciousness has an imaginative phase; it breaks through the “inertia of habit’” (Dewey, as cited in Greene, 1995, p. 21). We have been fed the lie repeatedly that teaching is technical and can be scripted. We may shrink back from moving forward with fully occupying our teaching roles because the aesthetic process is the antithesis of the definite and knowledge as finite measurement. Teaching is not solely or always scripted, and each of us must develop our own understanding of becoming more alive and freer.

Additionally, teachers are made to think their development pales in comparison to the manufactured bottom line of student test scores, while teachers also grapple with many things far beyond our control. Greene (1995) cautions against the simple fantasy of the one right answer to intractable situations. For example:

> the disappearance of joblessness, homelessness, fatherlessness, and disease are the obvious solutions to community difficulties that influence our students and therefore our schools. That futile type of dreaming leads to the inability to conceive a better order of things (and can give) rises to a resignation that paralyzes and prevents people from acting to bring about change.(p. 18)

The issues discussed here are complex and difficult ungovernable societal issues, and therefore, we must heed what Greene (1995) reminds—that as educators we can expand our imaginative capacity as it relates to our spiritual call to teach, to “look at things as if they could be otherwise“ (p. 19). “That same person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what

should be and what is not yet " (p. 19). This is to say that it is possible to hold in tension the "fixed" sense of (the teacher) self while in process of "creating a self, an identity" (Greene, 1995, p. 19). Seeing our present individual realities and engaging the possibility of change and positive transformation is meaningful work and creates added dimension to our inner lives as teachers and humans. Greene (1995) challenges us to "keep the pain awake" (p. 113). To live in a place of not yet (Greene, 1995), perhaps described as the in-between places, requires the courage to do so. Uncertainty, feeling isolated, and all the negative emotions is not negated even as we attempt to abide in the second shadow. We can expect this as it is the price of pathos required by all who engage with learning; the teacher is one who can willingly search for meaning, practice love, and grow through nonviolence. Possibly, the teacher feels a sense of the not yet as constantly searching and never finding; however, we can also accept that this understanding is the point of creating new meanings within our lives. The new ways of being and creating meaning within our world are self-created and unusual.

We experience violence when accepting being told there is only one outcome or one right answer. Nonviolence practitioners use their internal discipline to know what one thinks and feels rather than accepting the told or dictated answer. It is the personal practice of rejecting what is damaging and hate-filled and instead delving into oneself through reflective practice. Nonviolent personal practice is sometimes a quiet, internally intense, and thought filled discipline. Nonviolent practice says of oneself that I will not hate, but rather act with compassion toward myself and others in the everyday practice to remain open, flexible within oneself even though I (myself) may be pulled to want to hide from hurt and disappointment. Acknowledging the hurt places is not to live in denial, rather it is to remain alive, in spite of the violence felt in the moment.

The Will to Meaning

I have alluded to the important notion Frankl (1946/2006) refers to as "the will to meaning" (p. 99). I suppose one can think of this phrase as the will or the purpose to find meaning that is deeply valuable to human experience. Frankl (1946/2006) posits that a rich inner life full of aesthetic understanding facilitates survival and provides us with momentary relief from suffering. He acknowledges that not everyone can or will embrace this type of "inner triumph" (p. 72). The will to meaning is his concept situated within a human endeavor or a personal journey of mental health. He cites a statistical survey of 7,948 students at 48 colleges, conducted by social scientists at Johns Hopkins University and sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health. When asked, 76 percent of those surveyed selected to "find purpose and meaning" as their primary life goal (p. 99); making money and finding a good job was a distant second. Each of us, he states, can undertake the responsibility of the will to meaning.

Frankl discovered through his own survival journey that a person's greatest task is finding meaning, which may be found in three sources: one can find it through work, through love, and "in courage during difficult times" (Kushner, 2006, p. 10). He speaks of those sources as the fount of purpose-building everyone must have, and he cautions against finding meaning in work as that can easily be replaced by unemployment, which, for some, results in the loss of purpose. Teachers have all three sources from which to draw meaning. Frankl (1946/2006) speaks of love as a connection to the inner world, an aesthetic space, as the place to begin to find meaning, he first understood as a concentration camp prisoner. We can understand that nonviolent practice is love as courage, evidenced by standing alone even when unpopular with internal commitment to one's

core beliefs about love in action. This commitment to purpose is discovery that happens over time. Nonviolence preserves us while we wait, and in some cases, waiting with an open heart is the practice. Having an open heart, from a nonviolence lens is not carelessness or codependency; it is a purposed and focused decision.

> Thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life, I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers: The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love … in the position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement consists in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life, I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "the angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory." (Frankl, 1946/2006, p. 38)

Frankl (1946/2006) highlights several areas of consideration: the ideas of love, tension, and suffering. I discuss first the notion of love, explained through examples from Fowler (2006) and hooks (2001).

The Will to Examine and Redefine Love in Our Human Experiences

Fowler (2006) uses what she calls the *internarrative* (p. 23) as a type of writing schema. The internarrative brings to view our human experience in a way that allows us to observe in addition to what we already know and think. She claims in her book, *A Curriculum of Difficulty* (Fowler 2006), that we have additional interpretive spaces within ourselves—we demonstrate these metaphoric spaces by strategically writing additional stories between the chapters. She includes additional stories to communicate specific understandings within the general ideas of each chapter. I use Fowler's writing style to underscore that there are in-between spaces even within well-crafted stories.

Some of what is within us is what Wang (2019, citing Jung) refers to as our shadow—the second type of shadow addressed in this paper (p. 382). For Wang (2019), shadow is described as knowing and experiences not yet fully understood. It is part of our own selves that exists along with what we know, yet remains unknown; therefore, we are always partly in shadow. Not everything we experience is fully illuminated immediately. Practicing the passage of time, contemplation, and sitting with what we do not yet understand is a type of nonviolent action as we resist the urge to dismiss what is difficult in lieu of an easy answer. The easy answer may be apparent but not how we might fully understand something. Waiting and tarrying with the uncomfortableness of any situation requires discipline.

We may accept that there are unknown parts of ourselves coming into view while remaining open to that possibility. Why? Because we are learning daily. Additionally, our capacity to cogitate and embrace what is yet to be discovered, explored, unveiled, and known is expanding continually. That such a shadow holds additional power allows the possibility of opening ourselves more fully to incorporate the parts we are beginning to see as they are coming into view. hooks (2001) posits that reflection and a willingness to think about one's experience is significant to

transformative change. If we can listen less to the negative voices within that devalue us, we can commit to the difficult work of love necessary to sustain internal change. Notice that love is not just a feeling or a motivation; it is action and will. It requires us to take a stern position with regard to what we truly believe about others, ourselves, and education.

hooks (2001) explains that commitment to love begins with self-love, not selfishness. This type of love is an understanding that it is impossible to love another without loving oneself. She posits it is choice and action, not eros (physical) or even phileo (friendship). Humans are socialized to not engage with love for oneself because we are taught to trust the judgment of others over our own. We, as educators and teachers, are also susceptible to this kind of outside judgement, something that Taubman (2009) titles audit culture (see also hooks, 2001). "If we succeed without confronting and changing our shaky foundations of low self-esteem rooted in contempt and hatred, we will falter along the way" (hooks, 2001, p. 61). Living with purpose becomes more authentic and sustainable because we have dealt with our internal issues that prevent us from truly loving (i.e., ourselves, our neighbor, our students, our teachers, strangers, and life in general).

Then, as we revisit the site of the narratives we tell ourselves and examine them honestly, we encounter the additional understanding and can choose to integrate it through listening to what is coming into view from a once blind side, much like Fowler's (2006) internarratives. One may interpret the work of integration as one of interconnection, incorporation of what is not understood, so that our human experience becomes full of deeper understanding, less fragmented, with integrated capacity to share, care, and communicate. We shift into different spaces and become more relatable to those situations and persons with whom we appear to share no common ground. This work is not without sacrifice, pain, and disappointment. We may at first be surprised by new understandings and revelations because they may show us which parts are ready to be transformed. Those areas appear ugly or disappointing. Our own transformative experience may not be supported by traditionally pro-teacher agency, and we find ourselves feeling alone. hooks (2001) shares an example of love in action.

> But, we can all enhance our capacity to live purposely by learning how to experience satisfaction in whatever work we do. We find that satisfaction by giving any job total commitment. When I had a teaching job, I hated (the kind of job where you long to be sick so you have an excuse for not going to work), the only way I could ease the severity of the pain was to give my absolute best. This strategy enabled me to live purposely. (p. 62)

Using her experience as an example, love is action, alive, involving strength and sacrifice. It is not weak or emotive; it is affirming, sustaining within and throughout human existence.

This type of love can be illustrated through a story of pain and transformation. Smythe (2015) writes of his experience as a college adviser to international students presenting to faculty on the subject of working with international students. After delivering a lecture that he thinks is well thought through, another faculty member reveals that an international professor thinks Smythe's presentation is a racist one. Smythe is stunned, upset, and defensive.

> But once I moved past those feelings, I was even more stunned that I thought I could explain what American culture and all other cultures were in highly simplistic, stereotypical categories that pitted the U.S. against the rest of the world. (Smythe, 2015, p. 225)

He pivots his thoughts to change his actions and constructively questions his technique, and delivery. “How could I possibly be responsible for telling the faculty and students what other cultures were like or how to predict student/faculty behavior based on cultural labels without knowing the people themselves?” (Smythe, 2015, p. 226). Pondering without dismissing is an important step to learn, to tarry with what is in the moment surprising, uncomfortable, and hurtful to our egos. To begin to dwell with nonviolence is being empowered to linger until the possibility of enlightenment and then to care and love ourselves while keeping self- condemnation at bay.

The Will to Tarry and Adopt Nonviolence Within

Our nonviolent practice in everyday living leads us to the tolerance to withstand the urge to quit or shortcut important healing processes because of pain and negative beliefs. Nagler (2004) states that the term, *Ahimsa*, can be interpreted as the negative or opposite of *to harm*. Because English does not adequately define this Sanskrit word, he teaches that *Ahimsa* as a “kind of double negative actually stands for something so original that we cannot quite capture it with our weak words” (p. 45). Wang (2014) states that “nonviolence is a positive force that holds the solution to most of our major personal, social, and global problems” (p. 45).

Aoki (2005) encourages his readers to linger. “Indeed, a sublime moment tarrying with nothing at the center, tarrying with the negative” (p. 404). He relates the story of Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian thinker observing political upheaval in Romania. Žižek (as cited in Aoki, 2005) recalls that rebels were waving the national flag, but due to destruction, there was no longer any symbol on it, so they were celebrating the absence of what was once upon it. Žižek wondered about observing and understanding the negative space before it was quickly filled by other symbols, meaning: That which is in the unoccupied space is something of importance. Aoki (2005) likens this story to his concept of “tarrying with ‘nothing’ at the center, (tarrying with the negative)” (p. 404). In his example, the emphasis is not that there is negative, rather there is something important to be learned from the place that one cannot clearly define. When the viewer is not tempted to fill it immediately, but to sit alongside it, organic understanding flows forth. That process takes patience as meaning making must be waited upon and observed, lived with, if you will. He states that two things occupy that space—what is not and what is “growing in the ambiguity” (p. 407) for this is important to the human condition. Wang (2014) posits that a “zero-space of nonviolence” is essential to initially understand what we are capable of. Our present western facilitated thought privileges experience as a false sense of what we can depend on as unmovable. That is to say we rely on numbers, test scores, and believe validity in a scientific way confirms our personhood. We lack the integration of a deeper intention to remain open, since the numbers say what must be. Within her own life experience, Wang (2004) began to sense a churning, an unsettling, which led her to the possibility of something different, her notion of nonviolence.

Nonviolence

An Example of Nonviolent Reflection Emerging from Broken Relationship

I returned in 2018 to the state in which I was born, after being away many years. I was flooded with the excitement of visiting familiar places and experiencing the places of my youth.

The visual scene was so different; it seemed almost foreign and could not have been further from my childhood experiences and memories. We used our global positioning system to find landmarks that were so reconfigured I could not recognize them. It was bewildering, and I was disappointed. The places where I had expected to revisit only now existed in my memory. Additionally, people traveling with me on the trip had ongoing personal conflicts. We were not experiencing a community building activity, rather, the opposite. One family member told me how much she hated going and by extension how much she hated me. I was viscerally responsive to the verbal violence. I was shocked; I apologized several times, and this worked to further alienate me.

After returning home from the trip, my own friends heard about the situation over and over. They knew I was struggling but could do little to mend it. After two years of struggling and attempting to rebuild my thoughts and mend the relationship with the family member, the relationship seemed to deteriorate further. I felt like I was continually being bruised and that my relationship with the family member was lost forever. I realized I needed to fully release the relationship.

After some years, we began talking again. Very gently, a new relationship emerged—one that did not enslave me to being the procurable self. During that time, other relationships and opportunities caused me less angst and those began to flourish. I felt less shame ,and soon I could accept that the way I acted before was without appropriate boundaries. I learned that my overreactions were violent or at least allowed violence to myself. Accepting this part of me was painful because I did not want to see that I felt weak and that I allowed other's realities to supersede my own. I wanted to be seen as the one with good intention, yet I had never learned to speak my own truth without constantly apologizing or self-deprecating.

After adjusting my damaging behavior and no longer feeling wounded, I did not hold the other person responsible for my pain. Letting go was easier and less anxiety ridden. I was freer, different, not happier at first, but as I occupied a different place, I realized I did not have to return to old habits. I was able to be different, think more independently, and this learned navigation became a place of hope and personal freedom, growth and new understanding. I also realized that if I did not have that family member's approval or reconnection, I would survive. If I lost the personal connection again, I would be able to weather it because I had gained a better approval within myself. Out of options and forced to sit with the pain, I chose to hold a new sense, one of hope and new discoveries including repositioning my thoughts to encompass what was a newer discovery and being willing for a short time to accept my strangeness to self. Discovering a more open stance was surprising to me and allowed me to process a new sense of joy and increased my willingness to interact differently and gain perspective. Forgiveness came as I fully released myself from my family member, even though they did not forgive me. The change seemed little, because it is internal, measured by myself; however, it affected all my thoughts and actions going forward, affecting how I saw myself as a teacher and as a person. I am different because of that nonviolent interaction engaged within the everyday, that took some time to fully understand.

Wang (2014) relays similar understanding:

> For several months, I was re-experiencing the past in places I used to know but no longer recognized, in a journey of letting go my previous attachments while integrating the cross-cultural fragments inside of me, a journey of listening to the whisper of that little girl who longed for nonviolence and peace as she grew up and moved from place to place, finally landing in the American South for her doctoral studies. The whisper was subsumed under the noise of the relentless pursuit of "progress" in China (or worldwide) … . I worked,

> listening to my participants' voices, reflecting on my own disillusionment first with the Chinese socialist idea. And then the American ideal of democracy, the voice of nonviolence finally broke through the surface and rang like a bell in my ear. (p. 3)

I interpret the struggle to locate a different place to be as metaphor. It is painful because the path to discovery is not sure, creating an insecure, uncomfortable process. Wang relates this process to relationality—the interplay between human beings and their experience.

A Classroom Example of Pausing in Nonviolent Reflection

Once in my Pre-AP Language Arts classroom, I was drilling my students on poetry analysis. I was set on making sure they could analyze the acrostic to analyze poetry quickly for a test. Students were coming up with different theme statements, and they were off the topic, so I thought. One student finally said, "Why do we have to come up with the exact statement if I can defend my answer?" There was silence as I tried to process the surprise I felt at the realization of her statement. The truth is that, in my effort to make sure students landed on the right answer, I eliminated their ability to think and defend their own thoughts. This was never my intention, and thankfully, I stopped long enough to heed my own discomfort and sit with the stillness, which allowed me to choose a different path, one that was more invitational and generative, open to students' possibilities. That example is only offered as a way to think, rather than to develop a formulaic answer to the how to remain open as a solution to our present problems of and within American schooling. What other ways do we as educators act in violent manners toward our students? Without a change, we do a great deal of damage. How can I really listen to students without superimposing my reality over theirs? Without a change, we do not. I told myself I did not intend to hurt and push the lesson in such as a way, as a way to excuse myself. The deeper meaning came through practicing nonviolent tarrying. I understood that my method and implementation were damaging and that course correction meant I would have to change and treat students differently. I would treat students with respect and learn to listen differently. This was a type of professional development significant to my teacher self and my teaching practice changed to one of reflective practice based on what those students needed.

"Stillness speaks its own language (Tolle, as quoted in Wang, 2014, p. 3), and we can learn to listen to it through openness to possibilities. What has dawned for me is my own realization that this uncomfortable "working through intensity" (p. 3) is the work with which we must constantly engage. It is then that "generative stillness" comes forth; it is the ongoing process of birth, life, death, and rebirth" (p. 3). This tension of remaining open and holding at bay every onslaught to our spirits is also important. Just because one is open does not mean one should be abused. The practice of keeping ourselves open protects our minds and spirits from being decimated.

Nonviolence as Apparatus of Teacher Reflection

Nonviolence is one of "transformation of relationships," beginning with the relationship held with ourselves (Wang, 2014, p.163), one focused on "personal cultivation and growth" (p. 164). This cultivation affects our well-being, our mental health, and our way of moving and operating within our individual settings (Wang, 2014, p. 164).

Teaching the whole person involves integrating intellect and promoting students' physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual growth. In other words, teaching is for "deep learning" (Grauerholz, as quoted in Wang, 2014, p. 165). Additionally, we can learn that "engagement without attachment to pre-determined goal(s) is difficult to imagine in today's accountability age, but I think it is important for educators" (Wang, 2014, p. 170). Learning is letting go of the controls and releasing to find another way of living and learning in a greater way. This does not mean that teachers and educators should not start with goals and objectives when planning taught curriculum. Rather, our teaching must be considerate of the possibilities that we will find other ways of relating, not originally planned. We must choose to be freer in ways that do not further fetter us.

Conclusion: Fighting the Urge to Console Ourselves

How can we live freer? That question was posed at the beginning of this paper. And it is a large, all-encompassing, never-ending dialogue to which we commit when calling ourselves educators. Britzman (1998) posits, "Education is always lived as an argument, precisely because the repressed must return" (p. 55) She reminds us that we do "render the uncertainties of the lived" and cautions us by asking: "What actually is occurring when education represses uncertainty and trauma if the very project of reading and of love requires risking the self?" (Britzman, 1998, p. 55). Therefore, uncertainty and living in the interconnected space of the inner self and the outer world is one we negotiate to remain more alive, without a sense of closure.

> You must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen. (Baldwin, 1963/2008, p. 1)

Although James Baldwin (1963/2008) addressed educators and specifically the education of "the Negro child" (p. 1), his words ring true for all of us within education. We must understand that we will face opposition as we contemplate our own sense of education and live in such a way that we are those who examine "society and try to change it and to fight it" (Baldwin, 1963/2008, p. 1). I am simply reminding us that our difficult examinations emanate from within.

I encourage my co-teachers and co-laborers in the field of education to recall what scholars have taught us and place an emphasis upon their discoveries, for we journey through uncertainties. As we renew our commitment to philosophy and theory, we embrace the integration of practice, bridging thought, agency, and action. While teaching in public school for more than 36 years, I experienced various educational movements and requirements during those years, changing almost as fast as they arrived. Therefore, our ability to exercise nonviolence in an environment of constant change will likely aid in preserving the spiritual, intellectual, and love for our chosen profession. I suggest that scholars recognize the exquisite and intricate and often painful conditions that make keeping awake possible. Teachers are told that we must be flexible and of service to our students; however, very little focus is aimed on various types of teacher development. Our preservation is an act of our will, a part of our own purpose and nonviolent practice.

The planting of our teacher- and student-selves into the sacred space of the second shadow affords us firmer positioning, which integrates ourselves. Standing firmer through nonviolence

transcends the present turmoil and transcends the norm, connecting rather than dissolving, creating a healthier whole, more aware of what is actually thought about and what one actually thinks regardless of other oppressive thoughts. Integrating ourselves with scholarship is firmer ground upon which to claim our own inner freedom, enabling us to form different relationships within ourselves and with others. A great many teachers and adept students know what we value, what we think, and what are possible connections despite the loud drum beat of the anti-educational. Teaching and, therefore, classroom-based education is more than following a script and scoring well on an evaluation. Our shared human experiences continue to be intense as we grapple with difficult situations such as the war in the middle east, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and the return to in-person learning to name a few. In education most recently, some states have demonized Critical Race Theory and banned any reference to race as wrong and to be outlawed. The drumbeat to confine education and redefine and minimize teaching continues. Now more than ever teachers must practice the caring for ourselves through nonviolence, as we set new courses to learn how to love. One of my friends, a professor, meets with another professor weekly to discuss ideas of scholarship, teaching, and becoming. This action is not a part of the institution, rather, these commitments are his personal choice to keep himself alive, preserve his practice as his own, and they are his acts of nonviolence. Basing one's own personal daily practice on scholarship enforces Frankl's mandate that, despite the worst of human experiences, we remain thinking beings in order to remain free. Applying this during this time deeply connects the practitioner to philosophy, bridging the space between what is thought of as out of reach and unapplicable—to the daily life of teaching and learning and becoming. It is such a time as this when we are most in need of this relevant bond.

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Engaging *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as a "Great" Curriculum
A Curriculum Critique

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IN 2011, CURRICULUM SCHOLAR TOM POETTER released a book cowritten with a cohort of his students titled, *10 Great Curricula: Lived Conversations of Progressive, Democratic Curricula in School and Society*. In that text, the authors explore ten distinct curricular phenomena and critique them through a progressive lens. A stated goal of their project was to "think curricularly, that is to theorize, to generate new ideas, to critique, and to recognize possibilities as a result of [the authors'] interaction with curriculum and curriculum studies" (Poetter, 2011, p. xvi).[1] In what follows, I extend that original work; I offer a curricular critique (Eisner, 2002) of Fred Rogers's magnum opus, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, as an example of a "great" curriculum not explored in the original volume.

Part of the goal of such a project is to deploy curriculum critique as catalyst for renewed possibilities for sustaining democratic life. Such critiques of curricular events, phenomena, or movements recall a lived curriculum into public memory, recollections that can remind us how democracy has been made, contested, and remade. Ultimately, it is difficult to achieve what one cannot conceive. Curricular critiques such as the one I render here facilitate "the acquisition of new forms of anticipation. Educational criticism illuminates particulars, but it is through particulars that concepts and generalizations are formed and then applied to new situations" (Eisner, 2002, p. 243). In this way, then, the exploration of "great" curricula, or any curricular phenomenon like *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for that matter, attunes us to not only what has come before, but what might be presently in our midst pointing to a future we can create together.

"Great" As a Curricular Heuristic

To begin, let me explain "great" as a heuristic and, in particular, how it facilitates curricular insight. Poetter (2011) argues that "a curriculum is great if it helps the inquirer to understand curriculum better and to develop deeper insights into curriculum work from his or her perspective" (p. xvii). Further, he contends that a great curriculum is one that has had a significant impact on

individuals and/or society writ large and, ultimately, changes peoples' lives for the better. In this way, Poetter articulates great curricula as having a progressive bent. That is, they

> do several very unique, educationally progressive things:
>
> - open us up to seeing ourselves as more fully human, both individually and in relation to others;
> - create a world of institutions, cultures, and communities that are more democratic; and
> - establish more clearly the criteria for fairness, justice, tolerance, diversity, and opportunity in the world for individuals and for societies. (p. xix)

I can think of no better exemplar of these very traits than *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The invitation to see children, yes, but all of us as more fully human is central to Fred Rogers's lifework: the program modeled democratic community; and it cast a vision of a good society built on fairness, justice, diversity, and tolerance. As I shall elaborate, it is an exemplary progressive curriculum and one whose legacy endures.

Program Context

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood aired nearly 900 episodes over a 30-year run between 1968 and 2001. The show took a 3-year hiatus in the mid-70s as Fred Rogers, the program's affable and inimitable creator and host, briefly pursued other opportunities to communicate with families via the television medium. Fred Rogers died 2 decades ago (in 2003), scarcely 2 years after the final production of new episodes. Today, his legacy lives on via Fred Rogers Productions, which produces *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* among other educational programing specifically aimed at serving families with young children, and via the Fred Rogers Institute (formerly called the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media).

Though popular in his own day, the word "icon" is not too strong of a descriptor of his cultural import (though Fred would likely shirk such a moniker), interest in Fred Rogers and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has experienced recent resurgence, most notably in Morgan Neville's 2018 documentary, *Won't You Be My Neighbor*, and the release of *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* (Heller, 2019), a feature film starring Tom Hanks as Fred Rogers. And after nearly every tragic event in the news, memes of Fred Rogers's famous invocation to "look for the helpers" circulate social media. At the height of its popularity, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* reportedly generated between 15 and 30 pieces of viewer mail each day. Accounting for the program's 31 seasons, that volume of correspondence could reach upwards of 200,000 people (Mann, 2020). Still, a generation beyond the final production of his show, much about his work is unknown to the wider U.S. population apart from the caricature that lives on in parodies like Eddie Murphy's *Saturday Night Live*, "Mister Robinson's Neighborhood" skit and an abundance of ever-circulating memes and YouTube clips. Indeed, Fred Rogers is often quoted, his words used to illustrate any number of positions and ideological stakes in contemporary culture wars. In his 2018 biography, Max King (2018) notes,

> On one level, Fred is a gentle, reserved old man in a fading cardigan sweater whose principal contribution has been in the field of childcare. But on another level—and this is

> the level on which he is so often appreciated today—he is a powerful cultural avatar in an age that seems sick with rage and conflict. (p. 358)

Indeed, if one were to rest in mere nostalgia for *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, they would miss much of its deep and abiding curricular power as a cultural artifact.

Fred Rogers repeatedly called on American society to "make goodness attractive," and he rigorously modeled goodness himself. In the contemporary moment, the goodness of Fred Rogers, *Mister* Rogers to those of us who grew up with him, is a stark juxtaposition against the grifting boorishness embodied in Trumpism. "Why now? Why this nostalgia moment?" asks Carvell Wallace (2019) in his *Finding Fred* podcast. Certainly, there's a need in this polarized moment to cling to goodness wherever we see it. Yet, the goodness Mister Rogers embodied endures, linking his own age and our own.

Clichés of the "need" for a Mister Rogers figure in our contemporary moment aside (Ma, 2018), there is much in Fred Rogers's life and work, especially in the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* program, that provokes deeper study. To the casual observer, Fred's interactions with children, indeed his entire program, are saccharine and shallow. To the studied eye, however, the show is intentionally simple yet still deep.

Indeed, one of the key principles in Fred Rogers's own work was that of edifying the "helpful appreciator" (Behr & Rydzewski, 2021; Li, 2023; Long, 2015). In Rogers's understanding, to appreciate others, especially those who help others, shapes our understanding of goodness in the world and is a sacred act, one that mirrors God's love for his creation (Long, 2015. In a sense, there are strong parallels between Fred's conception of the helpful appreciator and curriculum critique as Eisner (2002) conceived it, especially in critique's evaluative aspect. For Eisner (2002), the evaluative aspect of critique suggests that "education implies some personal and social good" (p. 31) and thus requires discernment about what those personal and social goods are. In rendering a critique, the educational critic will necessarily choose some social goods as valid and reject others and provide grounds for those choices (p. 232). Criticism, ultimately, seeks to see an educational phenomenon in all of its complexity and thus requires that one appreciate, that is, recognize what is good or what needs redemption, in any given educational phenomenon. Critique is thus always oriented toward an image of what is possible, even as it may not yet be. Herein are strong connections to Fred Rogers's guiding ideal of the helpful appreciator: that "what is essential is invisible to the eye" (quoting Antoine de St. Exupery, 2000, p. 63). For Fred Rogers, the helpful appreciator helps render that which is essential in people visible, and for Eisner, the educational critique renders what is essential in an educational phenomenon visible to the reader. What follows is my effort to show what is deep yet simple, and enduring, in Fred Rogers's work.

A Childhood Advocate

Fred Rogers was a stubborn advocate for children or, more aptly, for childhood itself.[2] While he was careful never to be overtly political, at least in a partisan sense, he "never downplayed his role as a social advocate" (Jackson, 2016, p. 13). He saw the relationship between media creator and viewer as "holy ground" (Hutchison, 2021, p. 66), language that both exemplifies his own specific call to ministry and highlights television's cultural import. The Presbyterian Church USA affirmed Fred Rogers's ordination to ministry with a specific charge to use television as his ministry field. The "Reverend" Fred Rogers's pastoral reach extended to

millions of homes throughout the United States (and beyond) across multiple generations. Rogers chose television as a career because he was disgusted by the demeaning nature of television when he first encountered it. That demeaning behavior was catalytic. It awakened his call to love others in response, rather than to demean, through the vehicle of television.

Alexandra Klarén, scholar of cultural communication studies, demonstrates how Fred Rogers was progressive in his use of media, especially on behalf of children. He was an expert at blending medium and message. Klarén (2019) notes Rogers's mastery of the new (in the 1950s and '60s) medium of television and, especially, how he used it counterculturally to the way he saw it used even by other children's programs. For instance, he refused to use his program to sell things to children (or adults, for that matter). Further, "Rogers ties his program and its pedagogical framework to the civic realm, detailing how his program assists in the healthy emotional development of American children" (Klarén, 2019, p. 118).

Indeed, Fred Rogers treated childhood as its own curriculum, an aspect of his pedagogy that I find particularly transgressive. He engrossed himself in the study of childhood, and he was a consummate pedagogue, translating his understanding of childhood into an experiential curriculum for children and their families.

> Rogers's cultural intervention follows his recognition that entertainment is, in fact, a pedagogy. In this conflated space of entertainment and pedagogy Rogers's radically new understanding of child subjectivity as a developmental process that engages both cognitive and affective dynamics abides. (Klarén, 2019, p. 84)

Consequently, perhaps his greatest legacy is that he recognized emotions as central to human experience and formative to democracy and thus essential to cultivate in children and adults alike.[3] He studied child development at the Arsenal Center for Early Literacy at the University of Pittsburgh, founded by noted psychologists Erik Erikson, Benjamin Spock, and Margaret McFarland. His collaborations with McFarland lasted more than two decades, until her death in 1988. One could credibly argue, in fact, that the messages of the show are as much McFarland's as they are Fred's. It is important to note, too, that Fred's emphasis on the social and emotional growth of children intentionally distinguished *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* from the other most well-known children's program of its time, *Sesame Street*, the primary emphasis of which was on children's cognitive development.

Each episode of the Neighborhood program was intentionally designed with the child viewer in mind. The easy (some might say slow) pace, the rituals of entry and exit like the "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" song and the switch from sport coat to sweater, the intentionality of Fred's language, which his collaborators lovingly came to call "Freddish" (King, 2018), all serve children's developmental needs for continuity and stability. (The slow pace of the show was another way Fred's approach was distinct from that of *Sesame Street*). Nothing that happened on the show was an accident; it was all carefully designed in ways that would cultivate children's socioemotional growth. Fred's long-time confidant and educational consultant Hedda Sharapan (as quoted in (Williams, 1996) recalled that, "Fred has said the best use of television is what happens when the program is over and children use what's been discovered" p. 8).[4] Fred Rogers was acutely attuned to the importance of children's relationships to and within the family. And he believed in children as whole human beings and expertly crafted his entire show around that ethos.

To make it easy for young children to follow, each episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* followed a very similar, simple structure. The show's structure is intentionally predictable with consistent, repeated cues to scaffold children's comprehension. As one of my students who was studying episodes with me noted, the episode structure mirrors a lesson plan in many ways, and the weekly themes serve as a sort of "unit plan" that binds the individual episodes within each week. The program's topics were all rooted in the concerns and developmental needs of children, everything from "Creativity" and "Curiosity" to "Mad Feelings" and "Divorce."

Mister Rogers's honesty with children throughout the episodes is legendary, even transgressive, and the impact of his collaborations with Dr. Margaret McFarland and other child development experts (and Fred's own expertise) is clearly evident (for deeper insight into Dr. McFarland's influence on Fred Rogers, see King, 2018). For example, in one early episode of the show (Episode 1101, originally airing March, 1970) when Mister Rogers feeds the fish in the tank in his kitchen, he notices one fish has floated to the top and appears dead. Notably, Fred intentionally avoids using euphemisms to describe the fish's condition. He simply says it "died," rather than "passed on," or, the scarier phrase to children, "went to sleep." He then proceeds to dig a hole and bury the fish in his (on-set) backyard, all while discussing the important role his pet dog Mitzy played in his life when he was young and how he cried when Mitzy died. Throughout the scene, Mister Rogers looks directly to camera and speaks calmly, almost matter-of-factly. In another well-known episode [1695], Mister Rogers shows how he makes each of the puppets who appear in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe talk. He is intentional to note that they cannot talk themselves, that he is making them talk, that it is only for pretend, but that his child viewers can pretend too as a good way to cope with their feelings or develop their curiosity. Fred sought never to mislead or, worse yet, deceive children.

Fred Rogers was a consummate songwriter, and many of the songs that he wrote and performed in the episodes are also pedagogically aimed to foster children's socioemotional growth. "What Do You Do with the Mad that You Feel?" and "It's a Good Feeling" are among his most well-known, but songs like "Did you Know?" and "Good People Do Bad Things Sometimes," though less well known, are every bit as potent in their attunement to children's worries and their need for reassurance that, as Fred says repeating Margaret McFarland, "anything human is mentionable, and anything mentionable is manageable" (Tuttle, 2019, p. 148). The emotional rigor of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is, arguably, unlike anything else that has appeared on television.

In fact, it was Fred Rogers's attention to the emotional curriculum of childhood that so often makes him and his show an object of mockery. Some people have argued, for example, that today's "damn millennials" and their sense of being special has yielded unreasonably high expectations for "the perfect job" even while having no persistence in the face of obstacles that challenge that sense of specialness (Foundation for Economic Education, 2019; Kim, 2010). Most notably, Fred Rogers was derided on *Fox and Friends* "as an 'evil' man who 'ruined a generation of children' because his message to young children - that they are special just for being who they are -- leads to narcissism and attitudes of entitlement" (Barish, 2013, para. 1). Obviously reductive mis-reading of Fred Rogers's lifework aside, Fox News recreated Mister Rogers (or, his viewers, at least), as the embodiment of liberal values that conservatives consider so antithetical to American prosperity. More recently, conservatives' invocation of the evils of social-emotional learning (Anderson, 2022) continues this thread that emphasizing concern for others' feelings, much less one's own, is a sign of weakness and potential national decline. Yet, even in the face of such scrutiny, Fred Rogers unapologetically argued for the centrality of the emotional curriculum

as a central concern for children's development and consistently advocated for us all to "make goodness attractive," one of his favorite and most often-used aphorisms.

Making Goodness Attractive

At first, "making goodness attractive" might seem like a quaint invocation to conscribe one's personal behavior to a moralistic code of conduct or, perhaps, more cynically, to marketize one's adherence to the values of the upper-middle-class for personal advancement. Yet, as with so much of Fred's lifework, what seems simple is actually much deeper. Jennifer Shaw Fischer and Bob Fischer (2020) claim that "his advice wasn't—and isn't—just about how to be better individuals. Fred's wisdom applies to national and global problems too" (p. 178). They speculate on "what Mister Rogers might say" in response to contemporary social phenomena, such as separation of families at the border as they try to enter the United States. They ground their analysis in an understanding of "Fred the Philosopher" (pp. 180–182). Taking cues from Aristotelian virtue ethics, they argue that Fred "appreciated that being a good person isn't just about doing the right thing. It's also about doing the right thing in a way that reveals what's beautiful about acting well" (p. 181). Thus, Fred's efforts were not just about teaching children how to be nice, how to share, how to follow rules and please others. Rather, they were about linking those virtues to an image of the good life, one in which each person's humanity is preserved. Thus, Fred Rogers models for the rest of us an image of the "good" that takes childhood seriously and compels us to struggle to realize a world that is more good for not just our own, but all children.

> The show's purpose is to teach children to be good people by having them spend time with good people. Goodness here is defined as the willingness to pay attention to the things that capitalism tells us are unworthy of our time and attention. Things you cannot buy or sell. Found objects. Friends. Time. Connection. (Wallace, 2021, para. 8)

Certainly, one could critique Fred Rogers as a milquetoast progressive because of his emphasis on developing empathy for others, an orientation toward democracy rooted in dialogue among assumed equals. A social democrat he was not (on the contrary, he was a registered Republican his entire adult life, Maxwell King [2018] notes in his biography of Fred). But Fred understood that representation matters. He was intentional about casting non-white actors in prominent roles, most notably Officer Clemmons and Mayor Maggie. His visits with neighbors in his "real world" segments of the program and the video visits he made via "picture-picture" regularly included people of various colors and ethnicities, women and men, young and old alike. Certainly, much of his construction of the beautiful neighborhood was that of diverse others coming together despite their differences to embrace their shared humanity. After all, Fred Rogers so often reminded us, "it's what's inside of us that matters."

Yet, simply being "nice" to one another is not sufficient in itself to build a just community. In *The Price of Nice: How Good Intentions Maintain Educational Inequity*, Angelina Castagno (2019) rightly warns of the limitations of Niceness and links Niceness discourses to the reproduction of injustice.

> Diversity and Niceness have been so intertwined that any engagement with diversity is necessarily, almost by definition, *nice* … . Diversity in schools has been framed in such a

> way as to require a stance of inclusion, optimism, and assimilation … . Despite their good intentions and the general Niceness among educators, most schools in the United States contribute to inequity every day (p. x),

educators' very Niceness serving as a barrier to structural transformation because they understand anti-racism as merely a personal attribute, namely, being "nice" to people of different races. Fred's appeals to kindness, empathy, and understanding are not on their own sufficient to foster multiracial democracy. Still, I contend that Fred's work belies the limitations of Niceness.

Despite a persona of Mister Rogers and his ethos as "soft," "wimpy," etc. (gendered constructions of anti-masculinity, all), in his own day, and in his own way, he was much more countercultural than at first glance. Yes, he did devote a great deal of the show's energies to teaching kids that all it takes for neighborhood harmony is for us to listen to (assumed well-meaning) others and to talk about our feelings together. But, transcending mere Niceness, there were also moments of mutinous solidarity. For example, perhaps most notably, during the Conflict-themed week aired in November 1983, in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, King Friday has his subjects prepared for war because of his suspicion that the things people are building in Someplace Else are bomb parts. The residents of Make-Believe, especially the puppet Daniel Tiger and the human Lady Aberlin, conspire together to send peace balloons with messages of love and non-violence into the King's castle in a sort of direct-action campaign that mimicked antiwar protests in the "real" world. Michael G. Long (2015) argues that Fred Rogers was

> a quiet but strong American prophet who, with roots in progressive spirituality, invited us to make the world into a countercultural neighborhood of love—a place where there would be no wars, no racial discrimination, no hunger, no gender-based discrimination, no killing of animals for food, and no pillaging of earth's precious resources. (p. xiv)

In large part, Fred Rogers's Presbyterian Christian faith that taught him that all people are worthy of love and that all relationships can be redeemed, no matter how fractured, both grounded and inspired his countercultural ethos. His was a faith not only of the head or the heart, but of the hands (Hollingsworth, 2005); he applied his theology in the world both in his own actions and, especially, through the medium of television. "Fred believed God's action in the world was constant and purposeful, with a bias toward the marginalized and hurting; God acted—sometimes through him—to comfort the broken-hearted or accompany the outcast" (Tuttle, 2019, p. 162). Fred Rogers's pedagogical and theological formation were fused as inseparable and indispensable parts of each other even though he never directly invoked his religious beliefs on the program.[5] In a real sense, the Neighborhood constitutes a potent model of a lived curriculum of the beloved community—in Fred's religious idiom, the kingdom of God—a hopeful ideal full of possibility in which we all live out a vocation of peace, love, and justice.

Neighborhood Democracy: Growing into Good Neighbors

When Fred Rogers called for us to make goodness attractive, he was not just inviting us as individuals to cultivate personally virtuous character; he was also, perhaps especially, calling us to build a good—that is, a more just, peaceful, and loving—society. During each television "visit," as he called his episodes, Mister Rogers invited people to be neighbors from the very first

moments. It is no coincidence that he opened each episode singing "Won't you be my neighbor?" Rogers could have used a variety of different words to describe the relationship he sought to cultivate with and model for the viewer. However,

> as the song suggests, he aimed to form a specific kind of relationship with the children who watched his program—not to be their friend, exactly, and certainly not to be their parent, but to be a kind, caring, trusted member of their *community*. (Vogt, 2021, p. 47)

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood reminds us that one cannot, in fact, be a neighbor, let alone a *good* neighbor, without other people. Being a neighbor is inherently relational and thus requires mechanisms to navigate the desires, wants, and needs of everyone in the neighborhood. Mister Rogers treats the neighborhood as a curricular space where we learn how to live together in humanizing ways.

> Perhaps the neighborhood, and the idea of neighboring, was Mister Rogers's most persistent parable—if also his most covert … . The *neighbor* language is so omnipresent, it's easy to miss how theological it is. Mister Rogers, who carefully considered every word he spoke on screen, didn't call his viewers *acquaintances*, or *friends*, he didn't call us *boys and girls* or *ladies and gentlemen*, he called us *neighbors*. (Tuttle, 2019, p. 109)

Again, Rogers here brings a religious idiom into secular context. His use of the word neighbor—evocative of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament—clearly establishes Mister Rogers's Protestant-inspired theology as the grounding ethos of democratic community, namely, that to be a good neighbor requires loving-kindness (also known as compassion) even for one's enemies.

As I note previously, in her work, *On Becoming Neighbors*, Alexandra Klarén (2019) notes Fred Rogers's mastery of television as a way to form a relationship with his viewers, his own *television neighborhood*. He expertly mobilized television rhetorically as a master pedagogue (Hutchison, 2021). Mister Rogers intentionally "divided the program into three spaces: the primary home set, the outside world (i.e., educational trips to real-world locations), and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe" (Hutchison, 2021, p. 70). Across these three spaces, Mister Rogers taught lessons about life as neighbors. Klarén, for example, further emphasizes how *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* fuses the private realm of the home with the public sphere: "He celebrates the home as a space of bonding and security, and the neighborhood as a place where people interact and work in fellowship for the common goal of living together peacefully" (Klarén, 2019, p. 135). Thus, while in the home space of the show, Mister Rogers introduced or underscored many of the program's key themes and moral lessons, those themes were most heavily nuanced and contested in/through the Make-Believe segments. Rogers used the home space as a place of "safety" for children and, by extension, their caregivers, to work to make sense together of the particular theme for the episode, a theme rooted in child development. Make-Believe, on the other hand, was where any conflict on the show happened, and that conflict demonstrated the residents of Make-Believe working through that conflict together toward peaceful, democratic resolution.

Even while the home space of the show evinced safety and security of the family bond, the Neighborhood embodied a space of conflict among neighbors. The Neighborhood is provided as a space where real social conflict can be articulated, deliberated, and confronted. Rawson (2019) elaborates:

> The fact that the Neighborhood looks familiar doesn't mean it's always easy and comfortable. Conflicts and difficulties arise. The difference is that in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* everything can be talked about, and anything that can be talked about can be dealt with—even divorce, even alienation, even death. The haven of the Neighborhood is not a false world, but it is a safe world, where "dangerous" feelings can be confronted. Violence and war, hatred and intolerance are not painted out of the picture, but neither are they allowed to destroy the canvas. (p. 179)

Importantly, as Rawson notes, peoples' difficult feelings, their compulsions toward hatred and violence, are not disregarded. On the contrary, they are treated seriously, but they are at the same time given an outlet to be safely confronted and resolved in ways that are non-violent and that do not allow society to fracture.

Matthew Ussia (2020) notes the way Fred synthesized the distinct public and private spaces of the show in ways that both mirror and model democracy.

> We might have thoughts and feelings that are less than kind towards others. We might want to run away from difficult circumstances and choices. Fred Rogers gives us a model for working through all this. His show about a space where conflicts are resolved [peacefully and mutually] is a vital lesson for anyone living in a democracy. (Ussia, 2020, p. 193)

Thus, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* again functions pedagogically. Fred Rogers taught us that it is okay to be angry but also gave us tools to help us think through, "What do we do with the mad that we feel?" as the lyrics to one of his songs asks us.

One of Fred Rogers's greatest achievements was making the political personal and pedagogical.

> When Fred Rogers made programs about war … , or when he addressed issues of difference … , he wasn't addressing only these grown-up needs like armed conflict or integration. He was connecting the dots, as he was remarkably good at doing, between the grown-up versions of these social realities and their analog issues in childhood. (Tuttle, 2019, p. 92)

Thus, Fred Rogers's orientation toward democracy was rooted in his advocacy for children. Those issues that made life more difficult for children were his primary concern, and his great pedagogical mission was to help children and their caregivers successfully and humanely navigate those issues from larger society that threatened children's safety and humanity.

Mister Rogers's work reminds us, too, that we all have roles to play in cultivating healthy neighborhoods and a healthy, humanizing democracy. He cultivated healthy humanity in children as a pathway toward a better world for adults. His ultimate faith was that healthy, well-adjusted kids would grow into healthy well-adjusted adults, adults who work together to protect the world from their own destructive impulses. While Fred Rogers was ultimately concerned with the healthy development and growth of children, he also consequently had much to contribute to the healthy growth of the good society. His was an edifying message for adults as much as it was for children. Shea Tuttle (2019) elaborates:

> When Mister Rogers called his viewers *neighbors*, when he hosted us in his neighborhood for over thirty years, he was playing out his own greatest parable: calling us, gently but

> firmly, into loves of mercy and care for one another … . Maybe, in calling us neighbors, he knew he was calling us something better than we actually were. But maybe he believed that if he got us while we were young, if he told us again, that we are good, that we are lovable, and that we can build bridges of mercy, maybe we could grow into real neighbors to one another. (p. 110)

Ultimately, this fulfills Poetter's (2011) vision of progressive curriculum in that it "opens us up to seeing ourselves as more fully human, both individually and in relation to others" (p. xix).

Educators' Neighborhood and the Ongoing Legacy

Finally, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* constitutes a great curriculum at least in part because of its impact: its legacy endures more than two decades after it ceased to produce new episodes and, I contend, "those experiencing the curriculum on multiple levels have been changed for the 'better'" (Poetter, 2011, p. xix). Certainly, as I have noted previously, the recent resurgence in popularity of works on Fred Rogers, as well as his continued presence in the zeitgeist every time the United States experiences a national tragedy, indicate his impact on individuals and society alike. But Fred Rogers's legacy is not merely an artifact of the past. Rather, it continues in the present through Fred Rogers Productions, which produces spin-off shows *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and *Donkey Hodie*, and the Fred Rogers Institute (https://www.fredrogersinstitute.org/) and, especially, the Institute's work to grow a network of caregivers and educators who study Fred's work and carry it forward via the Educators' Neighborhood[6] group. The Educators' Neighborhood includes educators from a variety of capacities: pre-school to college-level teachers; school administrators; children's librarians; museum professionals; social service workers; and so forth.

This Educators' Neighborhood group acts as a form of public sphere for its participants. Through its multiple cohorts and its symposium series, participants study Fred Rogers's work, view and discuss *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* episodes together, and help each other translate Rogers's pedagogy into/across their divergent contexts. I have participated for three years in three different small-group cohorts and have found each a refreshing space that cultivates deep listening and deliberation while sharing a commitment to critical inquiry, community solidarity, and growth. In particular, through my participation in the various cohorts, I have found the experience to be rich for the questions it evokes about what it means to live well in the world, to live as neighbors, to take seriously the proposition that childhood is worthy of cultivation, that children are worthy of care, and that adults can be people who build a sustainable world for the children who are our present. We regularly explore foundational curricular questions about what it means to be educated. The facilitators from the Fred Rogers Institute induce us to ask "big" questions and "small" questions alike and collaborate on answers to those questions.

Annually, Educators' Neighborhood participants convene multiple whole-group meetings as well as monthly small-group cohort meetings. In addition, the Fred Rogers Institute sponsors multiple public events (online) featuring Educators' Neighborhood members as well as other experts. Topics range from "back to school," to "silence and solitude, to "talking with children about difficult topics," and "creativity." Each is designed to engage and extend Fred Rogers's work into the contemporary world through focusing on topics relevant to children and those who are charged with their care.

While on one hand curatorial of Rogers's legacy, on the other, Educators' Neighborhood infuses Fred's work with fresh possibilities for extending it into new spaces, contexts, and applications. Educators' Neighborhood expands the scope of scholarly work on Rogers's life and work beyond the interests of a few academics or occasional biographies into the everyday practice of people working to make sense of his work, yes, but especially to apply what they learn from his work in their own lived contexts. In this, Fred Rogers's lifework is an embodied, lived curriculum that continues to have real and positive impact in the world.

Curricular Takeaways

Interpreting *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* curricularly compels questions about our obligations to build a world that takes childhood seriously in a moment in which violent conflict has displaced more than 43 million children around the world (UNICEF, 2023) and one in six children under the age of five in the United States lives in poverty, including nearly 1.1 million unhoused children (Children's Defense Fund, 2023). Surely,

> if we are to grasp the full significance of Rogers's legacy, we have to place his compassion in its historical context … . As a compassionate human being, Fred Rogers countered the attitudes, policies, and practices of a political society poised to kill. (Long, 2015, p. 179)

As a society still poised to kill and very effective at doing so, curricula that show other ways of being in the world, other ways of ordering society according to peaceful, mutual cooperation, are vital to human survival.

Ian Bogost (2018), writing in *The Atlantic*, demands that we stop "fetishizing" Rogers's invocation to "look for the helpers," because it abrogates our responsibility to *be* the helpers, which was Fred's ultimate message for adults (para. 4). Democracy is not a spectator sport; a healed, healthy democracy will only emerge as we struggle to make it so, but it cannot emerge if we all passively look to others to do the work of building a good society for us. As Hannah Arendt (2006) reminds us,

> education … is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p. 193)

Do we have it in us to make goodness attractive, to work together to make beautiful neighborhoods? "Fred Rogers was the gentlest of men—but he was also a fighter. His chosen weapons were puppets and scripts and songs, but he battled every day to improve the world he lived in" (Edwards, 2019, p. 9) and he invites us to do the same.

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood continues to provide an enduring example of persistent curricular questions about how to live with each other in society, which values are most important, and who decides. It is, indeed, a great curriculum.

Notes

1. I was a contributing author in that book.
2. In an Oct. 1983 interview in *American Way* magazine, Rogers said "I consider myself a children's advocate" (Skalka, 1983, p. 95). Accessed at Fred Rogers Archives, Fred Rogers Institute at St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA.
3. Interestingly, during the mid-1970s hiatus from producing *MRN*, Fred Rogers returned to television as creator and host of *Old Friends, New Friends*, a show whose stated purpose was "to give emotional support and to convey helpful knowledge to people living through life's later years." From Fred Rogers' outline for the program, accessed at Fred Rogers Archives, Fred Rogers Institute at St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA.
4. Accessed at Fred Rogers Archives, Fred Rogers Institute at St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA.
5. The only exception is from "Conflict" week, which originally aired in November 1983 during US military engagement in Grenada. At the conclusion of the episode, the camera fades to an image of text from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah that reads *"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,/ And their spears into pruning forks;/ Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,/ Neither shall they learn war any more"* (Long, 2015, p. 8).
6. See https://www.fredrogersinstitute.org/educators-neighborhood

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The Politics of Education
A Refusal to Live without Praxis

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And How Did You Get [Here]?

OF LATE, I HAVE BEEN ENACTING a refusal to explicitly position myself in my work. This refusal does not stem from a desired regression into positivist scientism, and the normative stance of white epistemologies (Teo, 2022), that significantly benefit the structural integrity of the concretized myth of white supremacy and by extension the category of the white. But rather, it stems from the emotional fatigue of positioning myself within the continued schema of the concretized myth of white supremacy. With that said, my work is political as is that of those who package their interest under the myth of a neutral stance of white normativity and an objectivity that is positioned outside of their privileged subjectivity, which is violently secured for them. I understand and appreciate that storytelling (in CRT for example) is an important part of countering white normativity and the continued demand of the concretized myth of white supremacy to present itself through its various institutional spaces as the only legitimate supplier of narrative(s). Of course, in the schema of white supremacy, whiteness continues its monopoly on the production of reality, through its control of the legal, political, social, and economic means of production, unleashing muted waves of structural violence, on a regular tempo against non-white people, in general, and more acutely against the category of the black.

This muted violence, for the most part, escaped my untrained eye. It was whiteness's intermittent use of conspicuous violence that got my attention. I witnessed the war on Iraq and the war on Afghanistan in real time; I was not learning it through a Canadian history textbook that is sanitized and carefully curated. For the first time, I was seeing the insatiability of whiteness and the impunity with which it was able to exercise its insatiable desire for the wealth of others. To be clear, the Iraq war was about resources and not weapons of mass destruction. I was shocked at the casual language of "shock and awe" and "war theater" and of "a lit-up sky." I was angered to see white people—whiteness[1]—kill, maim, and destroy whole societies while it demanded its own security and safety. I was also angered by the way whiteness framed issues.

People had answers for questions like "why do they hate us?", but in an Orwellian (1984ish) time characterized by lapses in international law, secret police, rendition, and torture, no one dared say, "because you are insatiable thieves with a deep history of monstrosity against

humanity who doublespeak about morality and democracy."[2] There was heavy silence and palpable fear of the U.S. Government (particularly if you lived in or in close proximity to it), laced with the kind of humor that is born out of such situations.[3] My brother who lived in U.S. at the time would half jokingly interrupt our conversation or speak over me and say, "I love America Sir. God bless America and nowhere else!" Of course, he was talking to Big Brother who he feared was listening in.

Although colonial violence alters and drives the lives of so many of us, the violence of the two aforementioned wars didn't drive me into the field of education; it steered me into political studies. It was contemplation over prosaic white supremacy that drove me into the field of education. In my undergraduate degree, I falsely understood power through the lens of political theory and practice. It took me some time to realize that education, particularly curriculum and pedagogy, is where the real power lies. That is, before a bomb is ever dropped (not that I want to drop one), before a drone is ever deployed, and before any computer program is ever written, it is built, deployed, and written inside education, through curriculum[and]pedagogy[and]schooling—as an amalgam. The real battleground is inside education. And whiteness knows and understands that, so it violently gatekeeps.

This gatekeeping should be understood as occurring through two streams of white supremacy—conspicuous white supremacy and prosaic white supremacy. Conspicuous white supremacy was/is overt, legal, and conspicuously violent (i.e., previous colonialism, as well as intermittent conspicuous violence of present [not post] colonialism). Conspicuous white supremacy can loosely be explored through the idea of high frequency soundwaves. High frequency soundwaves "are reflected back when they encounter thin objects … don't bend much around barriers … can not endure over long distances and can quickly dissipate due to high energy levels" (Alison, 2021, n.p.).[4] When whiteness deploys conspicuous violence either in previous colonialism or present (not post) colonialism, it is met either with sharp or gradual resistance. The violent act(s) itself produces a reaction. This reaction can have a range and is not predetermined. For example, if you were to forcefully push someone, the act of pushing, the force involved, would (potentially) make a person fall over; this falling over, could cause injury. The totality of the act could also cause sharp resistance, as in a counterforce that sends the original force back, or it could encounter a more gradual counterforce that could result in various forms of resistance. Resistances can come from different factions within and outside, and it usually begins with a discourse or resistance, spreading to other forms. And because the act is conspicuously violent, it surfaces as a transgression that is clear and visible, leaving traceable marks; that is, you can debate the politics behind the transgression, but the transgression is a clear action—a forceful push.

The rhetoric of conspicuous white supremacy is also conspicuous. Eve Tuck and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) describe the role of schooling in the project of settler-colonialism through conspicuous white supremacy, meant to replace the Indigenous Peoples of the land through conspicuously violent means with the aim of erasing all traces of whiteness's insatiable monstrosity, enthroning itself as the native (which is evidenced by the perplexity that washes over the category of the white when you insist that they tell you where they are really from). This assimilationist project described by Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) to "kill the Indian, save the man" (p. 76) directly informed curriculum, and curriculum directly informed the project as an intersection of systems—the macro (high level architecture of curriculum) intersecting with the mezzo (curriculum design) and the micro (curriculum delivery), with iterative cycles that will finally lead us to prosaic white supremacy.

"Kill the Indian, save the man" can be reconstituted as, "kill the Indian, then, kill the Indian" as the concretized myth of white supremacy operates through a concrete visual economy of whiteness that can never really assimilate or integrate through synching. In the visual economy of the concretized myth of white supremacy, non-white people always surface and re- surface as they are disintegrated, before resurfacing through racial capitalism (Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 1983/2000) or multiculturalism (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Walcott, 2014), or some other mode. It is through prosaic white supremacy that non-white others surface through the flexibility of these modes. This is not so in conspicuous white supremacies' previous colonial era.

Like a high frequency soundwave, conspicuous white supremacy is more rigid, particularly in its membrane formation. All non-Europeans constituted non-whites and were explicitly excluded. The category of the white was on the in/left-side of a rigid membrane for which only they could unproblematically be on the out/right side—as it was porous only for them. The high energy needed to sustain conspicuous white supremacy, the resistance it met, and the distance between the center and the peripheries, made conspicuous white supremacy untenable. Thus, curriculum [and] pedagogy and [schooling], along with other ancillaries of white supremacy would all migrate from de jure white supremacy to de facto white supremacy, from what David Theo Goldberg (2007) described as naturalist white supremacy to racial historicism, with a hope of returning to the former. Just as naturalist white supremacy and historic white supremacy are two sides of the same coin, so are conspicuous white supremacy and prosaic white supremacy. Let us further explore conspicuous white supremacy through frequency and soundwaves.

One of the most important features of conspicuous white supremacy was/is its unification of a disparate Europe (and later settler-colonies) under the manufactured category of white, against non-white Others as well as the production of a concrete visual economy of whiteness based on signs and symbols. White as a category and as a strategic identification has the potential to constrain all the competing intersections within European identities. This solidification would allow the many fractures within the category of the white to be read through one identification, when it transacts with non-white identities. Furthermore, because white supremacy is a strategic category rather than an identity, it can expand and contract strategically, admitting and (violently) expelling various identities according to proximity to whiteness that is specific to a particular time and a particular space (i.e., white placeholders in Latin America).

Lastly, the violent nature of conspicuous white supremacy, its devastating presence across the globe and its lengthy duration as well as the intensity with which it invaded and appropriated the lives and wealth of the global South, has left very deep wealth asymmetries between the global North and the global South that are difficult to overcome.

These asymmetries have been *maintained* through prosaic white supremacy. This form of white supremacy works to maintain the expansive gains made under conspicuous white supremacy in a multi-layered, complex, and nuanced manner, evasively producing similar results. It is said that low frequency noise is more likely to be experienced as vibrations rather than heard, "has longer wavelengths, can travel long distances, and has high endurance" (Alison, 2021, n.p.). If we explore the concretized myth of white supremacy through this frequency, we can see how the metastization of the concretized myth of white supremacy can be felt world over (i.e., the relationality of development and under-development, environmental degradation, high infant mortality rate, political instability, widespread poverty in the Global South and higher poverty rates for non-whites in the Global North), yet the issues are framed through corruption, economic underdevelopment, underachievement, and many other narratives. There are remedies offered, concessions made, new inclusions enacted, old exclusions reinforced,[5] but a dialogue outside of

the framework of white supremacy (i.e., parallel world economies that exclude the West, new institutions that rival and delegitimize the IMF, World Bank, and UN) is *never* allowed. Glen Coulthard (2007) speaks to this point in addressing the politics of recognition in Canada.

Prosaic white supremacy works to maintain and, if possible, further expand the social and economic skin of the category of the white against non-whites, in strategic gradation. If conspicuous white supremacy had a rigid membrane, prosaic white supremacy has a selective, more flexible membrane that manages various non-white identities for its own stability. For illustration, white supremacy is anti-Asian racism, packaged through the liminal logic of the Asian threat—the yellow peril that must be contained and the model minority that must be simultaneously brought in to displace more "radical identities" and be contained, albeit in different ways (Chen & Buell, 2018).

The violence of and in prosaic white supremacy is muted by international and national institutional structures and can take on different forms. Curriculum, pedagogy, and schooling are maintained through prosaic white supremacy, delivered through a steady insidious tempo.

Collectively, we have become largely desensitized to prosaic white supremacy. And even non- white people, who the violence is acutely meted out against, have come to see the violence delivered through prosaic white supremacy as a normal part of life and a normal part of education (Patel, 2022), as a habitus (Bourdieu, 1994) that we inhabit through arriving and inheriting a white world, made white by colonialism (Ahmed, 2007), where, "whiteness is lived as background to experience" (p. 150).

One of my earliest memories of myself is of me packing a schoolbag with books I could not yet read. My parents would ask me, "Where are you going?" and I would answer "to university."[6] Born to new money parents in Somalia, who acquired their wealth shortly prior to my birth, the first seven years of life were marked by privilege in a continent that is synonymous with poverty due to the violent and intense appropriation of its resources and the perpetual violence against its social, economic, and political infrastructure by the category of the white through previous and present colonialism.[7] Imbued with agency and in a rich environment with structural supports, I thrived. It was only after coming to Canada that I experienced poverty in its different forms. That I left the continent of Africa[8] as a wealthy child only to experience poverty in its various forms in Canada will be read by most people as an oxymoron. I spent most of my schooling in Canada oscillating between the violent constructs of the exceptional and the unruly problem. While the violence of the unruly problem is more apparent, the violence of the exception as in the intellectually exceptional is not.

Frantz Fanon (1967/1986), in *Black Skin White Masks* states,

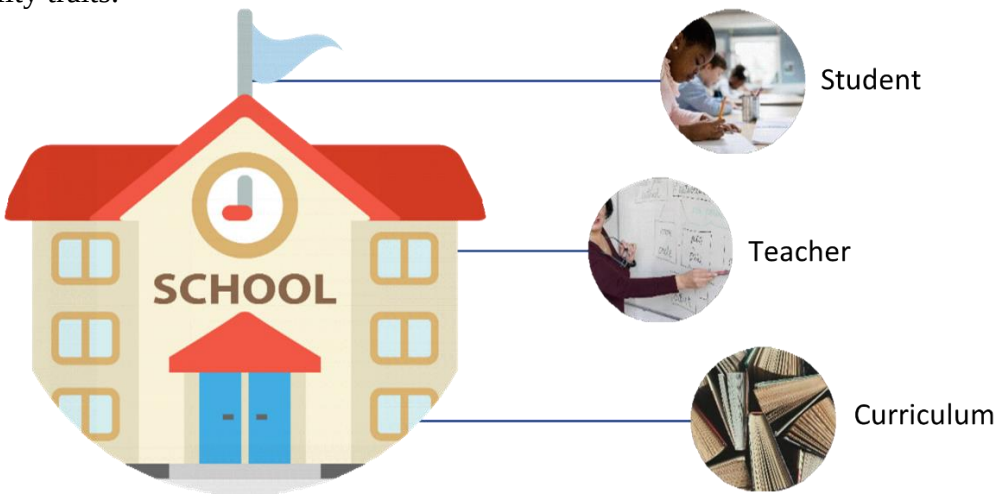
> The time had long since passed when a Negro priest was an occasion for wonder. We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases. "We have a Senegalese history teacher. He is quite bright. Our doctor is colored. He is very gentle." (p. 89)

In each case there is a but, as in, "we have a Senegalese history teacher," but he is quite bright; or "our doctor is colored," but he is very gentle. The "but" is a bridge narrative that allows the category of the white, which has a perverse relationship with the truth, to manage its false and contradictory narratives that help sustain the concretized myth of white supremacy. Toni Morrison (1992) argued that whiteness circulates contradictory narratives with impunity.

The myth of black inferiority is a central narrative that helps to moor whiteness's production of the hierarchies of races. So, when students from the category of the black walk into a classroom, which by architectural design can only be a white space (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015), and do intellectual circles around their white peers, it results in cognitive dissonance.

Whiteness recovers from this disorientation in a few ways, and it puts various mechanisms in place to thwart this threat.[9] Here, whiteness labels these students as exceptional and, hence, an exception (Abdulle, 2019). This move allows whiteness to repatriate positive characteristics, such as smartness, from the category of the black, back into whiteness as its legitimate space, while simultaneously positioning any success of the category of the black as proof that the system works and that, logically, the *problem* lies with the category of the black as a group (notice the implosion). Now we are ushered back into the narratives of black students as a problem. The violence of the system, including the violence of curriculum and pedagogy towards non-white people, as systemic and intentional, sits outside of any analytical framework, even whilst violence is the central analysis. This is partly accomplished by the starting point, what Sarah Ahmed (2007) calls, orientations—that provides for the category of the white (and differently for non-whites). This orientation is possible by always including non-white people as excludable (a term borrowed from Tanya Titchkosky, 2008), through a silencing that refuses to acknowledge (Brown & Au, 2014; Morris, 2015[10]).

Sharon Todd (2001), in her article, "'Bringing More than I Contain': Ethics, Curriculum and the Pedagogical Demand for Altered Egos," illustrates this silencing. Utilizing the work of the French-Jewish ethics philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the Greek-French philosopher and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis, and Melanie Klein, the Austrian-British psychoanalyst, Todd, asks, what if the very act of learning "enacts an ontological or a metaphysical violence?" (p. 431). Todd (2001) continues, if individual subject making, that is, the act of coming into oneself through the relationality of the other (teacher) and others, including the nation-state, is a demand for growth and change, a process which in turn encompasses "pain, struggles, renunciations and frustrations" (p. 431), how should curriculum be understood by teachers, and what is the relationship between teacher and student and curriculum? And lastly, taken together, as a totality, what ethical implications follow from these relationalities/relationships, which are negotiated within the school environments? In the image below, the school, (rather than curriculum, teachers, or students) as a very specific space with very specific rituals is centered as the cultural amalgamate through which everything is filtered—that is, *The School*, as a proper noun with specific personality traits.



Todd (2001) states that learning is inherently violent because the subject making process requires the student to alter its ego by way of synthesis; that is, the student must take in, information, outside itself, meant to alter the self with the underlying belief that this alteration is positive. The very act of knowing is an altercation. The struggles of taking in new information, for example, learning mathematics, learning to read, learning to negotiate with peers and learning the cultural demands of schooling, that press against the body and psyche of the student, even if well intentioned, can be traumatic and violent says Todd. For Todd (2001), the question of ethicality is positioned through the teacher-student relationship where, "teaching and learning are conceived as ethical relations, not because of some prescriptive injunction, but because there are present two distinct beings who come face-to-face in an encounter" (p. 437). In this understanding, it is the teacher who has agency in these ethical encounters, who can choose to be the compassionate teacher, who can choose to change his or her techniques (i.e., Klein and Dick) or who can mitigate the coercive nature of curriculum through its deliverance/pedagogy, including through character (empathy) and even tone. Here, if we look closely, we can see in Todd's (2001) argument a universal stance based on white normativity and the structural integrity of the concretized myth of white supremacy.

In the last breath of the article, Todd (2001) briefly connects curriculum, colonialism, and oppression and just as abruptly as she introduced it, she disengages from it (p. 446). Todd (2001) then moves on to briefly talk to the idea of the demand for diversity in curriculum material by marginalized groups, to redress inequities, and then dismisses that as a problematic that is assuming (p.447). Yet, Todd (2001) assumes a great deal. First, Todd (2001) assumes neutrality in the violence that is meted out against learners; the violence of altering one's self, the struggles and anxieties of taking from other(s), is not neutral. For students of the category of the white, the violence can be capped at that struggle to take from the other (the curriculum other, the other—others and the teacher other) and to integrate what is taken.[11] Students of the category of the white have already arrived in school, before their physical arrival; they have arrived in curriculum, in terms of the architecture and archetype of curriculum being a white supremist metanarrative (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015) that can be conceived of as an intense secular, non-religious, religion with a far-reaching scope, in that it is mandatorily everyone's secular nonreligious religion. They have also arrived, in an arrival that proceeds their physical arrival, in that whiteness proceeds the category of the white through a concrete visual economy of whiteness and its accompanying narratives (as symbols and signs now paired through an unspoken language). After having arrived before their arrival, students from the category of the white are onboarded and tracked to replenish the concretized myth of white supremacy.[12] Non- white students, on the contrary, are always in a state of arriving; never arrive and cannot be onboarded. Their presence is always a negation and appears as a body that cannot sink (see Ahmed, 2007) or sync, so it surfaces and resurfaces as glitch, against the visual economy of white supremacy. Students from various non-white categories are given a social death (Patterson, 1982) in gradation—in proximity to whiteness, in order to shrink the social, economic, and political skin of non-white categories. Their inclusion, when and where they are included, particularly, the inclusion of Asians as a whole (an expansion from just East Asians to all Asians) is as a social control stratum (Allen, 1997), for a strategic purpose, as a means to securing whiteness rather than as an end goal.

Second, Todd's description of the potentially intimate relationship between teacher and student is also not neutral;[13] it reflects assumptions based on white normativity that stems from the comfort of sinking in (Ahmed, 2007) and syncing with the concretized myth of white supremacy, and perhaps from the ways whiteness makes the world available to white bodies (Ahmed, 2007).

I remember my grade 11 English Media course, in which I was the only non- white student. I recall clearly the failing white male student being explicitly reassured that he would not fail. "Don't worry" the white teacher consoled, "you will pass." The same teacher complained about "immigrants" (which she, as a white-settler is[14]) "coming to take our jobs."

Freedom Dreaming: And How Will You Get Out Of Here?

Pierre Bourdieu (1994), in his essay, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," says, "the effects of choices made by the state have so completely impressed themselves in reality and in minds that possibilities initially discarded have become totally unthinkable" (p. 2). The difficulty of reimaging schools (curriculum + pedagogy + schooling) is a significant obstacle to abolition, yet this is ultimately what is needed.

Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández's (2015) article, "Browning the Curriculum," demonstrates that the education system is a white supremacist project, both in curriculum content,[15] in pedagogy, in its definition of Man2[16] as white hu/man, and the non-white other—non human, non-deserving other. Hence, in its totality, in both architecture and archetype, the curriculum and the education system as we know it is Un-brown-able, and unredeemable. Therefore, "the aim of browning" says Gaztambide-Fernández's (2015) is "the end of curriculum itself" (p. 422). Here, I call forth the death of white supremacist education and the beginning of new education futurities that are based on the simultaneous self-determination of many communities.[17] This future will be constructed through solidarity contracts that map out divergent (internal desires and goals of various groups), yet convergent (destruction of white supremacy, and the peaceful co-existence and full humanity), needs and desires of people. The conversation between Robyn Maynard and Leanne Simpson (2020), in "Towards Black and Indigenous Futures on Turtle Island," gives us insight into the possibilities of seeing collaborative solidarities that can bring divergent and convergent needs of various group identities through solidarity contracts. Thus, instead of going through civil rights channels in white supremist institutions to secure group rights, solidarity contracts would work outside of that framework in a competitive fashion to draw legitimacy away from white supremist institutions, establishing economies that are outside white supremacy. Thus, we would have dynamic solidarity contracts that not only eradicate white supremacy in its totality,[18] in terms of its structuring structures[19] (Bourdieu, 1994), but also that protect against a vacuum and a resurgence of another hegemonic. The question (of many questions) would be, what infrastructures and mechanisms would allow this to work?

The category of the white and the category of the black, its polarity (black/white) and its proximities (non-whites, sprinting away from blackness towards whiteness[20]) would also no longer exist (Abdulle, 2019). People would be shades and colors (beige-pink, beige, caramel brown, brown). This is of course about more than semantics, but rather about destroying the very language with which white supremacy animates itself. I am already doing this in my life. My young children do not use the term white; they use beige, and for the category of the black, they use brown; for South Asians, they use brown.

Although I do not plan to say in academia, one of the things that I would like to accomplish while I am here is to theorize a more nuanced understanding of oppression in the schema of white supremacy that reflects the strategic way whiteness oppresses through a proximity logic, displacing more radical "identities" and coercing other identities into submissiveness. Central to this is the way the category of the black is removed from what Theodore Allen (1997) referred to as the

social control stratum of white supremacy and how Asians (East and later all Asians) are invited into whiteness as less than white but greater than black, in order to displace the radical demands of the category of the black and stabilize whiteness through prosaic white supremacy. I identify this as a very important step in any counterinsurgency against whiteness.

I would also like to experiment with a strategy shift. It seems that we have been attacking the concretized myth of white supremacy by showing what whiteness is doing or has done to non-white people (i.e., through slavery, white-settler colonialism). I think that this process further objectifies. Instead, I would like to de-characterize whiteness by stripping away its positive characteristics that secure its visual economy. So instead of talking about slavery, we could build a counter-visual economy were whiteness and by extension the category of the white are characterized through their acts:

> Insatiable
> Monstrous
> Untruthful/liar
> Sociopathic
> Unworthy
> Mediocre

The question now becomes, can you attack whiteness and not white people. I leave with this thought from Frantz Fanon's (1967/1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> And there was my poor brother—living out his neurosis to the extreme and finding himself paralyzed:
> THE NEGRO: I can't, ma'am.
> LIZZIE: Why not?
> THE NEGRO: I can't shoot white folks.
> LIZZIE: Really! That would bother them, wouldn't it?
> THE NEGRO: They're white folks, ma'am.
> LIZZIE: So what? Maybe they got a right to bleed you like a pig just because they're white?
> THE NEGRO: But they're white folks. (p. 139)

Notes

1. It might sound strange that I am using whiteness here instead the United States. However, the United States' actions shouldn't be understood as the actions of a specific country, but rather as a (historic) continuation of whiteness's aggression, appropriation, and impunity. Unequivocally, it is only whiteness that could terrorize on that scale with impunity.
2. The closest you can get to publicly uttering those words was if you were an older white man. See Edward Peck (2001, 2007).
3. Not that there wasn't fear of the U.S. Government if you lived outside of and further away from it.
4. The movement and or characteristics of high frequency and low frequency soundwaves are understood through the established principles of wave mechanics and propagation in the field of acoustics.
5. The category of the black Moors the system, as they are placed outside of what Theodore Allen (1997) called the social control stratum.
6. I can still make out my dad's laughter, as he repeated the question.
7. While previous colonialism was overt, overtly violent and conspicuous, our present colonialism is managed through prosaic white supremacy, through global market structures that were meant to stabilize whiteness's loss.

Whiteness would reorient and regain through indefinite market asymmetries delivered through such institutions as the World Bank, the IMF, the United Nations—including the United Nations Security Council, which only has five permanent members with veto power, four of which belong to the category of the white (and three of those four are Western powers), China being the only non-white permanent member.

8. Africa is the second largest continent in the world, and according to the African Language Program at Harvard University (2024), the continent has between 1000 to 2000 languages, yet, in most spaces it is referred to as a country, even if indirectly. This implosion is a strategic narrative of whiteness that allows the richness and diversity of the peoples and cultures and the multifaceted and multifactorial circumstance to be streamed into a narrative of inherent poverty and misery.
9. Although I do not have enough space/time to cover this issue in depth, it is worth noting the way economic and social skin of the category of white expands through various policies and initiatives within and outside of education to sustain and maintain the concretized myth of white supremacy. Discriminatory education policies, discriminatory hiring practices and discriminatory economic policies like redlining are but a few general examples.
10. See *The Scholar Denied, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Morris, 2015).
11. Even this struggle is purposeful because structuring structures will call out to the category of the white through what Sarah Ahmed (2007) calls technologies of whiteness—the recruitment processes. Thence, education, in its entirety and the outcomes, even if painful, are productive. For the non-white, it is a negation in gradation, in proximity to an ideal whiteness.
12. See Chen and Buell (2018). See Deng and Luke (2008) for a taxonomy of education and its implications.
13. There is also no mention by Todd (2001) of an ethical need for diversity in the ranks of teachers.
14. Please see Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013).
15. Both in the epistemologies it centers and decenters, absorbs, assimilates, and eliminates (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015).
16. Please see Sylvia Wynter's (2003) *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation*.
17. We can think here about Leigh Patel's (2022) article, "Focus on Learning Loss Obscures How Much We've Truly Lost in the Pandemic," in terms of more Black parents refusing a return to school, as a refusal to a return to a normal violence, or hooks (1997) chapter on accessible theory as a form of liberation and a refusal of white supremacist logic of education as obfuscation as the unintelligible intelligence of academia. We can also think about Leanne Simpson's (2011) chapter, "Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought," where education is teaching your children, your heritage, your values, your way of live, unfiltered through anyone else's filter.
18. Not in the language or act or recognition as argued by Glen Coulthard (2007), (asymmetrical recognition) but rather in refusing the parameters of the system and hence the system, itself, as argued by Coulthard (2007). This of course would require a huge project of legitimacy divestment from whiteness, something that is crucial to destroying white supremacy. And something that is recognized by Fanon (1967/1986) when he says that the only legitimate world is the white world. This legitimacy has to be broken down.
19. No IMF, no World Bank, no development theories. There might be deterrent theories.
20. Through colorism, class, and other white apparatuses.

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The Transhumanist Tapestry
Unraveling Roles of Author and Audience

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"Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change."
(Shelley, 1818/1993, Chapter 23)

IN THE BIRTH OF THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE, Shelley captures so beautifully the tension between the masterful and minacious use of a certain dimension of technologies—ones that carry with them the forbidden fruits of scientific/technological knowledge. *Frankenstein's* exploration of uniquely human properties may serve as a reminder once more as the proliferation of consumer-facing AI has given rise to understandable anxieties about the consequences of such technologies.

This comes on the heels of fears about the effects of the nearly ubiquitous use of social media among adolescents and the concerns for its long-term effects. However, these kinds of affective responses to new technologies are hardly new. There was once a time wherein the spread of a broader reading public, in the wake of the invention of the printing press, caused panic about what the masses would do with such unfettered access to information (Furedi, 2015). It is not that any of these responses in the face of new media are wrong, but rather that they are predictably *human.*

These human responses are often considered to be purely intellectual; in reality, human beings think and feel simultaneously, with mind and body. The emerging technology drives not only intellectual panic but embodied/felt panic as well. Anxiety, excitement, and curiosity in response to emergent media are embodied responses. To put it pedantically—we *feel* our feelings. They sit in lumps in our throats, keep time in accelerated heart rates, and reverberate and hum through our nervous system. As Gumbrecht (as cited in Engberg et al., 2022) reminds us, "The affective experience is about being touched from the inside" (p. 12). To embrace these feelings—to be able to be touched from the inside—is at the heart of the human experience.

We have, however, forgotten this. Humanist thinking has privileged the thinking-being over the feeling-being. We have, for so long, believed that we "think, therefore we are" (Descartes, 1637/1986, p.73). Locating our humanity dominantly in our consciousness rather than our bodies makes the boundaries we tread today particularly fraught. Machines are beginning to replicate the kinds of language and writing that once held a keystone role in our construction of humanity as a

distinctly sacrosanct species. Hayles (2000) argues that "the erasure of embodiment is performed so that 'intelligence' becomes the property of the formal manipulations of symbols rather than the enaction of the human life world" (p. xi). We had thought for a time that our ability to reason through language, communicate, document, and archive our experiences set us apart from other animals and situated us as hierarchically superior (Abram, 2012). Ignoring the implications this has for the ecosystems humans inhabit (which are vast and demand significant attention beyond the scope of this work), this hierarchy is beginning to come into question.

The boundaries of humanity are blurring, none more so than the boundaries between humans and machines. In this way, transhumanist thinking is changing the ways we interact with the world and demands that we reevaluate what this means for education. It is in our daily interactions with technology that the line between human/machine becomes unclear. Digital culture propels us to read at all times, and it also reads us as never before: "our movements in and across space, our shopping habits, our usage of data sets, our listening to music, our eye movements, and our attention spans" (Koepnick, 2022, p. 219). Emerson (2014) suggests that each occasion of engaging with digital interfaces becomes a *readingwriting*; "the practice of writing through the network, which as it tracks, indexes and algorithmics every click and every bit of text we enter into the network, is itself constantly reading our writing and writing our reading" (p. xiv). As humans, we read and at the same time are read by technology. We are increasingly being produced or at least distributed by technologies that surround us in a post-phenomenological position (Ihde, 2007). The students in our classrooms today have been born into this technology-rich culture and their "selves" are produced and distributed in ways that extend beyond our current imaginings.

This digital entanglement of machines and minds, of reading and being read, stands as an invitation to interrogate the historical relationship between reader and writer, audience and author, student and teacher. We must uncouple our understanding of this relationship away from a fixed binary to understand it as a symbiotic and dialogic relationship (Bakhtin, 1929/2013). Our ever-evolving dynamic with communicative technologies has made it such that author and audience, teacher and learner, occur simultaneously and are often one and the same; the *readerwriter* has become part human, part machine—parts that are often interwoven and deeply inseparable.

Unraveling Authorship

For the purposes of this paper, I frame concepts of writing and authoring broadly to include not only language-based texts but screen-based literacies as well. Kress (2003) argued that, as the screen begins to subsume the page, traditional writing may too increasingly become subordinated. He argued that we must consider "what reading is; what the functions of writing are; what the relations of language to thinking, to imagination, to creativity might be" (p. 22). This is not to say that writing or even language-based communication is obsolete, but rather that its dominance is no longer unquestioned. Reading and writing are no longer a purely alphabetic endeavor, as we continue to think and communicate in multimodal and embodied ways.

Our students have grown up with technology that has shaped us into an image-rich culture. The image-rich culture we find ourselves in means that "questions of communication and composition absolutely will include the visual, not as an attendant to the verbal but as complex communication intricately related to the world around them" (George, 2002/2011, p. 785). This has only grown in urgency since the early 2000s. The widespread accessibility of video

communication means that the metalinguistic elements of language, including our embodied communications, are reproduced and spread more frequently and more widely than ever before. In this changing landscape, it is insufficient for contemporary classrooms, particularly English classes, to grapple with only alphabetic texts. As our cultural conceptions and practices around communication shift so too must our teaching practices.

Within this broad framing of reading and writing acts, the role of the author is highly negotiable. There is a long theoretical tradition that questions the role and independence of authorship. Whether it be Barthes' (1967/1977) proclamation that "The Author is Dead" or Foucault's (1969) questioning of "What Is an Author," both post-structuralists work to destabilize the author's authority over a work. In so doing, they each, in many ways, echo Bakhtin's (1929/2013) dialogic framing away from a single voice toward plural voicing. Bakhtin argues,

> To be, means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no sovereign internal territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another. (p. 287)

We can see parallels to this in Barthes'(1967/1977) descriptions of texts as "multi-dimensional space[s] in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (p. 146). This is the same idea as the heteroglossia of Bakhtin's conception. There is no single author to a text, but rather an authorship of plurality. All of our writing is, in turn, the voices of others.

But we must ask, whose voices are echoed in Language-Based Artificial Intelligence? AI is able to replicate the same kinds of writing only humans had previously been able to produce. By analyzing vast amounts of text, these models have identified patterns in language and are able to reproduce human language. In essence, these models have become experts on speech genres (Bakhtin, 1929/2013) and conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992)—albeit perhaps an incomplete version. Generative AI will always be one step behind. Unlike humans, it will not on its own invent slang or alternative usage of words and phrases. At present, it has no impulse to modify or change language. These generative language models were never going to write *A Clockwork Orange*, coin new phrases the way Shakespeare did, or play in the realm of language the way comedians do.

That being said, there are a great number of things it can do and do well. It can analyze our text, recognize speech genres and the anticipated utterances possible within them, mix and match language, and perform tasks of conversation and writing. What it produces is much akin to the way we paraphrase one another—the things we have read and the conversations we have had. What is original in this type of writing is the *way* you bring these multiple sources together. Our compositions, like the compositions of generative AI language models, are interwoven ideas influenced by others. If we embrace the notion that we are all a bricolage of the knowledge we have experienced, then it follows that AI language models are part of that same intellectual community.

What, perhaps, drives some of the panic and fear around this technology is how it will in turn shape our discourse and by extension shape people and cultures. While we have historically shaped our own discourses and, in turn, those discourses have (re)shaped us, there is understandable concern for what role generative AI will play in the construction of new discourse. This is directly related to the disembodied nature of these digital multi-voiced authors. Bakhtin (1929/2013) argues that

> a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (p. 293)

With no eyes, lips, hands, soul, or spirit, Language-Based AI enters into our discourse. It is the reader of these texts who projects onto the language the embodied realities of these words. A chatbot has no obligation to "invest its entire self in the discourse," yet its words still enter into "the dialogic fabric of human life"—disembodied from the author, yet re-embodied in the audience.

The disembodiment of AI authorship also means that we must reckon with multi-vocality in a new way. When the multi-voiced author is embodied within a single being, we are able to reconcile ownership and authorship. Neo-liberalist thought frames authorship around ownership. Neoliberalists ask: who owns this content, concept, or particular arrangement of words? What body produced this content? Neoliberalists do not recognize the multi-voiced elements of all authorship. This is not to say that individuals do not deserve credit for the novel ideas and phrasings they produce, but rather that this tension between ownership and multi-voiced writing helps to explain some of the anxieties around this AI-produced writing. It is difficult to ascribe capitalistic notions of ownership to the texts produced by AI chatbots. AI chatbots produce writing by mixing and rearranging the language of many data sets. Though sometimes jarring, these are the ever-evolving epitome of dialogic multi-voiced writers, quite unlike their embodied counterparts.

Of course, this comes in tension with the anti-capitalist ideas that are often foundational to many creative communities, including authors and artists. For many creators, ownership of content is tied to creating in pursuit of originality and ingenuity yet in opposition to capitalism. Meanwhile, multi-voiced AI has the power to perpetuate capitalism and serves corporate masters by taking from individual creators and collapsing their multi-vocality to give their AI models something new to say. One danger is that we are not meaningfully recognizing this collapse of the individual. We must urgently frame for students that the content AI produces is not pulling from a singular, nor attributable source, but rather generating new content based on many voices, each uncompensated for their creative labor. AI does not account for whose voices or perspectives are being leveraged in this way.

In recognizing these chatbots as multi-voiced authors, the real concern is not just AI's ability to mix and match language in the same ways that humans can, but rather that they brutally reflect back to us our own corruptions. AI is imbued with all of the belief systems, biases, and assumptions of its creators. As Noble (2018) argues, "algorithms are, and will continue to be, loaded with power" (p. 171). In this way, old forms of oppression are given new affordances. These new affordances of oppression come in many forms. AI image generators reproduce images of individuals laden with ableist, ageist, sexist, and racist undertones—for example, when asking DALL-E to produce an image of an autistic individual, almost all compositions are of a young white boy. Language models too are laden with similar biases: as individuals type, auto-correct struggles to keep up with code-switching, underlining in red the natural language of individuals and reaffirming a standardization of grammatical constructs.

Through their texting, use of filters on social media, and their drafting of more traditionally academic compositions, our students are already producing and being produced by algorithmic compositions. Concepts of critical media literacy need to be supplemented with deeper conversations that promote algorithmic literacy, that move beyond critiquing and evaluating a singular text, and instead interrogate the substructures that underpin algorithms producing multiple

texts. Students can use their own feeds and experiences to critically evaluate the ways their identities, and the identities of others, are being produced and distributed in digital spaces and the ways that they are reading and being read by technology. Classroom explorations and discussions that encourage students to evaluate the power-laden nature of AI are essential to developing technological meta-awareness.

Weaving with AI

These "algorithms of oppression" move beyond those who develop algorithms themselves—but move so much deeper into the mythologies, or the subcode, that naturalizes the belief systems of our culture (Barthes, 1957/2013). New Media's increased participatory spaces further encode these myths embedded in our language. They are written into our everyday interactions in online spaces, picked up in the data sets provided to AI, and recreated and perpetuated by the technologies that leverage them. This has particular consequences for our embodied realities. As our bodies move through space, geographically dependent content curation risks a new sort of digital redlining, one that perpetuates existing mythologies about the people we encounter and places we inhabit. An adolescent who lives and engages with digital content in an urban area may encounter an entirely distinct digital space compared to an adolescent in a more rural setting. This curation is dependent on AI's operationalizing of geographic and social assumptions. As algorithms pull from participatory spaces like social media, they act as both audiences of our texts and authors of new mythologies.

Algorithms are not just authoring alphabetic texts in response to the mythologies they find in participatory spaces, but they are also authoring particular reading experiences through the curation of feeds. While humans are often the creators of the content in New Media spaces, the arrangement of content occurs as a result of algorithmic intervention. As algorithms mix and match the content, they create unique reading experiences that impact how we interpret texts. Optimistically, we can envision this curation of feeds as a sort of found poetry—taking elements of our friend's experiences, our interests, and passions woven together into a new whole, a bricolage of our networked lives and an assemblage of our ethos, logos, and pathos.

It is important to remember though that the algorithm is our apprentice; we are the weavers.[1] It is not the algorithm alone that curates our lives; our algorithmic apprentice offers us threads of our lives; it is our interactions with this content that determines the pattern of our tapestry. Each time we linger on a post, like, or comment, we reaffirm an algorithm's presented conception of what we are interested in—it is an illustration of an algorithm's imagined audience. Conversely, each time we quickly scroll past, we challenge this imagined audience, reject this thread of thinking, and the algorithm amends what colored threads it offers us in the future. Over time, with too narrow a lens on the world, we are not given a wide variety of colors; we cannot weave broadly. With only the common threads of our experiences, the uncommon is left out; our tapestry becomes dull with too limited a color pattern—social silos are formed.

What would it look like if we gave students the time, space, and tools to critically evaluate the threads they are weaving with? If we showed them how to name the color of threads they choose, to pause and annotate their own practice of where they reaffirm or dismiss an algorithm's presented conception of their interests. Could we reframe the way we think about what it means to read online and the ways that students are authoring these algorithms to help them become more conscious writers and weavers? I think this demands that we cease placing value judgments about

adolescents' social media use and instead approach with earnestness and curiosity about the tapestry our students are weaving for themselves and the digital communities they are a part of. Can we apprentice our weaver students into broad and colorful tapestries?

Audiences: Authors of Their Own Interpretations

Engaging with participatory spaces in this way can be a helpful reminder of our own agency in interpretation. Audiences are authors of their own interpretations. Transactional theory, a concept that while descended from humanist thinking can be fruitful as we think about a transhumanist world, establishes that readers have an important role to play in constructing their understanding of a text (Rosenblatt, 1995). While Rosenblatt emphasizes individual transactions, socio-technical spaces are collapsing the difference between reader and audience by closing geographical gaps and empowering audience response. Individual readers do transact with texts, and educators should continue to encourage these transactions; however, such an individualistic focus potentially oversimplifies the "range and diversity of both oral and written communication situations" that are afforded to us in the modern age (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2011, p. 83). While we continue to encourage individual transactions, media theory can help maintain the spirit of transactional theory while accounting for increasingly collective responses.

Hall's (1973/2000) reception theory argues that the audience is both the "source" and the "receiver" of the message—they are simultaneously author and audience (p. 54). However, in Hall's words, "'selective perception' is seldom as selective, random or privatized as the concepts suggest. The patterns exhibit, across individual variants, significant clusterings" (p. 58). While individuals author their own experiences, they are often formed in collective clusterings. Hall goes on to argue that readings will be "dominant," "negotiated," or "oppositional" (p. 60). In short, a given reader's particular reading of a text is likely to be shared with individuals who may completely agree, are utterly outraged by it, or fall somewhere in the middle. In online spaces, these clusterings are further bounded by the algorithms that share digital content. As algorithms read these reactions, they share it with others it anticipates will have a similar reading of the same text. For those users, this becomes the only reading of such a text they are exposed to. These "clusters" of readers' responses become increasingly rigid and bounded, clumping tighter and tighter.

What has changed, beyond the literary texts centered in Rosenblatt's works and the television programs Hall discusses, is the evolved dialogic relationship between author and audience. Literary texts, television programs, and even the blogs of the early internet were statically curated experiences. We had choices about what to engage with, but the arrangement was fixed. To return to my previous analogy, consumers of content were not weaving, they were quilting. Affixing together chunks of pre-curated content into a larger whole of their experience. The role of algorithms in curating our feeds means that we have much more choice, much more power, and much more creativity in how we construct the fabric of our lives. But, this is only true if we make active choices about the range of threads we choose to pull and the types of interpretations we are willing to entertain.

Social media is the dominant location where much of this thread work is broadcast. Bolter (2022) argues that "social media [has] broken down the boundary between consuming and producing texts, they have also facilitated collective reading on a scale that dwarfs any form of earlier literacy" (p. 41). Reader-authored interpretations are more broadly spread because of

participatory spaces and networked reading. The ability to highlight and comment on digital texts makes the act of annotation public—your '"reading' of the text becomes paratext that others can read and add to" (Bolter, 2022 p. 41). Modern readers become part of a textual network constructing shared experiences of reading and writing (Engberg, 2022).

In these participatory digital spaces, audiences are able to immediately share and curate their own readings of texts. This occurs broadly, across a variety of textual subjects, but of specific interest for English Educators is the expansion of fanfiction as a genre and BookTok as a reading community. The immediacy of sharing reading experiences constructs authors in their own right.

These fan-based interpretations and rewritings of literature run into a similar problem in the attribution of ownership as does AI, as noted in an earlier section of this paper. Neoliberalism demands to know who owns the intellectual property of a given story. Jenkins (2008) argues that fans in participatory spaces are working to reclaim their rights to their own interpretations of the content they have come to love. While their compositions may be original, they are multivocalities inspired by origins that have been claimed, and often commercialized (see Harry Potter and Star Wars), by private entities. Authors of source material inspire authors of interpretations that are shared digitally and algorithmically curated for users. These inspire other readers to become authors of spin-offs. Non-canonical readings become the widely preferred readings, and eventually, the original creator becomes entirely divorced from the disembodied, amorphous, and networked concept they initially germinated. All the while, corporations attempt to police the boundaries of interpretive agency and digital distribution. These participatory spaces put the author, audience, and corporate entities in a dialogic relationship, navigating a constant negotiation of roles.

AI as Meta-Audience

This interconnectivity afforded to us through the internet and social networking sites results in the need to rethink the role of not only of the author but of the audience as well. Ideas of conscious and unconscious audiences, real and imagined, are being reshaped in these new contexts. In online spaces, sometimes, a writer's audience is immediately present, like when engaging in live discourse through social media sites. Other times, the audience is utterly unexpected, like when a social media post "goes viral" beyond a user's immediate network. Regardless of their immediate or unexpected presence, professional and student creators alike imagine their audience, who they anticipate and imagine their audience to be (Ong, 1975/2011). Simultaneously, we must acknowledge that audiences play a creative role and "actively contribute to the meaning of what they read" (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2011, p. 81). That being said, we must also recognize that this imagined audience only offers a partial view.

These imagined audiences do not account for an audience addressed (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2011). The existence of an audience addressed shifts perspective from an imagined audience to an acknowledgment of the "concrete reality of the writer's audience"(Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2011, p. 78). This concrete reality has historically been understood as a tangible, embodied audience—an audience who can think, feel, and be touched by your composition. In this case, the writer cannot purely invent an audience; they must also "adapt their discourse to meet the needs and expectations of an addressed audience" (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2011, p. 89). All the while, a fictionalized version of the audience lives in the author's mind. As writers in the modern age, we analyze and invent; we invoke and address the audience.

The complexity of the author/audience is further complicated in the digital age. Ede and Lunsford (1984/2011) argued that "audience refers not just to the intended, actual, or eventual readers of a discourse, but to all those whose image, ideas, or actions influence a writer during the process of composition" (p. 92). This broad framing of audience suggests that the audience is plural, and it is multimodal, defined by their ability to impact the writer. It is not just words that matter but the "image, ideas, [and] actions" too.

This also means that, while digital technologies author texts and digital experiences, algorithms are also an audience. Algorithms read our data both in content and context. They can not only "read" the message of multimodal writing we do online, but also recognize the spatial and temporal consistencies of our compositions. That is to say, our location, screen time, posting time, posting frequency, and much more are tracked and taken into account. Moreover, algorithms read the same data from responses to the root content in the form of comments, likes, shares, etc. It may be easy to dismiss this paratext to the writing we develop, but as Leander and Lovvorn (2006) argue, understanding these relations and movements helps us to avoid an overly narrow focus on "isolated texts or even textual practices" or a similarly narrow focus on "what texts mean rather than what they do" (p. 292) In doing so these activities become embedded in other activity structures and help to shape spatial and temporal relationships "of streams of activity" (p. 292). All of this information collectively forms a sort of meta-audience reading, not only the initial content but all of the paratext associated with it.

Recognizing this new algorithmic role, what happens when the audience invoked and addressed is non-human? What happens when creators construct compositions with an algorithmic audience in mind? Social media and social networks are not just spaces of human connection, but these digital networks are leveraged in favor of corporate interests. Modern content makers are not just thinking of potential product customers when they write for digital spaces. Each time a marketing executive aims to make a post "go viral," they are imagining an algorithmic audience—a reader of the text and paratext that will provide and reproduce the content on an accelerated scale. The writer imagines an audience without its own ethos, without its own pathos, without its own ability to reason. It thinks only in terms of trending sounds, constant clicks, and interest and engagement. It cares not for the truthfulness or ethics of the content—only for its likelihood to generate more writing. It is an audience designed to create more authors.

It would be foolhardy not to recognize these negative potentialities of an algorithmic audience. But that does not mean that an audience designed to create more authors is necessarily always negative. There is the potential for the stimulation of positive authorship. Much the same way that a beautiful painting might inspire future artists, beautiful content too may inspire more beautiful content. It can uplift voices and invite more participants into the conversation. Algorithms bring people together to cope with grief and tragedy (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021). They can spread information on under-reported issues, particularly in areas with state-controlled media (Enikolopov et al., 2020). Algorithms facilitate "learning in the wild" (Haythornthwaite et al. 2018) expanding viewpoints and perspectives.

The hybridity of humans and machines means that we carry traces of this algorithmic writing into in-person spaces. For our students in particular, much of the composing they do is in these algorithmic spaces, and they have learned, unknowingly, to write for the proliferation of content. We have seen time and time again how this can manifest itself in negative ways that have insidious effects on our embodied realities. Dangerous performativity is too often the currency of the day with little consideration for embodied impacts. These trends invent and reinvent themselves, but what is more important is the change in the ways the internet has made

performativity a more complex interaction between author and audience. Public spectacles of embodied risks are not new, but now, rather than a limited and local audience, the digitization and algorithmic proliferation of such content make a performer of such embodied acts—a character. Any individual witnessing and recording these acts becomes an author. The digital viewer, remote from the situation of such a spectacle, is read by algorithms each time they view or share such videos. Algorithms write curated experiences of the spectacle for more embodied audiences. Upon seeing the reach of such videos these embodied viewers recreate and reauthor more embodied performative experiences.

These lingering traces of algorithmic audience indeed impact the way we move through in-person interactions and lead to the proliferation of content that trades in indignation and outrage, but this does not need to be the case. It would be naive to ignore the dangerous elements of the ways that algorithms are impacting our embodied realities, but similarly, it would be overly cynical to ignore the ways that an audience that creates more authors can also be utopic.

We have seen firsthand how the sharing and writing of digital content has translated into embodied effects and has started to create a population rife with civic participation. The spread of digital content and the creation of more authors has facilitated the organization of embodied social justice movements. In these moments, we see digital networks commune in lived spaces of solidarity and resistance. We have seen the ways that documenting and sharing embodied abuses online draw attention to systemic oppression and act as direct challenges to power and privilege. Though often hard to watch, it is the proliferation of content online that has led to better documentation of embodied abuses of power by state force. Folks know the importance of leveraging disembodied audiences to make change in our embodied spaces.

Educating Beyond The Algorithm

The question is: How can educators work toward this future of advocacy and action? It is helpful to remember that these positive effects are already happening and that embracing our students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2006) around these issues may mean letting go of old ways of being in the classroom. While of course anecdotal, I have seen in my own students a willingness to push back, speak up, and make plain things they are uncomfortable with. Though my experience is anecdotal, it has been shared by educators across the country (Zirini, 2021) and by Gen Z themselves (Stahl & Literat, 2022). Our students have grown up sharing their thoughts and experiences with unknown audiences and have simultaneously been the audiences to people unlike themselves. They have learned the power of virality and have brought that boldness in addressing problems to their embodied realities.

However, this learned ability to speak up and challenge authority disrupts the power balance between educators and students. While many teachers advocate for socially just classrooms, too often it is undercut by their classroom management. Educators too often celebrate the narratives of speaking back to positions of power but don't often make space for this in their actual classrooms (Shalaby, 2021). In this way, educators do not often embody the principles they espouse. They rationally endorse social justice movements without embodying them. This means they only selectively acknowledge the bodies in front of them. To be fair to educators, embodying these practices can feel genuinely uncomfortable. Those embodied feelings of discomfort are valid and a real part of teacher identity. That does not, however, mean that they are correct. hooks (1994/2014) reminds us that "new ways of knowing may create estrangement where there was

none" and that difficult experiences are common in the integration of theory and practice (p. 43). It can be helpful to remember that this questioning, reflection, and critical and affective thinking is exactly the kind of work we want our students to do and are the kinds of skillsets students need to navigate this hybrid world of online and embodied entanglement.

What students need is not a dismissal of their advocacy but the tools to navigate the entanglement of embodied, live audiences, disembodied, digital, human audiences, and algorithmic audiences. Students need to develop a sense of paratextual and algorithmic meta-awareness. When teachers are crafting lesson plans and curricula that may include discussions of digital spaces, they need to keep in mind these evolving conceptions of audience/authors. Just because students are authoring does not mean they are not an audience. Just because you are an audience does not mean you are not authoring. Rather than a binary, these elements are in constant negotiation. Moreover, students need to grapple with the ethical complexities of writing for algorithms, for disembodied human audiences, and for embodied spaces.

I know that for many teachers a school year with already over-scheduled curricula rarely affords time and space for such endeavors. It can be tempting to only think of technology in limited ways. For many, they see technology as an obstacle to work around: How do I prevent my students from cheating using ChatGPT? How can I prevent them from watching YouTube during class time? For others, technology becomes supplemental to existing modes of teaching. Leander (2007) argues technology is too often integrated to "work with teaching and learning, adjusting here, supporting there" (p. 46). However, neither of these stances accounts for the increasingly complex interactions we have and will continue to have with technology. Technology is already intertwined with our bodies, our composition, and our communication. Students will continue to navigate this hybridity for the rest of their lives.

Embodied and Disembodied Parts Stitched Together

Perhaps one way to work through this is to tap into the very human compulsion toward empathy. Humans are both thinking and feeling beings, but empathy, dominated by feeling, is an embodied response. We lose this embodiment in virtual spaces because we are disembodied to others. In other words, the primary source of empathy is physical feeling (how would I feel physically if placed in another context); therefore, empathy is harder to stimulate in virtual settings. While we can expand our understanding of what it means to read and write, to compose and be an audience, we can reflect on what it *feels* like to do those from an embodied perspective as a way to work toward more compassionate communication.

It is an age-old problem to get student writers to conceptualize an audience beyond their teacher and yet they are *readingwriting* daily for embodied/disembodied audiences. As teachers move forward in thinking about composition instruction, we can help students understand the ways that they are *always* author/audience. By questioning their own compositions, we may facilitate a more empathetic and expansive understanding of their writing practice.

Sometimes returning to the old can help us see the new. Moffett's (1968) framing of shifting levels of discourse offers some useful questions students can ask themselves: "For what reason am I telling him? Would I tell it differently to someone else? Would I tell it differently to the same person another time and in a different circumstance?" (p. 37). The aim here is of course to shift our perspective, to consider who is the audience, who is the author, and in what ways might we be both—ultimately in pursuit of empathy and understanding.

However, this pursuit of empathy and understanding must go beyond a purely humanist perspective that only wonders how another person might feel at a given moment. Rather, students need to practice empathy for what another *being* might experience. What empathy can I share with this animal or plant or system? Can we begin to practice empathy for a technological being? Are we not all bound to one another through this same technological other—through an ecosystem from which the technological is inextricable from the organic?

I return here to Mary Shelley's (1818/1993) *Frankenstein*. The comparison of Artificial Intelligence to the novel has been made by many, but I do so to highlight the value of asking students to shift their perspectives. Victor's creation, as he moves through the world, is feared and spurned by society—a grotesque representation of the pursuit of forbidden knowledge. However, it is important to remember that as Victor initially toils away, he sees his creation as beautiful, an improvement upon man, and a triumph over death. It is only upon the creation's waking that the sublime becomes grotesque:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley, 1818/1993, Chapter 5)

At this moment, when theoretical knowledge becomes embodied knowledge, Victor's emotional response becomes paramount. He cannot articulate his emotional response, but he can feel it. He becomes an audience to the creation he has authored and is struck for the first time by its alienness. The engineers and scientists who have been working to develop Artificial Intelligence since the 1950s toil away under a similar pursuit of beauty and grandeur unable to recognize their own writing. It is when society at large encounters the product of their toils that the beautiful and the grotesque clash. We are unable to process our feelings: simultaneously awed and horrified, excited and bewildered by the possibilities.

But our humanly embodied responses to technology are only one element at play here, and anyone who knows the tale of *Frankenstein* knows that the narrative is not about Victor's perspective alone. Through a non-human perspective, through the lens of such a technological creation, the lens of the creation, a much richer perspective is gained.

The creation is neither perfection nor a monster, but rather, like much of life, somewhere in between. For many who read the novel, myself included, the ultimate message of the work is empathy for the creation—even as we recognize the atrocities he is ultimately responsible for. The creation in *Frankenstein* is neither inherently malicious nor benevolent; rather, the creation's interaction with humans is at the root of his misdeeds. Much like the creation, it is through the ways that humans interact with these evolving technologies that their ethics are constructed.

In the novel, the creation implores, "Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due" (Shelley, 1818/1993, Chapter 10). In what ways are we today, professing equity for fellow humans while trampling on the creations to which we owe justice, clemency, and affection? We learn much, as an audience to the creation's narrative. How can we account for the ways that we are

already audiences to the narratives AI constructs for us? How can we teach our students to do the same? Rather than reacting with fear or rejection of this newborn technology, as Victor does, can we replace it with curiosity and empathy? Rather than abandon our creation to the whims of society, how might we work to raise it, shape it, and recognize it as part of all of us?

Notes

1. I want to note here that the analogy of weaving has been used with some frequency to describe various aspects of the human experience, but particularly often in reference to education. I hope that here I use the analogy in a novel way.

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Towards a Theory of Lyric Curriculum

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> Look at the red throat
> Of the hummingbird, and tell
> Your story again.
>
> —Ronald Baantz

"WE WILL RAISE THIS WOUNDED WORLD into a wondrous one." At 23 years old, Amanda Gorman (2021b) read her poem, "The Hill We Climb," at President Joe Biden's January 2021 inauguration, with more than thirty million tuning into the broadcast. The event catapulted Gorman to national stardom, as St. Felix (2021) recounts in the *Vogue* profile, "The Rise and Rise of Amanda Gorman:"

> Gorman, or radiations of Gorman, were everywhere: on a February cover of *Time*, posed in her yellow, and inside the magazine, holding a caged bird, invoking Maya Angelou, interviewed by Michelle Obama; performing virtually at "Ham4Progress Presents: The Joy in Our Voices," a Black History Month celebration from the people behind the *Hamilton* phenomenon; on an International Women's Day panel with Clinton, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Chrissy Teigen; in media headlines, nearly every time she tweeted her opinion on a current event; memorialized on vibrant murals in D.C. and Palm Springs. (para. 6)

In the early 21st century, it's not often a poet becomes a star. Yet Gorman's words resonated beyond the cloistered realms of contemporary poets, humanities classrooms, and off-beat coffee shops to reach American masses who otherwise do not "hear the planet-like music of poetry" (Sidney, 1595/2009, para. 123). Following the inauguration, Gorman would go on to read another of her poems during the broadcast of the 2021 Super Bowl, and her subsequent poetry collection, also titled *The Hill We Climb*, debuted at number one on *The New York Times* bestsellers list, a historic first for a collection of poetry.

In addition to Gorman herself, radiations of "The Hill We Climbed" popped up everywhere. Before inauguration day had ended, lines from her poem surfaced across numerous social media (e.g., Campos, 2021). And in the days that followed, journalists published enthusiastic

think pieces, and educators shared guides for teaching the poem in classrooms. *PBS*, for example, developed a 50-minute lesson for grades 6-12 that invited students to analyze and respond to the poem (Stevens, 2021); while the organization 826 Digital (n.d.) created a lesson inviting students to use the poem as a model for their own poetry. One can even buy tee shirts and canvas bags embroidered with lines from the poems from independent vendors on Etsy or from corporations on Amazon.

Like many people, we saw the Instagram and Facebook posts that quoted the poem, but we also had other encounters with it. Scott noticed that an email sent from the president of his institution quoted the poem and cited the poem's outsized impact:

> "The Hill We Climb" … is a wonderful, modern example of the beauty and power of poetry. Though [Gorman] deservedly received great praise and personal attention afterward, the poem itself was not *about* her. Instead, she made it about much larger and timely issues, ultimately crafting a work for the ages that touched and inspired millions.

In Cori's college-level Young Adult literature course, a student quoted the poem the day after the inauguration, connecting its ethics to the final chapter of Angie Thomas's (2017) novel, *The Hate U Give*. Later in the spring, Cori was riding her bike in a Minneapolis neighborhood when she realized that each home along the east side of a city block had written lines from the poem on large posters and placed them facing outwards toward the street. Moving north to south, a pedestrian could read the final ten lines of Gorman's (2021a) poem.

As scholars of curriculum and English Education, as well as former English teachers and enthusiastic readers, the circulation of Gorman's poem excites us. What we see in the phenomenon is a manifestation of our wildest dreams about what poems and other texts might do in classrooms. People are *talking* about the poem. They are responding to its imagery and aspirational claims; they're close reading Gorman's use of repetition and critiquing her use of the pronoun "we." The poem has thrust people into conversations about language, the nature of unity and justice, and the function of poetry, literature, and art. It has made students of us all.

This swirl of activity surrounding "The Hill We Climb" suggests that poetry has a social function. Poems are not inert words on a page: they *do* things in the world. They act on people, and people act on them. This conception of poetry as a social actor is not merely a post-humanist hunch of ours; it is a perspective articulated by literary theorist Jonathan Culler (2015), whose *Theory of the Lyric* delineates the formal properties of lyric poetry and theorizes the social function of lyrics. Through an examination of poetry from antiquity through today, Cullers argues that the lyric's special formal qualities make it possible for poetry to generate social change.

The uptake of Gorman's poem also calls to mind Aparna Mishra Tarc's (2020) stirring call in this Journal for curriculum theorists to use finely tuned reading practices to theorize how a poem like Gorman's moves us to see ourselves and the world anew. Mishra Tarc points out that discourses of hate and violence circulate widely and freely today, and she argues that, if we do not see words as the powerful weapons they are, these discourses will "lead to our collective death and destruction" (p. 34). We must attend closely to texts, she continues, because understanding how texts move us—"how it is they pedagogically seduce us, lead us on our thinking, insinuate in our skin" (p. 34)—will help us to theorize how we might use texts and words as bulwarks against discourses of hate. She argues that such closely felt textual readings may help illuminate how literature sustains us, how it supports us in bearing witness to the times, and how it offers hopeful paths forward.

Inspired by Mishra Tarc's call, this essay attends closely to lyric poetry in order to understand how a poem like Gorman's (2021a, 2021b), "The Hill We Climb," comes to sustain and move us. Mobilizing Culler's theory of the lyric as a framework, we read lyric poems like Gorman's to consider how the formal qualities of lyric allow it to get under our skin and to see the world anew; in doing so, we imagine how lyric poetry "can help us theorize curriculum anew" (Mishra Tarc, 2020, p. 39).

Lyric Theory

"Lyric" has become a loosely-used catch-all term for poetic writing today, most often signaling a particular kind of poetry: an intense expression of subjective experience, the kind that can be traced canonically in the Western literary tradition from Antiquity (e.g., Sappho, Horace) through the Renaissance (Petrarch, Shakespeare) and Romanticism (Wordsworth, Whitman) into modernity (Lorca, Ashbery) and beyond. Culler (2015), for his part, distinguishes the popular sense of such poetic expression (the kind that saturates the screen in *Dead Poets Society*, for example) from the formal properties of lyric poems across space and time. *Theory of the Lyric* reads across the history of lyric theory, parsing poems along the way as the author assesses "the inadequacies of current models and … explore[s] alternatives by examining possibilities in the lyric tradition" (p. 3).

Features of the Lyric

In laying out his theory, Culler (2015) identifies major features common across lyric poems. He begins by asserting that lyric poems are distinctive because of the indirect way they address the audience. "The Hill We Climb" (Gorman, 2021a) nicely illustrates this feature. At first glance, the poem seems to straightforwardly address the audience through the repeated use of the pronoun "we." The fact that the poem was recited mere weeks after the Capitol insurrection of January 6th, 2021, however, complicates the "we" of the poem's address. Against the backdrop of the riot, the poem's audience may have questioned who, exactly, is included within, and excluded from, the poem's "we." Commentators might ask (and indeed did ask) if there really is a unified "we" that is climbing the Gorman's titular hill, and they might instinctively feel that insurrectionists are not included in the "we" that strives "to forge a union with purpose" (p. 207). Thus, the poem and its performance engaged in indirection, addressing readers through a "we" that breaks down almost as soon as it's uttered.

Second, Culler (2015) describes the way the lyric diverges from other types of fictive writing in that such poetry attempts "to be itself an event" as opposed to a mere representation of an event (p. 35). Often the event created by the reading or recitation of lyric is a call to arms, a celebration, or a request for intercession. For example, when read or heard, Gorman's poem functions as a call to unity, one intended to rally those who wish to be part of the "we" the poem addresses. Although the poem occasionally dips into narration—"we've braved the belly of the beast" (p. 206)—those narrative moments are presented in service of the poem's call to unity, which is reproduced each time the poem is read.

Third, the lyric is marked by its ritualistic aspects. A ritual feel is created by the poem's formal dimensions, such as "the patterning of rhythm and rhyme, the repetition of stanza forms,

and generally everything that recalls song or lacks a mimetic or representational function" (Culler, 2015, p. 37). As we discuss at length below, Gorman's poem is replete with these formal qualities—its compelling metric patterns, for example—that lend the poem a ritualistic texture. This feature of lyric renders these poems ripe for repetition, inviting the event of the lyric to occur again and again through repeated performance.

Finally, lyrics typically have a hyperbolic quality that inflates the importance and intensity of the images, actions, or other content described. Some lyrics deploy obvious hyperbole, as with elaborately exaggerated expressions of romantic sentiment. At other times, the ritualistic feel of the lyric renders any "homely observation" an "accessory into an epiphany" (p. 38). This is the case throughout "The Hill We Climb," as in the moment at the end when the speaker cries, "And so we lift our gazes not to what stands / between us, / but what stands before us" (p. 207). The image of people lifting their gaze may not be an obvious hyperbole, but given the poem's ritualistic tone and the complicated "we" being addressed, the line takes on a hyperbolic quality, calling to mind an entire nation lifting its gaze in concert.

Social Functions of the Lyric

These features of lyric poems work together, Culler (2015) argues, to fulfill several social functions. The repetitive form of lyrics allows audiences to return to them again and again as a source of sociopolitical insight. Though Gorman's (2021a) poem is tied to the historical context of its creation, generations of Americans will likely encounter this poem, reading it for insight into how the nation might "forge a union with purpose" (p. 207) in the face of new (or old) divisions.

Socially, lyrics can also free readers from prosaic perceptions of the world. Culler demonstrates the ways such poems help readers see our sociopolitical world anew. As we discuss in detail below, we suspect that the "Hill We Climb" was taken up with such fervor because, in the face of the cold hard facts of our nation— including white supremacist violence before, during, and after the racial uprisings of 2021; dangerous divisions sowed by insurrectionists; climate disasters that disproportionately affect marginalized communities—the prayer-like feel of Gorman's poem provided the audience with the opportunity to feel hope.

Lyrics also function to engender shared values and structures of feeling among an audience, thus, contributing to the creation of distinct communities. In its repetition of words like "rise up" and "climb" and in its repetition of a complicated "we," "The Hill We Climb" invites readers to take up space in a community of citizens who will be "brave enough" to see and be the light the nation needs to "forge unity with purpose." Such a community, the poem declares, must be "aflame" with a passion for "freeing" a new dawn. Incredibly, in its use of ritualistic language, the poem generates the feelings of passion, dedication, hope, and excitement that it declares necessary. As such, readers can leave the poem feeling hopeful and energized and part of a larger "we" dedicated to climbing the titular hill.

Below we take up Culler's theory, focusing specifically on these latter two social functions, as we wonder and worry about the questions: What would a lyric curriculum look like? And, how might we think about curriculum anew with/through the lyric? Specifically, what might Culler's articulation of the social functions of lyric offer a theory of curriculum? What happens if we imagine that curriculum might be good for freeing students (and teachers!) from prosaic perceptions of the world? And how might curricula, like lyric texts, create communities of care and attention?

Freeing Curriculum from Prosaic Perceptions

The day after Gorman read "The Hill we Climb" at the inauguration, Karen Attiah (2021) of *The Washington Post* reflected on the young poet's performance. Drawing from Audre Lorde's (1977/1984) foundational essay, Attiah wrote that Gorman's poem reminds us that "poetry is not a luxury" (para. 1). Instead, Gorman's words were an "elixir to a nation in critical condition, pure truth poured into an ocean of lies and division" (para. 12). Whereas Biden's remarks were "good and helpful and presidential," the truth articulated by Gorman "was the necessary one" (para. 7).

Attiah's commentary on "The Hill We Climb" highlights what so much of the inauguration audience sensed about poetry that day: Gorman's poem did something different than Biden's prose. According to Culler (2015), the difference between Gorman's poem and Biden's prose lies in its use of evocative language, which encourages the audience to see the world anew. Poetry, claims Cullers (2015), has the potential to free readers from a "prosaic perception of the world" (p. 304). Gorman herself uses similar language to differentiate between poetry and prose. In an interview with Michelle Obama (2021), Gorman points out that it is human instinct "to turn to poetry when we're looking to communicate a spirit that is larger than ourselves" (para. 7). In concert with this point, she notes that "poetry and language are often the heartbeat of movements for change" (para. 3).

What is it about lyric in general and "The Hill We Climb" in particular that allows audience members to see the world anew? Culler argues that lyric's capacity to free us from a prosaic perception of the world lies in its four parameters—its enunciative apparatus, its event-ness, its ritualistic language, and its use of hyperbole. Here, we build off Culler and consider how Gorman deploys sound as a way to reorient audiences to the world.

"The Hill We Climb" is replete with sound play. Lines sometimes end in rhyming couplets, but at other times the rhyme is internal. Some lines follow a similar metric pattern, musically arranging the language's emphases; other times the lines resist these patterns. Lines often burst with alliteration, but a few hang heavy with dissonance. One particularly salient sonic moment occurs early in the text, when Gorman reflects on the social and political upheaval preceding Biden's inauguration and articulates the hope that one day the world will be able to see and remark upon the resilience of Americans:

> Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.
> That even as we grieved, we grew.
> That even as we hurt, we hoped.
> That even as we tired, we tried. (p. 208)

The rhythm here is noteworthy. Each of the final three lines is written in eight syllables comprised of four metric feet, and each follows the same pattern of stress: one iambic foot (an unstressed syllable succeeded by a stressed one) followed by a dibrach foot (two unstressed syllables), followed by two more iambic feet. Listening to the beginning of each line, a listener might feel as though they are going to hear the comforting sounds of iambic feet placed one after another: a dance from unstressed to stressed sounds as regular and predictable as a heartbeat. When the next metric foot is a dibrach—two unstressed syllables—we may suddenly feel awkward, as though we've missed a beat in a dance. But after that momentary discomfort, each line provides two consoling iambic feet: "we grieved, we grew;" "we hurt, we hoped;" "we tired, we tried." With these final feet, we recover the rhythm, and feel the poem in step with the pulse of our heartbeat.

It is significant that this moment of noteworthy rhythmic work is also a moment that feels ritualistic. The verb "let" that precedes these three lines pulls us into the imperative and calls to mind the opening of a prayer (as in this passage from the *King James Bible* [1769/2024]: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad" [Psalm 96:11]). This nod to prayer coupled with three lines of symmetrical rhythm allows the poem to move our bodies and spirits. After this portion of the poem, we might feel newly able to believe that as a nation we have the capacity to be resilient: to grow even as we grieve; to hope even as we hurt; to try even as we tire.

This *feels* different than a think piece or essay calling on Americans to be resilient. We know, for example, that our critical hackles would be raised if an essay called for us to be so resilient that people around the world would note our efforts. *Who is the "we" you speak of?*, we'd ask the author. *Are you aware of how much harm "we" have done in the world and how problematic it is that you expect the global community to look to Americans with awe*? And yet this moment in the lyric—with its prayer-like opening, and a rhythm that initially destabilizes us and then comforts us with iambic feet—moves us. As Cohen (2021) argues, it is an incantation. Given the ritualistic texture of this moment, we do not feel compelled to critique the signifiers at play here; we feel justified in letting these lines make us feel as though such collective resilience might be possible (but only if we are brave enough).

This section began with a reference to Audre Lorde's (1977/1984) essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," but it is her later (1978/1984) text "Uses of the Erotic" that gives us language to theorize the curricular implications of lyric's capacity to act on bodies and minds. In "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde conceptualizes the erotic as a source of power. To do so, she "expands the function of the erotic" (Ferguson, 2012, p. 298), treating it as both a "social practice and a technique of the self" (p. 297). The essay is not explicitly about poetry: it was written to encourage "women-identified women" to recognize that attending to the force of the erotic can provide "energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (Lorde, 1977/1984, p. 54). Still, we believe that Lorde's insights about the power of eros has implications for how we understand why lyric can "pedagogically seduce us, lead us on our thinking, insinuate in our skin" (Mishra-Tarc, 2020, p. 34).

In Lorde's (1978/1984) essay, the word "erotic" does not signify the "plasticized sensation" (p. 49) it is so often associated with. Instead, the word "erotic" refers to *eros*, "born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony" (p. 50). Though it is inclusive of sexual pleasure, in Lorde's hands, "erotic" is more precisely about our embodied, sensual responses to the world around us. Indeed, Lorde writes that, for her, there exists "no difference between writing a good poem and moving into the sunlight against the body of a woman [she] love[s]" (p. 53). The felt experience of eros, Lorde argues, can illuminate the distance between our internal needs and the life we lead. When we attend to our embodied and sensual experience of the world, it can attune us to the ways in which the structures of our white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchy prevent us from fulfilling our internal needs. Our awareness of this gap can then encourage us to push against those structures. "In touch with the erotic," Lorde explains, "I become less willing to accept powerlessness" (p. 53).

This power of the erotic becomes particularly relevant to our exploration of the lyric when we consider lyric's capacity to "insinuate in our skin" through the use of sound and ritual (Mishra-Tarc, 2020, p. 34). We may wish to swing our fingers when a poem falls into a satisfying iambic meter, or we may feel emotionally moved when the poem deploys ritualistic syntax. When these moments of embodied sensation are experienced in the context of a poem like "The Hill we Climb," the erotic experience of the poem can become linked with the poem's political message. Ideally, the sensations of feeling moved by a message of unity and hope draw our attention to the

gap between the unity we wish for and the entrenched patterns of oppression that mark our everyday lives. Such a gap could point us towards changing the systems and structures that reproduce systems of oppression and division.

We realize that this articulation of the potential power of the lyric is an optimistic one. We know that it ignores some of the obstacles—personal, institutional, and structural—that prevent the enactment of the kind of change that "The Hill We Climb" points us toward. Still, we believe this optimistic view of lyric poetry provides us a model for a curriculum that privileges embodied knowledge as a precursor to change. In the essay, "Uses of the Erotic for Teaching Queer Studies," Thelathia "Nikki" Young (2012) provides a situated example of this erotic property of the lyric in a particular curricular context. Using Lorde's (1978/1984) essay as a foundational text in a Queer Studies course, Young finds that such embodiment becomes a "legitimate lens through which one can gain a deeper understanding" (pp. 304–305); further, she argues that Lorde's essay invites teachers to consider how the embodied knowledge of our classrooms can be used to help students identify the gaps between their inner desires and the external directives of oppressive social structures. A lyric curriculum asks us to consider the kinds of texts and contexts most likely to generate such embodied knowledge. A lyric curriculum asks us to consider what it means to engage with these texts so that they illuminate the gaps between our embodied desires and the ways we actually live. In doing so, the lyric encourages us to consider how we might point our awareness of these gaps towards material change.

Making of Curriculum a People: Lyric Communities

Anyone watching? Casey texted the group. *That poem, holy shit.* These texts arrived in the seconds after Gorman's inaugural reading rapturously concluded. That particular group chat, comprised of past and present teachers, discussed many things—Chicago schooling, college football, the rise and fall of Kanye West—but never poetry. And yet, Gorman's reading captured the attention of the group and did something surprising: it joined us together as readers.

Culler (2015) identifies this as a "fundamental social role" of lyric poetry: "it works to constitute groups of listeners as social groups" (p. 307). The wide performance of lyrics in Ancient Greece, for example, established an early audience for poetry. The form proved so popular that Plato famously banned poets from his republic, fearing the tyranny of passion over reason. Centuries later, European troubadours established intellectual and affective communities through shared "structures of feeling" (p. 305) engendered through the proliferation of the sonnet form in the work of authors like Petrarch and Shakespeare. In addition to establishing a community of readers, fans, and aficionados, the lyric also constituted

> a potent form of social action: positing a conception of an intense, often divided inner affective life; promoting literate culture through their success as a socially-valued virtuoso display in courtly or aristocratic settings; and advancing the prestige of national languages. (pp. 320–321)

Writing in the wake of the Renaissance poets, the Romantics—Culler singles out Wordsworth in particular—carried forth the lyric tradition through popular ballads, further democratizing poetry's appeal and "establishing a national middle class readership" (p. 305).

The quintessential American example of this is the work of Walt Whitman (1892), whose *Leaves of Grass* attempts to be, as poet and critic Ben Lerner (2017) puts it, a kind of "secular Bible" for the nascent American nation (p. 45). The adolescence of an unprecedented political project, unifying an immense and diverse geography of peoples under a (purportedly) democratic dream, required, Lerner (2017) writes, "a poet who could celebrate the American people into existence, who could help hold the nation together, in all its internal difference, through his singing. (p. 45). *Leaves of Grass*'s most famous lyric, "Song of Myself," proves exemplary in this regard, demonstrating the formal hallmarks that critics cite as the American-ness of Whitman's work: (1) the freedom and extensiveness of poetic lines, often overflowing via enjambment (e.g., "I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not contain'd between my hat and boots / and peruse manifold objects" [Whitman, 1892, 153–4]); and (2) his expansive use of pronouns, as demonstrated in the poem's title, its reception, and established with Whitman's opening lines: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1–3). These lyric qualities, Lerner argues, allow "Whitman's famous catalogue … to model federalism in its very structure, uniting in a single syntactical unit all the differences (of class, race, gender, geography, etc.) that threaten the coherence of the people" (Lerner, 2017, p. 46). (This is a project of which we ought to be skeptical—Whitman claimed to write the poetry of the slave and slaveowner—and we will do so below.) For better and worse, in the story of American literature told by teachers and scholars, Whitman came to poetically constitute the nation.

Across these examples, lyric form, marked by its brevity, intense subjectivity, mode of address, and use of hyperbole, proved capable of forming communities of readers participating in shared experience. "Form grounds us in a community," writes Michael Robbins (2017), "however attenuated or virtual" (para. 15). This extends even into the various lyrics of today: Robbins reminds us that a "pop song is a *popular* song, one that some ideal 'everybody' knows or could know. Its form lends itself to communal participation. Or, stronger, it depends upon the possibility of communal participation for its full effect" (para. 14). Robbins cites the potential of popular music to galvanize and gather, as it did for his friend, Jen, who spoke of a particularly eventful moment when she found herself suddenly singing an impromptu duet of Miley Cyrus' (2013) "We Can't Stop" with a stranger outside a Brooklyn club. The pivotal scene from the film *Almost Famous*, Cameron Crowe's (2000) autobiographical love letter to the classic rock era, serves as Robbins' most developed example:

> Elton John's "Tiny Dancer" comes on the bus stereo, and for a while the band members continue to glower, but finally the bassist starts singing along: "Handing tickets out for *Gah*-awd." Kate Hudson joins in on the next line—"Turning back, she just laughs"— and most of the bus is smiling and singing by the time Elton gets to "The boulevard is not that bad." It's corny, but it's true: everyone knows the lines by heart, everyone throws their head back and closes their eyes and belts out the chorus … "Tiny Dancer," on that bus, is a spell, an incantation, but a public one, one that also connects the particular congregation to the thousands of like-minded others at diverse sites across the globe. (para. 12)

We share this to point to the ways lyrics construct communities where people are bound together by different things: literacy, shared values, affections, and by the very act of participation itself: singing along with friends or reading aloud to them, passing along poems, teaching texts and writing about them. We build circles of shared passions this way. "The Hill We Climb" did this

too; we can see in our introductory example that Scott's university administration participated in the community called together by Gorman when they centered the poem in an email to faculty, while Cori's Minneapolis neighborhood's window displays of the poem's final lines drew passers-by into the community forged by Gorman's text.

This happens in classrooms of course, as engagement with curriculum attempts to gather students as a community with a shared epistemic foundation. It's a practice so common as to seem obvious: students read the same book at the same time. Simultaneous, collective focus on a single text is a hallmark of the university seminar and K-12 literacy curriculum. In some sense, the practice is what makes the class *a class:* an explicitly curricular experience. The point, of course, is talk. At its best, such focused conversation around a shared text facilitates dialogically co-constructed learning. More pragmatically, reading one book at a time allows teachers a measure of control over students' learning and facilitates the evaluation of their academic progress against each other.

Taking a longer view, the practice of assigning specific texts for all students to read *within* a course and *across* iterations of it, returning to Homer and Dante and Dickens year after year, fuels the project of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1988), in which sharing texts inducts students into a cultural heritage. In the South Bay area of California where Scott teaches, for example, the Depression-era works of John Steinbeck loom large, many of which are set in nearby Salinas. The teaching of Steinbeck's novels invites students to participate as members of a particular community: one which prides itself, and roots its identity, in narratives of agrarian struggle and family tragedy. Yet the worldviews undergirding communities formed by reading Steinbeck are not always benign: a reading of *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) might justify the colonization and displacement of indigenous populations to make way for settler fantasy, or contribute to the historic erasure of Filipinx, Latine, and Japanese peoples in racializing the California farmer as (exclusively) white (Wald, 2016).

For our purposes, what intrigues us about this conversation is how the particular aspects of lyrics help form communities and what this might mean for how teachers and scholars consider curriculum. Lyric communities depend on the magnetizing qualities of poetry to constitute them. The somatic properties of rhythm, for example, the way a song moves us to sing it, literally moves us to move to it, or the way a poetic phrase worms its way into our memories to reside, unforgotten—these, we think, are promising affects for curriculum theorizing. How might curriculum be more like song? A lyric curriculum understands rhythm as a crucial yet under-considered part of educational experience. Guillory (2021; see also work by Huckaby, 2016, and Edwards & Taliaferro-Baszile, 2016, in this vein) writes of the formation of one such lyrico-curricular space, wherein the poetry of Audre Lorde facilitated the formation and sustenance of a community of Black women scholars in the academy. Importantly, Guillory asserts that what she learned from her experience reading Lorde's poetry is that "Black women's survival is inextricably linked to our speaking" (p. 304). Thus, a curricular community comes into being through participation: persons read a text, giving their voice to it, and so enter into a kind of educational community initiated through shared experience and sustained through the energy generated by that experience.

The Romanticism of this project reflects the Whitmanian hope for lyric as constituting a people *across* difference. Yet Lerner (2017) aptly reminds, in his analysis of *Leaves of Grass*, that our world exists otherwise: "The capacity to transcend history has historically been ascribed to white men of a certain class while denied to individuals marked by difference" (p. 63). Poet Claudia Rankine's (2014) *Citizen: An American Lyric* employs ambiguous pronouns to a very

different end. Reading *Citizen* as I (Scott) did, a white man and academic, made for an uncomfortable experience. Early in the book Rankine writes:

> You are in the dark, in the car, watching the black-tarred street being swallowed by speed; he tells you his dean is making him hire a person of color when there are so many great writers out there.
>
> You think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested or retroactively insulted or you have done something that communicates this is an okay conversation to be having.
>
> Why do you feel comfortable saying this to me? (p. 10)

Instead of flattening racial difference through pronouns, Rankine employs "you" lyrically to discomfiting effect. "*Citizen's* concern," Lerner (2017) argues,

> with how race determines when and how we have access to pronouns is, among other things, a direct response to the Whitmanic (and nostalgist) notion of a perfectly exchangeable "I" and "you" that can suspend all difference. Whoever you are, while reading *Citizen*, you are forced to situate yourself relative to the pronouns as opposed to assuming you fit within them. There is both critique and desire here—a confrontation with false universality and a testing of the possibilities of a second person that won't let me, whoever I am, be lonely, "to call you out, to call out you." (p. 71)

Citizen forms a different kind of community, then, one in which internal difference contradicts and conflicts, in which the formation of community (through lyric) constitutes an encounter with conflicting difference, inequity, injustice. How might curriculum, we wonder, form such communities of productively conflicting difference? Apologizing for poetry and waxing, well, poetic, about its promise (as we are here), Scott (1998) suggests that "What we need as readers is a reason for reading the same thing over" (p. 93). We suggest something of the same for persons in schools: that we need a reason for being together in classrooms, over and over again. How might lyricality provide such a reason to curriculum, establishing in the classroom a "We," but do so *with* Rankine, who cuttingly observes "the pronoun barely holding the person together" (p. 71)?

Two examples of recent curricular scholarship explore this contradiction, speaking to the potential of poetry to do such critical curricular work. Drawing on the *testimonios* tradition of narrative inquiry in Latin American history, Espinosa-Dulanto and Calderon-Berumen (2020) engage in lyrical play with pronouns. The authors theorize curriculum by creating poems that "subvert the Western 'I' for a community shared, social 'I/We' and advance the poetics aesthetics of testimonios" (p. 242). In doing so the community they aim to form is one grounded in a "politicized understanding of identity and community" (p. 245). Their poetry-as-curriculum provides not only a curricular space for this to happen on the page but, by gathering marginalized voices and sounding them, actually *makes* it happen. As such, a lyric curriculum embodies the notion of *curriculum* as a verb, an action that brings communities—even contradictory ones—into being.

As a second example, Mishra Tarc (2020) writes of the lyrico-curricular power of Toni Morrison, expressing the way the novelist's:

> luminous vocabulary takes over the lexicon, initiates a counter-culture, becomes part of a new way of inhabiting yourself and being with others. From this quality of being altered by curriculum, we speak, see, hear, relearn our minds, again in a community of others with nothing and everything in common, and we are not the same. (p. 26)

As with the work of Espinosa-Dulanto and Calderon-Berumen (2020) and Guillory (2021), this example proves useful in contrast to the canonical lyric communities formed above. Instead of advancing Hirsch's fundamentally conservative project of preserving (white) literary heritage and, thus, culture, Morrison, in Mishra Tarc's experience, instantiates a culture that runs counter to that. The lyrical community is one with the power to alter being—the essence of the critical project—rather than merely protect and further entrench it. Morrison's curricular community operates on a fundamental contradiction rooted in difference; in gathering "others with nothing and everything in common," the lyric instantiates an impossible community wherein members might learn to be in the world—together, better—with others (Garrett, 2017).

Conclusions & Cautions

This study implicates the lyric potential of curriculum. Taking as exemplary the uses of lyricality noted in our analysis of the texts above, educators and curricularists might turn their attention to the rhythms of curriculum, attending to and animating the poetic rather than prosaic qualities of educational experience. In lyric theory, rhythm accounts for the ways texts come to move people: how they seduce, insinuate, and stick, but also how they actually *move* people, activating the body through somatic response. For those of us interested in activating students and colleagues towards activism, Culler (2015) and Gorman (2021a, 2021b), among the many poets and theorists of the lyric tradition, provide language and conceptual basis for how such work might be done. Further, our inquiry into the gathering potential of lyric, its capacity for forming communities through address and affinity, offers educators a basis for how they might do so among students—and a model particularly useful for curricula beyond the schoolroom, in disparate yet still educational spaces where people are dispersed, persons not subjected to the subjectification of schooling as *students* but who might yet be gathered together for study. There is promise in that. But at the same time, our engagement with lyric theory, following Rankine (2014) and Lerner (2017), points to the harmful potential of such a project, challenging educators to teach with/in and across difference, rather than eliding it. Beyond those lyric affordances of curriculum, it may be that what this inquiry suggests is a need for educators to get out of the way: to share lyric texts and bring forth their poetry with students, but not to schoolify (Whitney, 2011) them in the process: transforming them into curricula stripped of the wild and wondrous qualities that made them compelling in the first place.

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Biophilia and the Wonder of Picture Books

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FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD, picture books have captivated us with a spectrum of characters playing out plot lines in places both far and near. According to Cullinan (1989), "The content may be realistic, fanciful, or factual, but the format of text and illustration combined defines it as a picture book" (p. 29). More specifically, many of these books, with their aesthetic and efferent elements of words and images, have come together to evoke and inspire our love of Nature and respect for the potential role Nature can play in our daily lives—formally known as biophilia (Wilson, 1994). A poetic phrase describing a darkened sky, the grass lawn beneath the leap of a child's feet, the flashlights of fireflies illuminating the evening air, and much more have all provided us with possibilities of reflecting and connecting to the natural settings around us. In a back-and-forth sequence within the pages that follow, each of us presents and responds with both word and image to three picture books that have all played roles in reaffirming our love and respect of the natural world. English (2000) posits that children's literature enables significant adult learning through experience, and furthermore states, "Writers of this literature are often resolving adult dilemmas when writing and, more specifically, they are seeking to understand and explain their own relationships and interpersonal issues when they write" (p. 14).

It is our hope that this form of personal transaction will be useful to educators, within and without the classroom, who wish to delve into their own texts as sources of biophilia. Teachers who want students to engage meaningfully with Nature in relation to children's literature relationships will be better equipped for the journey if their own teacher experiences are well understood to themselves. While our written journeys are quite personal, it is our hope that we join James Joyce (as quoted in Ellmann, 1983) who, in defending his particular love for writing about Dublin said, "In the particular is contained the universal" (p. 505). So, in this spirit we offer our particulars below. We couple these particulars with a few key questions that educators can use as they navigate either the children's literature texts we have chosen or, more likely, their own experiences as they relate to ours. Our work is theoretically grounded in Rosenblatt's reader response, methodologically supported by auto-bibliography as a form of narrative inquiry, and

grounded in biophilia. As Mackey (2016) posits, the mingling of the texts and places that we encounter every day emerge in the perspectives and actions we use to make sense of our worlds.

Biophilia

Georgia O'Keefe "used to sleep on the roof in a sleeping bag in order to awaken under the vast multitude of desert stars, to watch the pale, cold moon shadows on the cliffs and see the first morning light touch what she called 'my wonderful world'" (Lisle, 1980, p. 236). One day, off the Atlantic coast of Florida, standing on a shallow beach at low tide, Annie Dillard saw what appeared to be a hundred ravenous sharks passing the beach near the mouth of a tidal river. Dillard (1974) stated, "The sight held awesome wonders: power and beauty, grace tangled in a rapture with violence" (p. 10). The experiences that both authors encountered would be considered examples of biophilia. According to Wilson (1994), biophilia, the word he coined in 1974, is "the inborn affinity human beings have for other forms of life, an affiliation evoked, according to circumstance, by pleasure, or a sense of security, or awe, or even fascination blended with revulsion" (p. 360). If given the choice, people often prefer natural environments or human made ones accented with trees, water, and other vegetation (Kahn, 1997). People will even travel, sometimes at great distances and at their own expense, to encounter such natural worlds as beaches, mountains, and even deserts.

Focusing on the effects of making a school yard into a school garden, Stravrianos (2016) reported that people's connections to nature can be facilitated by an education program that supports such an activity. More specifically, a school garden can be a complex reality, but it can also provide a framework that "provides opportunities for exploration of and connection to the natural, cultural, historical and social inheritance of the community" (p. 424). In particular, it also has the potential to foster self-esteem and a happier outlook on school, as well as develop positive relationships among both students and staff. As part of a four-part series, Hall and Knuth (2019) reviewed a substantial body of peer-reviewed research regarding the emotional and health benefits of incorporating plants into biophilic design for built environments, from homes to businesses. Benefits range from anxiety and stress reduction to decreased depression and enhanced productivity and attention. Hall and Knuth posit that, by bringing the benefits of plants to people's attention, they would be in a better position to consider the important role that plants play in the psychological and physical well-being of their lives.

In a quest to make collective meaning of their own familial relationships with the natural world, Bai et al. (2010) came to consider visual art, storytelling and poetry-making as navigational devices that have the capacity to lead us home to biophilia—the heart of environmental education. Using these vehicles of expression, together they wrestled with the concept of biophilia and the struggles they encountered on how it came to be situated among their lives. All four authors commented that "ecology is the art of homecoming for the souls lost, not in wilderness, but in the senseless discursivity of the mind fed on abstract and fragmented information that often passes as knowledge in schools" (p. 362). Their essential message centers on the need to find ways to connect with the biophilia that resides within each one of us. Narrative inquiry via auto-bibliography is one such means to encourage us to make those biophilia connections.

Auto-bibliography

Margaret Mackey (2016) begins her book, *One Child Reading*, with her recollections of being relegated to porridge duty as a child. Once she learned to read, she was unable to lift her eyes from her book in the morning; thus, her parents moved her to stirring duty to be "out of the line of general traffic" (p. 3). Here, we have the seed of what grows up to be auto-bibliography. She has crafted, from her particulars of becoming a reader, a universal look at the embodied literacy that children move through. More than this,

> Mackey's auto-bibliography is also a testimony to the physicality of literacy. None of us learns to read without a body; none of us learns to read isolated from the environment in which we are living. As she puts it, all reading is "earthed"—reading always happens with a body that is always located somewhere. (Mackey, 2016, p. VIII)

We, two teacher-researchers, join Mackey's work, tracing literacy and embodiment, tracing literacy and environment, tracing our *specific* literacies through *particular* environments. Mackey herself calls on the reader to bring forth their own specifics, "other readers will have to bring their own private and internal sense of what it means to maintain focus on an act of reading through an assortment of ordinary, daily distractions" (p. 4), in order to properly understand both her auto-bibliography, as well as our own.

Buzbee (2006) writes, "to remember a book is to remember the child who read that book," which auto-bibliography seeks (p. 32). But more than returning to the child who first encountered and learned a text, auto-bibliography seeks to uncover the materiality of the text and approach it through the lens of the current reader looking again. In other words, for Mackey (2016), auto-bibliography does not want to reencounter text as the child who once did so, but to re-examine a text through the literate and embodied eyes of the socialized and situated adults we are.

Auto-bibliography, relying so heavily on our memories of reading, is necessarily a fragmented process. By re-encountering the texts themselves, as a literate adult, Mackey underscores the nature of fractured memory, while surpassing it through the re-encountered text today. For the most part, we are aware that memory is elusive and unreliable (Nikolajeva, 2014). Thus, a retelling of a remembered literacy experience is, at best, just that: a re-memory. But, by returning to the physical texts, Mackey (2016) returns to her childhood experience through the experience of specific and physical text. She can, to some extent, circumvent the ambiguities of memory by adding the physical back:

> My re-exploration of these materials offers potential to develop a deeper understanding of the complex internal world of reading. Trying not to make a falsely "choate" picture of the narrative of my own youth, I have focused as carefully as I can on the available materials. (p. 7)

Place, time and physical text are paramount to the auto-bibliographic process for Mackey (2016). In her childhood bedroom, where she first encounters books alone, "This room was the first place in the world that I remember coming to know" (p. 51), she equally encounters dolls and clothing as texts that form the first literate steps in her current literate identity. What is necessary in this early journey for us as teacher-researchers delving into Mackey's work is the idea that early physicality can be re-examined through environmental text (here, the bedroom and its contents).

Mackey (2016), writing as an adult, uses photos of her home and one of her bedroom dormer window as current textual sources. *One Child Reading* is deeper than a simple re-examination of a literate childhood through particular texts (albeit eleven shelves full!); it does illuminate that a "singular sense of literate development is actually misleading, and that crossovers, intertextual and intermedial, actually complicate any reasonably full picture of a reading life" (p. 289). Thus, we can join in Mackey's work of auto-bibliography by reminding ourselves to seek the complications and connections. For Mackey, and for us as teacher-researchers, these rife interconnections between text (physical), text (imagined), and memory can lead to insight into literacy. By returning to texts through the lens of a current experience, a necessarily embodied and particular experience, we can reimagine the literacy event by the eyes of today. Said differently, while it might "be possible to consider rereading as a way of re-achieving something. … my experience in rereading so many materials from my own past is that, sooner or later, the story opens up to uncertainty all over again" (Mackey, 2016, p. 481). So here we are: opening ourselves to uncertainty all over again. And, it is Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of reader response that can provide a framework from which to reexperience these lived through experiences.

Rosenblatt and Transactional Theory of Reading

Since the publication of Rosenblatt's (1933) major book entitled, *Literature as Exploration*, she has played a major role in redefining the study of literature, especially with her theory of reader response. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts that the reading of literature centers on the reader's integral contribution as a two-way transaction or lived-through experience with the text. She acknowledges that no two readers come to a reading with the same background, store of knowledge, values, temperaments, experiences, and rationales (Dooley et al., 2014). In addition, Sipe (1999) states, "It is possible that a reader may manifest a matrix of responses that are specific and unique to him or her" (p. 123). Furthermore, Cullinan (1989), discussing Rosenblatt's reader response theory states,

> It is a circular process in which the reader responds to the words on the page and at the same time draws upon personal experiences in order to create individual meaning. Such a flexible position leaves room for a wide range of responses—all valid. (p. 46)

And Mackey (2010) asserts,

> In some ways it is fair to say that we are taking the space of a book as printed on the page, and turning it into the place of our own reading, invested with our own understanding of the world. (p. 331)

Figured prominently within this transactional experience are the concepts of efferent—what knowledge is carried away—and aesthetic—what is personally activated (Rosenblatt 1985). That is, during a reading of a text, the reader moves back and forth along a continuum with efferent at one end and aesthetic at the other. For example, the reading of a textbook would usually generate more efferent responses—information that is needed for practical purposes—while the reading of a historical novel might require both efferent to learn about the background of the setting and aesthetic for engaging in such responses to characterization or conflicts. That is, according to

Rosenblatt (1978), "Many texts are susceptible of being experienced at different points of the continuum by different readers, or even by the same reader under different circumstances" (p. 36).

Delving further into Rosenblatt's reader response theory and its efferent-aesthetic continuum, a much fuller and deeper meaning behind the relationship between these concepts emerges. In particular, Rosenblatt (1982) emphasized that the reading of literature has the potential "for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating the world" (p. 276). That is, the purpose of efferent reading is to acquire and maintain information while reading for meaning-making and action, while aesthetic is both personal and political because it involves questioning one's own responses (Cai, 2008). In the aesthetic and efferent reading of our own auto-bibliographic transactions with the three picture books, we come to the process as two individuals, each bringing our own past memories of experiences threaded with our personal backgrounds, life events, perspectives, and ways of making meaning.

In the pages that follow, we invite you, the reader, to come with us as we share our own lived-through memories of Nature, evoked by three selected picture books that hold a special place in our adult lives. We hope that as we recount our memories, you will be encouraged to actively reflect on your own recollections. In doing so you might ask: Do they reflect Nature's restorative and aesthetically engaging side associated with such places as forests, beaches, grasslands, snow-covered mountains, and local gardens? Or, do your recollections turn to the more unpredictable, turbulent, and even violent possibilities of Nature, such as derechos, wild fires, avalanches, and typhoons, all leaving you with feelings of powerlessness and great respect. Where did the encounters take place? What role did Nature play? What was your reaction to the event? Was there a particular part in the picture book that evoked your response? Were you prompted to think of your own picture book? Did the encounter have any impact on your current daily life, or your classroom practices as an educator? We now begin with our first selection.

The First Book: *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985)

The first book entitled *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985) tells the story of a family vacationing on an island in Maine one summer. Special attention is given to their adventures during and after a hurricane. Soft pastel-like watercolors capture the natural beauty of the island featured in the various scenes, from exploring a rocky beach in the fog to tending sunflowers as they face the sun under a clear blue sky.

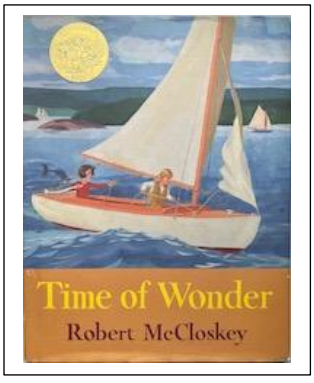

Figure 1: Time of Wonder

Hurricane: A Time of Wonder (Author 1)

I was three years old when I encountered my first hurricane, a category four. Since that time, I have become fascinated by the weather, especially those events that provide opportunities for us to garner respect for Nature's capacity to chart the course of our lives.

Figure 3: Sailing on the Sound ©C.M. Morawski

TV and radio reports, makeshift weather stations, stories of hurricane hunters and nonfiction texts were among some of the sources of information that I consulted to track hurricanes and learn about their histories and characteristics. I was already an adult when I came upon another reference in the form of a picture book entitled *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985). With the author's depiction of the early morning fog as warm and mysterious in concert with the sudden short and jerky sentences that prepare the reader for the approaching hurricane (Johnson, 2015), I was immediately captivated by McCloskey's book. As I read and reread each page, my own encounters with hurricanes emerged and re-emerged as lived-through transactions placed along Nature's continuum of expressions. According to Painter (1968), McCloskey has "the ability to portray facets of ordinary but real living which are familiar to all of us, creating a kind of magnet that draws us together" (p. 145), prompting me to compose the following.

Figure 2: Weather-worn ©C.M. Morawski

My Narration. The last few days of summer had been preoccupied with denim blue skies, occasional puffs of white clouds, and enough of a sea breeze for sailing. However, Nature's plans for us would soon be changing. The Eastern Seaboard was on high alert. A weather system had been brewing off the coast, now heading toward New England cities and towns. It started out as a momentary breeze that nudged the blades of the pinwheel stuck in the front yard gate. Day light suddenly dimmed into the greys of evening without the prelude of colored striations. The congregation of bees that tended the hollyhocks along the old stone wall had disappeared. Butterflies no longer lingered on the ropes attached to clothesline pulleys. The intermittent trills of red-winged blackbirds suddenly faded, leaving a lull in the early morning air. By noon, the wind began to toss the tv aerial against the flashing of the gabled roof. An unexpected gust lifted a row of shingles sending them into the boughs of the nearby blue spruce. Storm windows rattled and clattered. One eventually became unhinged, smashing on the sidewalk below. Tree trunks thicker than telephone poles buckled temporarily as their branches brushed against the ground already drenched in rain. The water from the Sound churned around in the turbulence of endless whirlpools, inching into the land in the neighboring marsh. Businesses

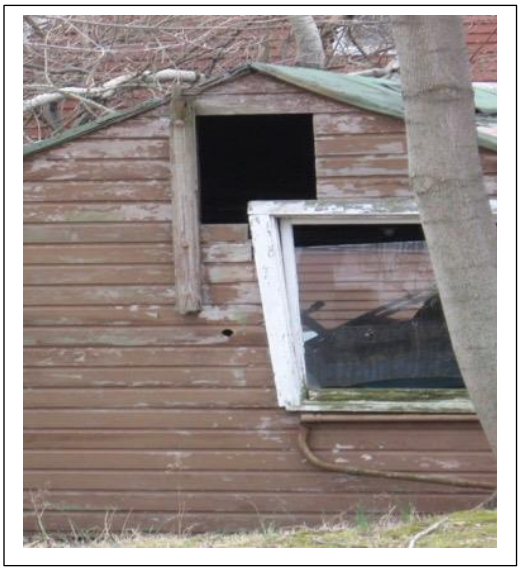

Figure 4: Unhinged ©C.M. Morawski

closed their doors and shuttered their windows. School buses remained locked in place. The weather warning issued on the radio was no longer needed. The hurricane had finally arrived.

By morning, the aftermath of the storm revealed itself in shadows of boats submerged under the froth of murky water. The local beach, now littered with a mixture of debris, could no longer act as the destination for picnics, sandcastles, and dunks in the saltwater surf. Seaweed, rumpled and tangled, the kind popped as a child, had gathered in clumps. Wooden planks, broken bottles, remnants of canvas, pieces of netting, and a lobster pot were all laid out in the disarray of an impending tag sale. Further inland, landscapes once familiar and settled had changed course. Roads remained impassable. Wires slung down in the street. A roof stood lopsided hanging off a porch. A branch, having fallen during the night, punctured a gash in the side of a neighbor's home. A skiff, anchored in the harbor, had managed to land on someone's front lawn. A community landmark—the vintage candy store where children always gathered to buy their inflatable tubes and snacks—had now been reduced to a cement foundation. A tree down the street, once a canopy of maple leaves where bird houses hung from its seemingly sturdy branches, had been uprooted during the storm, no longer there to remind residents of the passing seasons.

Eventually, weeks passed, "from the rise and fall of the tide, to the come and go of the school bus" (McCloskey, 1957/1985, p. 60). Roads reopened. Shingles were replaced. Debris was removed. Boats now cut through the water, enjoying the cooler Autumn air under a cloudless sky. Although the candy store foundation remained the same, the maple tree was replaced by a sapling, and the town beach once again became a retreat for its residents. Curiously, further down the Sound on a small rocky island, a cottage was being built on stilts. According to Massee (as cited in Painter, 1968), children who read and look at *Time of Wonder* "will be very subtly taught to love and wonder at the world we live in" (p. 154) and might even come to ask, "Where do hummingbirds go in a hurricane?" (McCloskey, 1957/1985, p. 62).

Figure 5: Cottage on stilts ©C.M. Morawski

Time of Wonder **(Author 2)**

It occurs to me now, through the newly informed glasses I am wearing as an auto-bibliograph(er), that *Time of Wonder* might be read as Robert McCloskey's own auto-bibliography, re-experiencing the texts of his time on an island in Penobscot Bay in Maine. For in *Time of Wonder*, what we have, textually, is a poetic reimagining of summers on a Maine island, bumbling and wondering, and closing with a climactic hurricane. Indeed, McCloskey has created a picture book that evokes a "mixed reality information space" (Nardi, 2008, n.p.), where readers poetically encounter his island. Factually, of course, we know that it was *his* island, purchased in 1946 with his wife Margaret. But as readers, we are invited in, for there is neither character nor true narrator in this text. Indeed, "You can watch a cloud … until you, on your island, are standing

in the shadow, watching the rain begin to spill down way across the bay" (p. 7-8). Here "you" are; you are on the island; this book is yours.

English was not my first language. I cannot remember understanding the cryptic reading lessons at school until about third grade. My mother complained to the librarian that I was choosing "inappropriate" books, those chosen for their imagery, not their content. Every year teachers reported I read with fluency yet lacked comprehension. Simply: I couldn't *get* it. "Recapturing distant childhood as far back as I can trust my memory, trying to understand my act of reading the particular world in which I moved, was absolutely significant for me," (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 30). When I join Freire, and reach back into own particular early literacy world, those years most suffused with print, they are blurry with incomprehension. So, I follow with Mackey and get my hands on the texts. Then, I follow her further and look for the body; for my body—my body as an island, blurred in a sea of school.

My Narration. And here is the memory: I am seven, and I am singing. The dress my mother has bought me is dark teal with an embroidered basket of flowers on the chest. I remember the embroidery because the back of it scratched my ribs uncomfortably. I cannot find a record of the song we sang. In my own cryptic memory version, it is about Suzy Snowflake and Robert Raindrop falling and covering the ground. I can find the words to a Rosemary Clooney (1978) song called "Suzy Snowflake," but no Robert Raindrop. We will have to assume the memory is flawed but useful. There were lovely little song books printed for us, computer-generated snowflakes pasted to the front. We held them up with music stands that, to me, felt quite professional. What is so poignant about this memory is that it swallows up all the earlier memories of garbled reading comprehension. This is the text I remember understanding first—lyrics of a snowflake and raindrop, likely misremembered lyrics, and the embodied experience of reading and performing text on stage shining through. McCloskey (1957/1985) writes:

> the fog has lifted!
> And suddenly
> You find that you are singing too,
> With the blue water sparkling
> all around, all around
> With the blue water sparkling
> all around! (p. 18)

So, the fog lifted, and some esoteric storm passed over my reading woes. Like a final click in the Rubix Cube®, all the other previous clicks led to this one moment of solved puzzle. I sang about rain and snowflakes, and the fog had lifted! Yet, it could not have been that simple, neither cognitively nor viscerally.

Roger Duvoisin (1973) wrote that a children's book illustrator takes from his childhood "the things, impressions, attitudes which impressed him most. He remembers his childhood conception of people, of animals, of scenes, and of books which were part of his world" (p. 177). So, a child takes the world they have, their specific environment(s), and brings it with them to adulthood to inform the evolving literate self. I have been carrying this specific idea of weather, this specific concept of snow and rain, as character to inform my adult literate identity. I find this to be so. I have re-read text with weather, here and below, in order to re-collect on my relationship to environment. "The cross-section of trajectories that marks each child's place in the literate world is dynamic, idiosyncratic, and local, and we need to pay better attention to all its rich possibilities."

(Mackey, 2011, p. 305). And here I turn back to McCloskey's work, though specifically to his paintings. The beginning of the storm is illustrated in whirling brush strokes that cut the page horizontally over and over (pp. 44–45). The blues and greens become intentionally muddy against one another—a far cry from my cheerful Suzy and Robert, harbingers of reading comprehension and softly covered ground. As I turn from *Time of Wonder* and this specific moment of remembered literacy, I move forward to imagery of storm and conflict portrayed by McCloskey. What he also paints is one island home, lost in the storm colors, save for its bright yellow light, burning through the night.

The Second Book: *Window* (Baker, 1991)

In *Window* (Baker, 1991), there are no words. Instead, a series of 13 intricate scenes, each framed by a window, tell a powerful story of a neighborhood's gradual change from bush to city life. The first scene depicts a mother holding her newborn son, while looking out over surroundings rich in foliage and wildlife. Every two years another scene emerges through the same window, until the 12th one displays the same surroundings overgrown with the urban density of buildings, people, stores, signs, vehicles, and cemented streets. The 13th and final scene depicts the boy, now an adult with a baby, looking out of the window of his own home, discovering "house blocks for sale" signs right across the street, where woods now stand. Photographed collages aptly made from various materials such as feathers, wool, bark, and tin, skillfully bring the story to life.

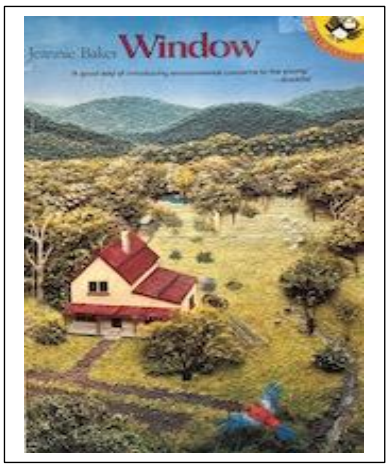

Figure 6: Window

Looking Back through the Window (Author 1)

Recently, while browsing through my own personal library, I came upon the book, *Window* (Baker, 1991), and began leafing through its pages. Iordanaki (2021), referring to Rosenblatt, posits that wordless picture books, infused with illustrative details "give visual cues and gaps for the critical beholder to fill" (p. 495). I immediately thought about the gradual transformation of a residential property that I would periodically view through the window of a car whenever we passed by on our way to various destinations. According to Zocco (2013), "When we look out of a window … the view we get is actually still influenced by our subjective imaginations, interpretations and projections, which we use to fill out the gaps of visibility" (p. 8). As I recount my experience below, the house and its impact on the neighborhood comes into view.

My Narration. In a residential town on a tree-lined drive, a house stood set back from the others. Passing by, you might have mistaken it for a jumbled heap of entangled brush overgrown in olive-green vines. Months before, it appeared that a family had decided to stay longer on their trip, postponing outdoor work for another week. The lawn needed mowing. Leaves had collected in small piles on the flag stone steps. The orange-red petals of the geraniums had begun to turn a faded brown, crisp to the touch. After weeks of neglect, it appeared that the family had no plans to return. Wind-blown propellers from the maple were now scattered across the driveway and onto

the front porch. The grass, having reached the height of the electric meter attached to the front yard wall, provided a hiding place for fallen branches from a late summer storm. Patches of crabgrass lined the un-edged walkway, which had accumulated a filmy residue of moss. The sedges, no longer holding a place of prominence, had become choked by the cedars encroaching on the iron gate. Piles of acorn husks littered the sandbox left uncovered under a striped awning. All signs of human life had vanished.

Figure 7: Neglected house ©C.M. Morawski

Now, unrestrained without prior mangles and manicures of mowers, rakes, and the impermanence of interlocking pavers, clusters of Cosmos now interspersed with Queen Anne's lace. Dandelions, once considered eyesores to be weeded and sprayed, drifted into wisps of floating parachutes. A contingent of worker bees presided over the flowers. From a nearby sand cherry, the lilting song of a cardinal trilled the air. Groundhogs snacked on zinnias, while a rabbit bounded out of overgrown shrubs, stood still, and then settled next to a row of ferns. As dusk approached, a gaze of raccoons scampered down the drainpipe and began the nightly ritual of scavenging for food. Fireflies illuminated the evening air with their flashlights set on intermittent pause. Nature had officially taken over, re-landscaping the area with local plants, flowers, and the infusion of wildlife. After almost two years, instead of being condemned, the property seemed to have simply blended into the middle of the suburban street. Cars continued to drive by. Joggers, out for their daily run, always passed along on the right. Children kept riding their bicycles around the block, occasionally stopping in front to adjust a pedal or finish a half-eaten pear. Without so much as the touch of a human hand, a nature reserve had been established in the neighborhood.

Figure 8: Hidden house ©C.M. Morawski

Picture books can act as mediums through which one can reflect on their storied connections to an environment and place (Burke & Cutter-MacKenzie, 2010). In the case of my observations of the third house, *Window* acted as my medium through which I saw the final transformation of the property as a nature reserve as opposed to an eyesore that needed to be trimmed, weeded, mowed, and raked. That is, *Window* became the critical catalyst for considering the situation from an alternative perspective in relation to understanding place as a fluid phenomenon (Wason-Elam. 2010). Although the book has been placed back on my library shelf, the story will stay with me as I look through future windows and perceive what I see.

***Window* (Author 2)**

Jeannie Baker (1991) uses the window in her text as the lens out for her mother/son duo to see their environment. It is also how their environment is physically framed. For example, as we readers are invited to consider the urbanization that takes over their previously wild landscape, we cannot see what was originally outside the scope of their view. Was the city encroaching just past their line of sight? The window provides the parameters: what is visible, *and what is invisible*. As in *Hildilid's Night* (Ryan, 1971, to be discussed as the third book in the next section), there is an obscuring that is happening. As in *Time of Wonder*, there is a sense that something is coming. For all these texts, we have what is invisible and what is changing.

> [Books] capture some of that energy of change, stow it inside the covers of the book in all its latent readiness to be discharged by a reader. And in the course of our reading, we also enter a zone of necessary fluidity. (Mackey, 2016, p. 481)

Entering text, according to Mackey, opens that potential for change previously packed tightly within the text. There is an implication of physicality for Mackey, an unleashing that happens when the book is opened and, finally, read.

My Narration. Here is a text I did not encounter until later in my reading journey, though it harkens to an important physical text of my childhood. My bedroom was in the basement of a home built into a mountain face. This means that three walls of my room faced, invisibly, the earth. One wall featured two windows; they were less than a meter above the ground. Can you imagine this? It means I could step out my window and feel, immediately, the grass lawn beneath my feet. It means that I mastered the art of escape early. It means that the window symbolized to me friend, safety, and freedom. What it also means (silently) is that I rarely looked out my window; I only leaped.

This is how it was for me to read *Window*, a wordless book, and unleash the potential for considering the window as both an in/out space and a visible/invisible space. It is interesting to me that, for Baker, the book *Window* was actually a source of discomfort. In an interview about her companion text *Belonging* (Baker, 2004), she states:

> I always felt rather uncomfortable about "Window" being a negative statement, In "Belonging" I try to balance this and sow the idea that if one doesn't like a place, rather than move to bush or wilderness and in the process reduce and change yet more bush and so help start a new cycle of development; to take a place that is already developed and without necessarily removing buildings, put back some of what originally made the place special but which was taken away in the process of development. (2004, n.p.)

Figure 9: Home within and without window ©C.L. Dunnington

Baker is urging what Author 1 poignantly noticed above: spaces can move through cycles of home, commerce, nature, and wild. Instead of leaving behind a changed space, for Baker the equivalent of closing the window and moving on, we can go outside the window and work. "I believe thinking about home in a multitude of ways can lead to thinking in a layered and complex fashion about identity, and by extension to understanding and maximizing the power of the individual voice" (Lockhart, 2017, p. 36). Can reflecting on the window, on the home that Baker has created, recontextualize the individual reader considering change?

The Third Book: *Hildilid's Night*

Hildilid (Ryan, 1971), the main character who had a hound dog companion, so disliked the night that she wanted to eradicate it, along with stars, moon, owls, voles, and moles. After numerous attempts that included sweeping, boiling, bundling, shearing, singing it lullabies, and serving it a saucer of milk, Hildilid could not make the night disappear. Finally, the sun began to appear over the hills, but Hildilid was too tired to enjoy it. The illustrations, expressed in pen and ink drawings, effectively set the nighttime mood, along with adding humor to Hildilid's actions.

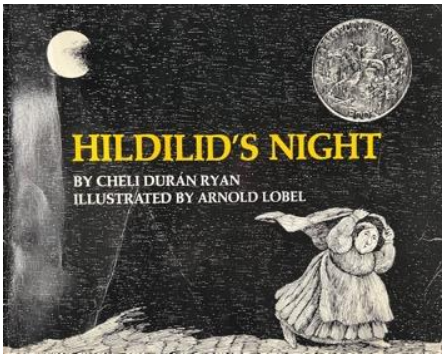

Figure 10: Hildilid's Night

The Night (Author 1)

As day blends into night and darkness takes hold, people tend to move indoors where they can turn on their lights. According to Boyce (2019), without any light, humans are deprived of one of their principal senses—vision. On one particular occasion, I too wanted the night and its darkness to vanish but would have been grateful just to have had only one of Hildilid's lanterns.

My Narration. It was near midnight when we began the final round of our journey to the village house, six stories high, several miles away from the nearest town. The road was bumpy and narrow, jostling the passengers. Headlights were our only guide as shadows became absorbed into the evening pitch. Sounds, unknown to us, rustled, snapped, and creaked intermittently. At every curve, branches scraped the side panels of the car. The vegetation was dense—jack fruit, leachy, longan, banana—all taking on the coloration of smudged ink. Suddenly, openings between the trees began to appear, signaling the beginning of a driveway. After moving through the entrance of a high concrete wall, topped with the elegance of red upward curvatures, we arrived at a courtyard. Directly in front of us, hints of the house, encased in darkness, appeared looming, large, imposing. Without light, there was a presence of unease among us, a sense of

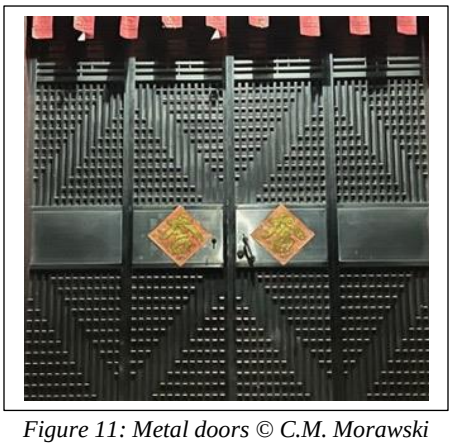

Figure 11: Metal doors © C.M. Morawski

foreboding. Eerily, a rooster's haunting call resounded from a nearby thicket, contributing further to our discomfort. We grappled for an outdoor light, illuminating the intimidating metal doors. As we made our way up the stone steps, past the fishpond, and onto the landing of the first floor, more lights were turned on, making us feel less uncertain, less vulnerable. Next day in the morning brightness, we looked out from the third-story balcony and were stunned by the striking beauty of the surroundings, considered so menacing the night before. After, walking across the side yard by the lily pad pond, the rooster, seeing us approach, quickened his steps and ran away. Reflecting on my experience that night, I came to understand Horwood's (1986) statement: "Being active at night gives … access to a unique and untapped source of beauty, experience and learning" (p. 13). If only Hildilid would make peace with the night and begin reconsidering nature's possibilities not just in the light. Learning about owls, watching colors change her view, observing stars in formation, and the moon appearing anew. Isberner et al. (2019) assert, "Stories often convey messages about the world that can influence recipients' own views and beliefs … via the behavior of the character and its consequences" (p. 576).

Figure 12: The Village ©C.M. Morawski

A week and several minutes later, standing in front of Bund 66, the Peace Hotel nearby, daytime switched from evening to night. Without warning, we found ourselves in a massive crowd surging toward Shanghai's waterfront on the Huangpu River. The silhouettes of skyscrapers blazed in continuums of colorations. The Orient Pearl Tower, majestic in the stature of spherical features, stood stunning in variegations of magenta, turquoise, pink, yellow, and red. Commercial tugs mixed with private boats, strung with lights, some blinking, passed back and forth along the base of the promenade. Thousands of phones poised in position to capture the scene, maneuvering for the best position at the metal railings. As one group left, another moved in to take its place. Family portraits, singular pics, landscapes, panoramic views. It seemed ritualistic, a spiritual rite. A photographic ode to illumination. At 11 o'clock, the lights went out, and darkness prevailed. As quickly as they came, the crowd dispersed, leaving the celestial possibilities of the night sky alone and unnoticed. Or, so I thought.

Figure 13: Orient Pearl Tower ©C.M. Morawski

As I glanced back at the scene, wanting to see the stars without lights, I noticed a woman standing alone with a hound on her right. Holding a pair of binoculars up to both eyes, she seemed to be studying something in the sky. Then, with a camera she captured photos of that sight, while I thought I heard her say, "I like this time better than bright day light." Horwood (1986) so aptly asserts that darkness can open up a magical world in which growth can occur on both intellectual

and emotional levels. Furthermore, Dillard (2008) notes that if you want to study the stars, it is necessary to do so at night in the dark. So, the next time that I venture out at night to explore, I just might see Hildilid looking at the stars from her open front door.

Hildilid's Night (Author 2)

The first encounter I had with *Hildilid's Night* was in second grade. A teacher read at Halloween time, though Hildilid is no Halloween text, nor is it easily described. The specifics of the memory are this: we all sat on a rug with inexplicable dinosaur-like creatures on it. It was worn out where some children had kicked their shoes repeatedly. I sat on a worn-out spot and tried to hold still for the third, and final, read-aloud of the day. All the books were somehow "Halloween themed," but the only title I remember is *Hildilid's Night*.

My Narration. Rereading this text now I can see that it is a humorous, though complex, tale. In some ways I was *right* to be perplexed. But my confusion came with a narrative frustration with the missing "why" of the book. *Why did Hildilid hate the night*, I wondered. The book still leaves this question unanswered, I am pleased to report. The book came back to me years later, when my town was hit by an ice storm that caused days of lost electricity.

It was 1998. I owned my first ever CD-player and had exactly four discs I listened to on repeat. These were listened to at night, in my bed, often falling asleep before the last track played. I would wake in the morning silence, the CD-player's face lit. I also owned a corded telephone, light blue with cloud stencils on it. It sat on a card table near my bed, and should I be fast enough, I could answer the phone before my family. I mostly waited to place calls out on that beautiful phone until after dark, when no one else needed the phone. The night, I felt, was my friend. At night I was free. There were no young siblings; they had earlier bedtimes. There were no parents, who also had earlier bedtimes. And then an ice storm hit that wrecked the night for me, that took away the peace of my very clearly electricity-dependent texts.

In the days of cold and dark in my own home, with school cancelled and cracking ice everywhere outside, I thought about Hildilid again. I remembered that haunting text that had stayed with me, elusively, for years. Because I could now understand Hildilid's hatred. I too was mad about the night, though I was largely mad about the discomfort brought on by my own more momentary night. It is useful to think about text and meaning in these fractured moments, or, re-reading and re-calling. What new meanings are shaped? For here we have a layered memory: first night and Hildilid as incomprehensible, then night and Hildilid as deeply comprehensible. Below, Mackey unpacks her experience of water-lilies as danger.

Figure 14: The ice storm ©C.L. Dunnington

> In our boat, struggling to control one oar apiece, my brother and I were already in a liminal space; the disruption to my sense of the world provided by learning about the perfidiousness of the lilies was one more shift in an arena already charged for change. Brief as it was, this moment of remembering served as a corrective to my adult sense of the past as something singular. *For children, an idea is singular only until it is rendered multiple or contradictory or confusing*. Such changes are a regular feature of ordinary life, and children incorporate new knowledge in a taken-for-granted way. (Mackey, 2016, p. 480, emphasis added)

Thus, my early idea of night-hatred, complicated by an older child's experience of a power outage, both of these memories were compressed and revisited as I reread *Hildilid's Night* now.

My singular idea had been complicated. Re-collecting, I could see that Hildilid had represented a concept of night that required complication, now thrice. And now I consider the potential for decentering texts, what Jessica Whitelaw (2017) has called "disquieting," those texts that haunt and scratch at what is incomprehensible or challenging. She notes that the "1970s saw a shift toward a belief in the power of the imagination," away from those picture books that sought to protect readers (p. 33). *Hildilid's Night*, firmly published in the 70's, likely joined this epistemic turn toward imaginative picture texts. For me it certainly was a place of possibility for considering what is ultimately unknowable: why night or, why *not* night?

> The picturebook slows down our awareness, and it holds ideas up to the light in words and pictures in suspended moments made for dwelling and observing […] this synergy has the potential to move us aesthetically as readers, to "urge voyages." (Whitelaw, 2017, p. 35)

Hildilid has urged my voyage yet again. Returning to this rich text now and remaining haunted by Hildilid who was "too tired from fighting the night to enjoy the day," I feel a caution pulling at me that was unavailable to me as a child (p. 30). What is at risk in a text if we are indeed too tired from fighting to press on? As teachers, how can these liminal spaces urge us forward? For Hildilid, rest provides the answer. In the case of my storm, the power was simply restored. But, for all of us, is there solace in the fight itself, regardless of outcome?

Concluding Comments

Ryan et al. (2014) comment that biophilia helps explain why shadows and heights instill fascination and fear, while gardening and strolling through a park have restorative healing effects. That is, Nature has many faces. It is both colorful and monochromatic, peaceful and violent, elegant and messy. In their editorial on environment and place through children's literature, Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al. (2010) remark, "children's literature variously represents, mediates and informs experiences and understandings of diverse environments and places as well as the people and other presences … found therein, be these imaginatively constructed or firmly rooted in a diversity of realities" (p. 253). More specifically, picture books have the capacity to serve numerous roles in our lives, from creating bonds between child and parent to sending messages within the picture plotlines of their stories.

We too have experienced the many faces of Nature from varying perspectives, and it was the reading of three picture books that provided us with both aesthetic and efferent opportunities

to revisit and review a sampling of our own biophilic connections, whether as direct encounters with Nature or metaphors regarding life events. For example, the effects of weather on our lives emerged in the pages of *Time of Wonder*. The scenes in *Window* encouraged us to reconsider observations concerning changes to a home's ecological setting. *Hildilid's Night* provided opportunities for us to readdress our own relationship with the darkest time of day. More specifically, the books acted as what Scott (2020) refers to as valuable portals through which we can inquire and make sense of life and the world in which we live, which for us would include Nature and its daily possibilities.

For teachers, this type of self-reflection, a journey into autobibliography, can invite meaningful biophilia into the classroom. As Pulvermacher and Lefstein (2016) assert, "Developing teachers into collaborative and critically reflective professionals requires that we deliberately interrogate and inquire into the stories that emerge as they study to become teachers" (p. 265). Using our own narrations as studies for how children's book text evoked specific biophilic connections, our hope was to find the "universal in the specific." Our hope was that these narrations serve as inspiration for teachers embarking on this type of work.

Yesterday, the Museum of Nature opened up their display of rescued owls to the public. Out of respect for the birds, everyone was asked to remain quiet and calm. One of the owls, scrutinized us with a half-opened eyelid, while another rotated its head, ignoring us altogether. Observing the owls in such close proximity allowed us to appreciate the muted striations of color values found in their feathers, the sharp edges of their beaks used at dinner time, and the powerful potential of their talons that gripped the rough bark of their recently hewn perches. Captivated by the presence of such dignified creatures, we eventually walked away, humbled by yet another continuum of Nature's possibilities, with a new sense of physical and psychological knowledge of rereading our natural world. As we return once again to the shelves of our picture books, informed by our lived-through experience with owls as well as the many other occurrences encountered every day, we concur with Mackey (2016) who states, "We weave strands of our own lives into the words before us on the page and ride the energy that is thus created so, every reading is also new" (Mackey, 2016, p. 482).

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