Freedom, Interconnectedness, and Curriculum Attunement
A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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WE ARE IN CRISIS TODAY, locally, nationally, internationally, and at the planetary level.[1] In today's crises, democracy, freedom, and interconnected life are under attack. While the U.S. Supreme Court and half of the state governments have been busy limiting women's reproductive freedom, religious education is allowed to use public funding. While the Supreme Court allowed the expansion of gun rights at the local level, mass shootings have constantly rocked the nation, including on school sites. As a woman protester said so revealingly: "How is it possible that an AR-15 has more rights in this country than a woman?" (Goodman, 2022) and, I would add, a child at school. Some people argue for limiting the government's power, while others are frustrated that the federal and state governments do not adopt measures to protect people. Worse still, for those who are marginalized, the government becomes a force of violence, as police brutality against Black lives demonstrates. While teachers are punished for critical teaching in many states, during the pandemic those who did not want to wear masks also protested the government mandate of wearing masks in the name of their freedom to choose. There are many contradictions in all these different directions. As it turns out, these contradictions have been inherent in the West's history of freedom, as Annelien de Dijn's (2020) historical study reveals.

On the other hand, while the freedom of nature has long been tossed out by human control, will a cap on human freedom be necessary for the survival of the planet and, in turn, the survival of humanity? What would it be like to exercise freedom without enacting the mechanism of domination over human and nonhuman others? Can freedom be nested? As we have seen from the pandemic, social movements, and political polarization, freedom means different things for different people: for example, freedom *from* internal and external constraints (negative freedom) or freedom *to* live one's own life (positive freedom). Scholars also make a distinction between Eastern and Western viewpoints of freedom (Ahmadov, 2008; Shaw, 2011), and Oded Balaban and Ana Erev (1995) have come up with 12 different categories of freedom.

Western freedom is considered a lighthouse for advocating for human rights and democracy in the world; however, it also casts a shadow onto other parts of the world. Living in

the shadows of freedom today, we not only need to think about how to struggle for more freedom to think, act, learn, and teach, we also need to make detours through history, culture, and nature by attending to our own inner shadow in order to open new vistas. The shadow in the Jungian sense is part of the whole and does not disappear but must be integrated into the individual and collective psyche (Wang, 2019). The shadow is the aspect that we do not want to see inside of the self, and we often project it onto others we reject, but the shadow can also be unrealized potential. Has the thread of interconnectedness, acknowledged more in other parts of the world, become the shadow of freedom in the West's long quest to conquer the self and the world? Is it possible to bring these two threads together in the daily practice of education?

Here I take a detour through Daoism and the West's history of freedom so that we might be able to approach the issue differently. Complicating the notion of freedom through the thread of interconnectedness in a cross-cultural perspective, I argue that, without being immersed in the life-affirmative stream of interdependence, freedom cannot elevate individuals or groups above the web of life. *Zhuangzi*'s teaching about free wandering in Chinese indigenous wisdom is about the possibility of being free *only* when attuned to the rhythm of the cosmos. Incorporating both freedom and interconnectedness, curriculum attunement in the daily practice of education requires attending to both the inner and outer work of teachers and students for new openings and new relationality. In the shadows of freedom, this paper invites the transformation of the red fire of rage inside of us into the blue fire of passion (Doll, 1995) that can sustain life, for us, for our students, and for the planet.

Zhuangzi's Free Wandering

The first chapter of *Zhuangzi*[2] sets the tone for free wandering:

> If one rides on the natural spirit of heaven and earth, follows the changes of six vital breaths (*qi*), freely wandering in the infinite, what does the one need to rely on? The authentic person has no self, the spiritual person seeks no external achievement, and the sage does not have outer reputations. (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 1, "Free Wandering")

In this key passage, the notion of free wandering follows and transcends time and space, rises above conventional value judgments and official success defined as accomplishment and status, and goes beyond ego-consciousness to become one with *Dao*. Different from the liberal Western sense of freedom, Zhuangzi's free wandering is not based upon the notion of an autonomous self, but on a person's ability to peel off social and cultural norms and cultivate free-flowing movement through non-instrumental attunement to *qi* (breath). Such an attunement is cultivated through practice, particularly aesthetic, meditative, and spiritual practices.

Qi, translated as breath or energy, is an important concept in Chinese philosophy. *Qi* exists in everything and everybody, and its circulation brings opposites of *yin* and *yang* together to reach creative harmony. Transformation lies in the movement of *qi*, not in any external force. In ancient Chinese cosmology, the universe unfolds in a self-generating and self-transforming process. *Dao* in Daoism is non-controlling, non-dominating, and non-possessive, as many passages in *Dao De Jing* convey. For example, Chapter 29 of *Dao De Jing* states, "Those who rule the world cannot succeed. Those who control it will lose it."

Attunement to the movement of *Dao* is through *qi*, as *Zhuangzi* explains:

> Concentrating your heart. Do not listen with your ears but with your heart; do not listen with your heart, but with your vital breath (*qi*). The ears hear only the sounds, and the heart welcomes only what is pleasing to it. *Qi*, however, in its emptiness and stillness, is inclusive of all. Only *Dao* gathers in emptiness. The [purpose of the] fasting of the heart is to reach emptiness. (Chapter 4, "The Human World")

Emptiness is inclusive of all. Listening with the ears stays with the senses to obtain knowledge. Listening with the heart is better, as the heart is a Chinese concept that includes both intellect and emotions, but it still has preferential judgment. Listening with *qi*, however, goes beyond knowledge and judgment to reach the openness and spontaneity of emptiness that enables human freedom through interconnectedness. Such a whole-being listening suggests the interfusing of the human self with cosmic energy to dissolve both external standards and a fixed sense of the self and follow the movement of *qi*. *Free wandering* is also translated as *playful wandering*, and there is a strong sense of play rather than rigidity in this freedom (Ilundain-Agurruza, 2014; Kwek, 2019). "A playful freedom" (Ilundain-Agurruza, 2014, p. 329) becomes possible when the individual loosens their ego-boundary to attune their inner beings to the rhythm of the self-transforming cosmic process. Not taking the self seriously, one can play with the world.

Attunement to *Dao* also has the potential to integrate the subconscious. The parables in *Zhuangzi* mention various skillful artisans who can connect different layers of the psyches in their spontaneous actions to freely accomplish the task at hand. In particular, their ability to cultivate stillness within the self and to see the free space in an external object is important for connecting the *qi* inside and outside for spontaneous creativity to spring forth (Wang, 2021). These craftsmen do not try to control the situation at hand, but tap into the unconscious energy and claim they are only following *Dao* to craft magical products or performances. As Liu Zaiping (2016) points out, in *Zhuangzi*'s spiritual freedom, human consciousness and the subconscious are "mutually adapting, supportive, inspirational, rather than mutually manipulative, interruptive, or hindering" (p. 212), which makes integration an organic part of the process.

Free wandering is both a natural and a cultivated ability since it is inherent in humanity, but societal and cultural regulations suppress such naturalness. It is worthwhile to explain that naturalness does not refer to the natural world *per se*, but to the "self-so-ness" of the world, the natural patterns and principles of a self-generating cosmos. "Cultivated spontaneity" (Ilundain-Agurruza, 2014, p. 329) is a good term to capture the two sides of Zhuangzian freedom, and I would also say "educated spontaneity" to emphasize the role of education. Here, I highlight three aspects of Zhuangzian freedom as follows.

Nonharming and Mutuality of Humanity-Nature Relationship

According to Lu Jianhua (2016), humans and objects can mutually fulfill each other's nature when the conventional utility gives way to the realization of the true nature of both. In doing so, humanity and objects form a nonharming relationship. Two examples at the end of Chapter 1 illuminate such a relationship.

The first example is the use of a big gourd. In the parable, Huizi talks about a huge gourd that he cannot use to carry water. Zhuangzi responds: "Why did not you think of it as a float that

can be tied with the waist and use it to freely wander on rivers and lakes instead of worrying that it could not hold anything?" The conventional use of the gourd is to cut it and then use it to carry water. Huizi cannot imagine a use outside of this utility and considers the huge gourd useless. In a twist of the lens, Zhuangzi fulfills the nature of the gourd in its free floating, and the gourd keeps its own shape while being used as a companion for a human's free wandering. With a free human spirit, objects become free and remain intact (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 1, "Free Wandering")

The second example is a big, "useless" tree. In the parable, Huizi mentioned a big tree with a gnarled trunk and twisted branches. Since it does not fit into any measurement or rule, the carpenters pay no attention to it. Zhuangzi responds: "Why don't you plant it in an empty, silent space in the wilderness? There you can walk freely by its side and sleep carefreely beneath it. It will not be killed by the axe, so no harm will be done to it. Without usefulness, it does not suffer from harm, either" (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 1, "Free Wandering").

In these two parables, Huizi intends to dispute Zhuangzi's free wandering as big words without any usefulness, and yet each time in Zhuangzi's response, he thinks outside of the box to go beyond the conventional measure of utility and restore the holistic nature of objects through human freedom. The big gourd, considered useless, becomes a companion to support human beings' free floating on the water while it remains intact without being cut open. The gnarled and twisted tree stays alive in a remote area to provide shelter and a resting place for those who are roaming. External things can fulfill their own nature without being damaged by human utility if human freedom does not impose its will but tunes in to the interconnectedness of life to let nature be. Such an insight is much needed in today's world, where climate change and environmental crises threaten the planet's survival. Human freedom is intimately linked to planetary well-being and cannot be exercised without rebalancing our relationship with the natural world. Whether or not human beings can still have a dwelling place on earth will depend on how we change the ways we relate to the planet.

Inclusive of the Margin

With a radical approach to equality, Chapter 5 of *Zhuangzi* is full of parables of people who are crippled one way or another but are full of wisdom with self-confidence and spiritual freedom. They can go beyond constraints imposed by either nature or legal punishment and acquire exceptional inner strength. The contrast between their appearance and their internal richness indicates the importance of a spiritual life that transcends social norms and of an inner capacity for attuning to *Dao*. It is not so much that they make an extra effort to get better, but that they are able to get in touch with the nourishment of life that exists deeper under the appearance. This deeper dive into the undercurrents of life makes them disregard conventional judgments and freely go about with their own sense of integrity, unaffected by the external standard.

In a movement of reversal, just as the reversal movement in seeing the strength of the big gourd and the twisted tree beyond their conventional uses, Zhuangzi depicts how people with a lame leg, amputated toes, or a hunchback have advantages when they become attuned to *Dao* and acquire inner qualities that normal people cannot match. For example, a particularly ugly person becomes so popular that all others actively pursue his comforting company, or a crippled person provides wise counsel to a Duke who found him so appealing that non-crippled people begin to look strange. The arbitrary nature of judging who is good-looking or physically able is made evident in such a reversal. As Ilundain-Agurruza (2014) points out, Zhuangzi calls into question

how discrimination and biases divide the world "according to immutable essences" (p. 338) and endows crippled people with the spirit of free wandering—a high achievement that few physically able people can accomplish. Such stories not only show Zhuangzi's "deep compassion. More crucially, they turn the limiting condition into an opportunity that embodies competence and charisma" (p. 334).

This radical openness unsettles the boundary between the normal and the marginalized, and people who do not fit into norms can be freer in spirit because they can see through categories and divisions and are not bound by them but become unbound. In a sense, the freedom of the "handicapped" is made possible through accepting their unchangeable condition to work within the constraints and yet, by this acceptance, transcending the limits by calling into question the official, normative expectations. "Conceptions of normality" (Lai, 2021, p. 7) are deconstructed here. Thus, Zhuangzi's free wandering is inclusive of the margin and adopts multiple modes of working with constraints all at the same time.

Working with Constraints

Karyn Lai (2021) defines "working with constraints" (p. 3) through both responsiveness and fit as the primary mode of Zhuangzian freedom. Working within or beyond constraints is among many specific responses one can adopt according to the circumstances, contingencies, and context. She argues that "'working with constraints involves a person's responding fittingly to a particular set of constraints, by employing their capabilities in the light of the situation" (p. 11). By prioritizing the mode of "working with constraints," I think the nature of Zhuangzian freedom as the exercise of "freedom-with" is made clear.

First, Daoism is a nature-based theory and practice (Miller, 2022). *Zhuangzi* acknowledges the limits of humanity and does not necessarily approach internal and external constraints as negative barriers to freedom, although it tends to strongly criticize the official and normalized rituals and regulations as impeding a free spirit. As the parables regarding the crippled people show, working with physical constraints to release potential means first the acceptance of constraints before the people can transcend them. Moreover, Zhuangzi's free spirit is radically open to what emerges in the process, without attachment to the predetermined destination, and this non-instrumental approach is compatible with the nature of *Dao* in its movement that does not possess, occupy, or dominate. To achieve non-dominating relationships with others and with nature, one has to empty out the conceptions and practices of social and political domination. *Zhuangzi* is well known for deconstructing Confucian morality and loosening up any internal and external fixations. So, there are various ways of working with constraints.

Second, working with constraints is a cultivated and improvised exercise, and the freedom to act spontaneously and responsively comes from an extensive time of practicing the alignment between the self and the world. Fitting in with the situation often involves meditation to fast the mind, empty out preconceived assumptions, and forget the self in order to go with the flow. Emptying the mind to cultivate stillness within leads to transcending external standards and social regulations and dissolving the boundary of the self for attunement. This sense of transcendence that starts from within is not the same as breaking away from the external constraints, and it often requires relinquishing internalized norms to work through constraints in a new way. In other words, this freedom beyond does not necessarily mean direct resistance but dwelling in emptiness to flow through constraints with flexible, situation-dependent responses. *Zhuangzi* humorously re-

appropriates the conversations between Confucius and his disciples to reveal how the Confucian moral, norm-oriented approach of governing only fails to convince any politician to take a different route, but working *with* constraints to let fitting responses emerge from the process can lead to others' willingness to change on their own initiative (Chapter 4, "In the World").

Lai (2021) gives an example of working with constraints through a swimmer who, to the anxiety of observers, swam under the waterfalls where no fish or turtles could swim. Nevertheless, he enjoyed it and was singing a song when he came out of the water. When asked about how he could do it, he replied:

> It is due to habit, and I have acquired this ability after a long time of practice. I can accomplish it because I go with the natural. Going in with the swirls and coming out with the eddies, I am following the *dao* of water and do not impose my idea, and that is how I can tread water. (Zhuangzi, Chapter 19, "Nurturing the World")

In this parable, the swimmer responded fittingly to the situation of cascade. Going with the *Dao* of water, the swimmer became attuned to the environment of the waterfall and could swim freely in what is perceived to be a dangerous situation. Such fitting responsiveness was both natural and acquired, as he had grown up along the water and practiced this ability to go with the water for such a long time that it had become part of him. This is a good example of working with the constraints to enact freedom-*with*, because without insight into how waterfalls work, the swimmer would not have the freedom to swim.

As Valmisa (2018) points out, the issue for Zhuangzi's relational freedom lies:

> not so much with the constraints imposed by given socio-material conditions as it lies with the ways in which humans function in relation to these constraints. Effective responses involve either changing the agent's relation to these constraints or, when possible and desirable, transforming constraints into freedom-conducive conditions. (p. 9)

Working with constraints enables the transformation of either inner or outer worlds, or both, through different ways of responding, and this mode of freedom can contain specific actions of seeking freedom-from, freedom-to, freedom-within, and freedom-beyond, sometimes simultaneously and other times sequentially, according to what the situation calls for.

Third, Zhuangzian freedom leads to changes in both the objective and subjective worlds, often in ways that the conventional viewpoints cannot see. His freedom is often characterized as subjective and spiritual, which suggests that it does not have an impact on the objective world. Contemporary critiques of Zhuangzi since the 1919 May Fourth Movement in China (Lu, 2016; Xu, 2013) positioned his theory as withdrawing from the world and divorced from social and political reality. However, Zhuangzi's conception of free wandering has a political component, and his approach is outside of the conventional moral, legal, and political forms and structures in his turbulent time. Without attachment to institutional regulations, free wandering "seeks out unsettled, ambiguous political relations and defies what is called upon by normative politics in consolidating the boundary between 'we' and 'them'" (Yu, 2020, p. 351). For Zhuangzi, the usual sense of politics as power struggles for control or the triumph of one side over the other is precisely what must be transcended to achieve inner freedom. In valuing the useless, deformed, and crippled, Zhuangzi's free wandering also has radical inclusion to unsettle political boundaries. By losing the self in free wandering, one achieves the ability to navigate political relations in adaptive and

situation-responsive ways without relying on any fixed formulas but with attunement to the interdependent nature of relationships. Ironically, his wandering makes inner freedom possible even with institutional constraints. In this contradiction between the inner and the outer world lies the strength of Zhuangzi's free wandering, as his inner freedom is attuned to the cosmic energy and interconnectedness of life and surpasses the external political constraints.

Western Conceptions of Freedom

In her historical study of political freedom in the West, de Dijn (2020) argues that, although today most people tend to think of freedom as "the possession of inalienable individual rights, rights that demarcate a private sphere no government may infringe on" (p. 1), this is a modern notion that has shifted from the ancient Greek tradition of freedom as popular self-government. In the Greco-Roman democratic conception of freedom in which one should exercise "control over the way one is governed" (p. 2), individual freedom is embedded in collective freedom. As we all know, of course, there was a limit to such freedom, as slaves, women, and resident aliens were not allowed to vote, so the percentage of the population that was allowed to vote was small, but this foundation pointed to the possibility of extending self-government to everyone, which we are still fighting for in the contemporary era.

Although this notion of freedom was criticized by ancient elites as leading to anarchy and licentiousness, it was practiced in Greek city-states for centuries before it disappeared. It was revived by the European Renaissance and the eighteenth-century Atlantic revolutions (the American, Dutch, Polish, and French Revolutions), which also added the element of economic freedom as inseparable from political freedom. However, in the backlash against these revolutions, the critiques of democracy led to the discourse of liberalism, in combination with the earlier discourse of natural rights, splitting the notion of freedom into political and civic liberty, with civic liberty understood as "the ability to peacefully enjoy one's life and possessions" (de Dijn, 2020, p. 243). Moreover, political liberty and civic liberty were often pitted against each other, and the civic liberty of individual rights, often elitist, was advocated more as an antidote to the limitations of democracy. This change became a turning point:

> In the postrevolutionary period, the idea that human beings had individual rights was increasingly invoked to argue against any extension of democracy. Political actors came to insist that popular government, instead of being an indispensable foundation for rights such as religious freedom and property, posed a major threat to them. (p. 226)

Thus, direct democracy was changed into a liberal democracy that enhanced judicial systems, added balances and checks, and positioned individual rights—the rights of those who were rich and powerful—at the center as against government constraints. While the government was cast as under suspicion in this shift, actually it was the fear of the masses and their participation in governing that was the undercurrent. In short, the modern notion of individual liberty as against the constraints of the government actually originated from antidemocratic counterforces. The Cold War of the last century reinforced such an approach. Isaiah Berlin's (1958/1969) well-known distinction between negative freedom as being against government interference and positive freedom as being able to achieve one's potential cast positive freedom under suspicion of misuse by the government. In the contemporary age, many tend to forget that freedom is not about fighting

against governmental constraints, but about "the establishment of greater popular control over government, including the use of state power to enhance the collective well-being" (de Dijn, 2020, p. 345). Of course, this historical trajectory has not been linear or reductive, as democratic freedom has inspired civil rights movements, women's movements, and decolonizing movements globally.

This historical understanding clarifies some of the confusion about the contested and unresolved nature of freedom in today's American society. The sweeping impact of recent Supreme Court rulings without the support of a majority of the American people is an alarming example of how the notion of individual rights or states' rights in the U.S. context can serve antidemocratic purposes. The individual choice not to wear a mask disregards its impact on others' safety and, while couched in "freedom of choice," is not so much about freedom as about an individual right that erodes collective freedom. The earlier conception of freedom connects individual and collective freedom through acknowledging the communal welfare, from which the sense of individual rights as the center of attention in the conception of modern liberty has deviated. However, today's liberal democracy often obscures the nature of democratic freedom.

On the other hand, I do not think the majority rule in democratic freedom is free from problems when legitimate minority rights are pushed away or when many participants do not practice their "freedom" for the common good. Using force to defend freedom when it is under threat started with the Greco-Roman tradition, which contributed to the Western domination of the world in later times. While popular self-government was a cornerstone of political freedom, freedom practiced internally as self-mastery has also been a thread of Western thought since the Greco-Roman tradition, although this thread was often embedded in elitist and rationalist tendencies, as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoic philosophers were not fans of democratic freedom (de Dijn, 2020). However, I would argue that, without cultivating inner freedom within the individual, institutional procedures do not necessarily lead to a common welfare. A participant in my earlier life history project, Song, who majored in political science, through his cross-cultural journey between China and the U.S., realized that the efforts to build systems "to ensure the good part and eliminate the bad part" are futile, because "they are two sides of one coin" (Wang, 2014, p. 86). For him, there is no system—however refined—without limitations, and individual spiritual transcendence beyond forms of systems and rational control is more important. Ordinary people often have a higher level of transcendence through their lived experience without formal education than do those with more intellectual development, which can become an obstacle to achieving it. Paying attention to inner freedom is not necessarily elitist, but essentially important for education rooted in transforming an individual from within (Pinar, 1994).

Michel Foucault (1984/1997, 1985, 1986) goes back to the Greco-Roman tradition in his later work to regenerate the notion of the care of the self as a practice of active freedom for self-mastery, in contrast to the later Christian self-renunciation and the modern conception of the subject seeking essential truth. He points out that the nature of such self-mastery and self-determination was elitist, male, and rational through the control of passions, desires, and conduct, so he does not aim to recover this Greco-Roman notion *per se* but to question the modern Western conception of the human subject. While de Dijn (2020) makes the link between the anti-democratic tendency of cultivating personal freedom and the modern notion of the individual subject who possesses liberal rights, Foucault re-articulates subjectivity beyond scientific reason and turns to the body and the aesthetic for the possibility of self-creation.

Critiquing the modern subject with its central concerns with truth, transcendental essence, and rational agency, Foucault does not define freedom through identity building, but through nonidentity in intellectually, ethically, and aesthetically crafting one's own life and creating new

modes of subjectivity in an ongoing process (Wang, 2004). It is an open-ended approach, beyond the modern notion of free will, truth claims, and individual rights. The care of the self is not for the autonomy of the subject, or the independence of a free will, or liberation through rational agency, but as "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to obtain a certain mode of being" (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 282). As an exercise, freedom is not the property of the human subject, but is fluid in the circulation of power relations, and power is "the constitutive instability and possibility of the reversibility of power itself, of power's always potentially being otherwise, of its never being ultimately determined" (Golder, 2013, p. 18). Through his postmodern articulation of power as relationships, Foucault's notion of subjectivity is both constraining and freeing, constituted through societal constraints while at the same time having the capacity for constituting itself.

In this complicated, simultaneous movement, the human subject can transcend the system and yet at the same time cannot be completely free from it. In this sense, Foucauldian freedom works with the limits to release difference without relying on a metanarrative of liberation, which is fluid, productive, and capable of deconstructing the fixation of the grand political ideal. On the other hand, the necessity of a rupture with the self as the basis for transgressing external control in Foucault's freedom of self-creation still re-iterates the conception of freedom as against internal and external constraints, albeit in a fluid way, and thus still misses the link of "freedom-with."

Contesting the liberal notion of individualism, Judith Butler (2020) points out that vulnerability "should not be considered as a subjective state, but rather as a feature of our shared or interdependent lives" (p. 45). The equality of grievable lives in the global setting opens a space for "freedom as defined in part by our constitutive interdependency" (p. 24). This contest is consistent with the long-standing feminist critiques of the Western tradition of privileging rational control, masculine active agency, and the mechanism of objectification, as the fluidity and plurality of the female body disrupts gendered binaries and dominant modes of freedom (Kristeva, 1996; Smith, 2021; Wang, 2004). They advocate for a relational, non-dominating, and sustainable sense of freedom, in which challenging the limits is intertwined with responsibility for the other (hooks, 1994/2020; Ziarek, 2001).

Moving between psychoanalytic and social/political theories, Butler (2020) asserts the necessary use of aggression and defines nonviolence as aggressive resistance against violence to pursue equality and freedom. Her recognition of vulnerability as a form of social relation and of the link between freedom and interdependency have profound implications for our in-depth understanding of the primary connection in human and planetary life as the tie *through* which human freedom is possible. Advocating nonviolence for more than a decade myself,[3] I agree with Butler that nonviolence is a force, yet I am not sure where her "rerouting aggression" (p. 27) *without transforming it* would lead us. As Butler points out, nonviolence is not helpful for morality, as part of the superego serves as the regulator of psychic aggression; however, I prefer converting aggression into a compassionate force through attuning to the energy of interconnectedness. Nelson Mandela's (2002, 2003) long walk to freedom transformed his viewpoints, and he walked out of prison leading South Africa on the path of truth and reconciliation. Interestingly, he fought for the right to start a garden in the prison where he had been confined for 27 years, and attending to the garden offered him "a small taste of freedom" in confinement (2003, p. 233). Here the freedom-from and freedom-to were intertwined in the mode of freedom-with the garden, where he could stay in contact with the positive energy of life to sustain his struggles. His pathway involved the transformation of aggression into a positive force of embracing freedom for *all*, including previous enemies. I would argue that it is in this transformation that the power of education lies.

I think that interdependency is *the condition* for life to be possible and to flourish, and it is our response to it (aggression, compassion, or indifference; compulsive self-sufficiency, pre-determined control, or relational freedom) that determines the nature of relational dynamics. As an educator, I also assert that responses should be educated ones, because conditions for compassionate responses can be created in curriculum and teaching, and possibilities for freedom can be cultivated in the ongoing struggles to transform both the inner and outer worlds. There is resonance between Zhuangzi's freedom and Foucault's freedom in their aspirations towards self-transcendence, and both convey a sense of going beyond conventional constraints, be they material or mental, internal or external. However, while such self-transcendence is seen as a break in Western freedom, Zhuangzi's personhood dissolves the self without breaking with the web—in fact, the possibility of going beyond constraints is *through* attuning to the interconnectedness of life. In other words, freedom-with is the primary mode but can include a variety of specific, fitting responses, such as freedom-to, freedom-from, freedom-beyond, freedom-within, to list a few. It also exceeds rationality and reason, which is often associated with the Western ideal of inner freedom following the Greco-Roman tradition of the care of the self. However, democratic conceptions of political freedom, which provide external conditions for the exercise of subjective freedom, are lacking in Zhuangzian freedom. It is at the intersection of internal and external freedom where I would like to speak about curriculum attunement.

Curriculum Attunement

Building dynamic interactions between inner and outer freedom—a gap in the Greco-Roman tradition between elitist and public practices—is important for the field of curriculum studies. *Currere*, popularized though the Reconceptualization movement in the U.S. and curriculum studies worldwide, works at such a site, as the democratization of the inner world is intertwined with the democratization of the external world (Pinar, 1994, 2012, 2019a). Expansion of the internal space is intimately connected with creating a vibrant public life for subjective and social preservation and reconstruction (Pinar, 2019a). Maxine Greene (1988) asserted the dialectic of freedom decades ago in education: "It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space" (p. 12). Freedom beyond the self needs the support of a democratic community.

Madeleine Grumet's (1988) body reading, Janet Miller's (2005) post-structural feminist autobiography, Denise Taliaferro Baszile's (2015) critical race/feminist *currere*, and Shawna Knox's (2021) decolonizing *currere* provide specific gendered, racial, or intersectional pathways for embodying such a practice of freedom by building inner and outer connections. As William Doll's (2012) questioning of the notion of control in education through historical inquiry demonstrates, the mechanism of control for imposition and domination must be deconstructed from its root, and I argue such a mechanism underlies various forms of social violence and should be emptied out in Zhuangzi's sense of freedom-with. Particularly in a time of crises when we can easily blame external constraints for all the problems, shadow projections in both the individual and the collective psyches can be mobilized quickly and passionately to split the inner and outer worlds. It then becomes crucial that we insist on standing at the threshold between the inner and the outer to uncover possibilities through viewing both worlds and resisting aggression against "enemies" both within and without.

In my own lived experience of cross-cultural journeys as a student and as an educator, confusion and struggles have been abundant and so have revelations and awakenings. Those moments when I truly felt free were often moments *after* I felt connected, connected to the root of a big oak tree (Wang, 2004), to others, or to the flowing nature of stillness (Wang, 2014). In teaching, I felt connected to a creative flow when everything fit together, was attuned and interrelated, and when the relational dynamics of students co-creating with one another and with the world led to a sense of freedom in mutual exploration and intersubjective resonance. It is through connecting with the "living wholeness" (Aoki, 2005) of a unique situation and the dissolution of ego-consciousness that I feel free. While it is possible that my own cultural traditions predispose me to a sense of "freedom-with," the interdependence in the Jungian collective unconscious as the condition for life and the interdependency through which freedom is partially constituted in Butler's theory have become part of Western consciousness as well. Cultural differences lie in a different degree of the conscious recognition of interconnectedness that exists.

Attunement is often associated with sound, music, or aesthetic rhythms, but it is broader than that: Daoist attunement is through *qi*, the energy that connects everything and everybody. I use the term "attunement" to indicate that tuning in with the world requires tuning in with the self to come up with the most appropriate responses not only to fit in what the situation calls for but also to make new contributions to potential change in both the self and the world. The direction of influence is mutual as the environment influences as well as responds to human action. As Aoki (2005) argues, there is no need for attunement without tensionality, so attunement means harmony through "working difference" (Miller, 2005). Cultivating the inner freedom and relational freedom that contribute to the well-being of all participants is enabled by curriculum attunement to the creative tensions of human and ecological relationality.

Drawing upon George Grant's work, Pinar (2019b) explains, "Like revelation, attunement cannot be possessed or summoned; one decenters and waits, open—listening—to what lies beyond" (p. 261), and "freedom is enlisted in becoming open to that beyond" (p. 262). Attunement to the transcendent is also situated in what the moment and the context requires. Quietude and contemplation can create openings for subjective freedom, "an inner space of felt freedom wherein attunement becomes possible" (p. 269); thus, freedom and attunement mutually enable each other. While embodied, for Grant, attunement is towards God, for Zhuangzi, it is openness to cosmic energy in which immanence and transcendence are mutually embedded in each other. For curriculum as a complicated conversation, teachers' and students' attuned listening and participation in educational experience as lived open the potential for transforming the self and the social as well as curriculum itself. In Doll's (2012) terms, transformative and emergent curriculum cannot be centralized but must be dissipative, and its structure emerges through attuning to the interactions of all components.

For Zhuangzi, listening through ear or heart is not adequate; to follow *Dao* is to listen through *qi*. The quietude for emptying out preconceived assumptions, instrumental attachment, and possessive desires that is achieved through cultivating the stillness inside and reaching beyond is enabled by connecting with ever-changing cosmic movement. Following "what is revealed through attunement" (Pinar, 2019b, p. 375), one responds fittingly in order to work with the constraints and carve out new openings while not provoking more blockages. Zhuangzian freedom resonates with the three aspects of listening, quietude, and transcendence in Pinar's (2019b) curriculum attunement, although there might be different angles.

Curriculum attunement simultaneously attends to both the internal and external, the historical and imaginative, the explicit and implicit, and both the constraints and potential. At the

intersection between the inner and outer work, attuning to both constraints and the potentiality of the self and the world leads to their mutual transformation. The significance of the subjective presence in education against the context of cultural crises (Pinar, 2023) becomes even more urgent today. I believe that the root of curriculum lies in the cultivation of personhood that can exceed the established cultural and social norms. Getting in touch with relational dynamics also goes beyond the limits of individual subjectivity to provide improvised flexibility for creative directions in meeting entangled challenges. Curriculum as lived experience is historically and temporally situated (Aoki, 2005; Huebner, 1999), and future possibilities can be re-imagined by attending to the past, individual, and collective, and tapping into the inner abundance of time. This conference site also requires attuning to the history of the *JCT*/Bergamo conference as well as the history of curriculum studies as a field and diving into its inner complexity in order for curriculum studies to have a future. Attunement also attends to the unsaid or the implicit in individuals and institutions so that freedom can be carved out in the interstitial space for finding ways to work with explicit constraints. As Aoki (2005) points out, curriculum conversations across differences "must be guided by an interest in understanding more fully what is not said by going beyond what is said" (p. 227). Seeking freedom through the unsaid, the silent, and the gaps does not have to be explicit, but follows the contours of constraints to open the potential for improvised directions.

Such a simultaneous attending to both the inner and outer world does not mean that these two dimensions necessarily coincide because, on most occasions, they are in tension. Outer freedom provides external conditions for actualizing inner freedom, but inner freedom can exceed outer freedom to expand its limits. Ours is a time when we are called to rise above the turbulence in the external world, where it feels like everything is crashing down, but we must stand tall and be firmly rooted in human possibilities to expand the interior space for "sacred freedom," as Naomi Poinexter (2022) discussed earlier in this conference. The gathering together of inner freedom can expand the limits of outer freedom, not so much in the way of adding up individual components but in the sense of shifting relational dynamics (Doll, 2012). Attuned to the tensions between the inner and outer freedoms, curriculum and pedagogy are rooted in cultivating students' inner freedom and attending to relational complexity through intellectual, aesthetic, political, ethical, and spiritual experiences.

The inner and outer quest for freedom has rung through the field of education as clearly as a bell. For Maxine Greene (1988), freedom is "an opening of spaces as well as perspectives" (p. 5) to disclose possibility, to cultivate critical understandings and reflections, to overcome and engage in the praxis of shared becoming through dialogues, with the awareness that such a project is always uncertain and incomplete. Greene (1988, 1995) advocates engaging students in art, imagination, and aesthetic experiences to free their ability to "take the initiative in reaching beyond their own actualities, in looking at things as if they could be otherwise" (1988, p. 124), and in re-making a democratic community together.

bell hooks (1994/2020) approaches a pedagogy of freedom as both liberating from domination and creating new visions at the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other layers of social difference, urging all of us:

> to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions. I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement that makes education the practice of freedom. (p. 12)

Echoing her passionate call, issues of identity and power and struggles against oppression in many different dimensions are on central stage in critical approaches to curriculum and education, for example, Nina Asher (2007), Paulo Freire (1970/2000), and Nichole Guillory (2021). These influential works are all powerful formulations of exercising freedom in education, and their applications are further deepened in today's backlash against critical race theory and LGBTQ rights, which are officially banned from many schools. Consistent with the notion of freedom as breaking away from internal or external constraints, we often hear a call for liberation from domination, for transgression of the boundaries, and about the importance of building a community.

An interesting question to ask is: Is there a place for accepting the constraints in Zhuangzi's sense of freedom-within as a mode of freedom-with? For example, is working *within the constraints* of climate change a fitting response? It is denying the constraints that makes it impossible to responsibly respond; blind faith in the human transcendence of the world has contributed to the environmental crisis. There is a cosmic and human virtue in working within constraints. We must re-learn the lessons of living with the natural world, which is much bigger than we are, through restoring a view of ecological interdependence. In social and cultural realms, recognizing multiple, specific modes of freedom through working within and with the constraints is also necessary. In decolonizing education (Grande, 2004; Hopkins, 2020; Patel, 2016), we not only need to thoroughly deconstruct the mechanisms of colonization, but we also need to listen to the indigenous voices that situate curriculum in history, land, place, harmony and balance, and ecological interrelatedness (Mankiller, 2011). Indigenous traditions in North America support educating the body, heart, and spirit of the whole person, whose inner landscape is intimately related to the external world, and living in synchronized relationships with nature (Archibald, 2008; Chamber, 2008). These insights, the wisdom, resonate with Zhuangzi's message that human freedom cannot be unrestricted but must be in tune with the life force of the cosmos.

We need to seek out new pathways of co-dwelling in the midst of tension, difference, and polarization. As discussed earlier, freedom-with as Zhuangzi's primary mode, contains diverse, specific responses: freedom-from, freedom-to, freedom-within, and freedom-beyond. So, all different forms of freedom should be exercised in education according to what specific situations call for, and Zhuangzian freedom adds dimensions that we have tended to neglect. As Jon Smythe (2020) argues, a cluttered mind and a cluttered curriculum can both benefit from an infusion of Daoist emptiness. Freedom in emptiness involves letting go of pre-determined expectations, biases and binaries, and external control, as well as following the flow of what emerges in the process of generative interactions in the classroom. It is this sense of freedom with interconnectedness that I think curriculum attunement must attend to.

Curriculum attunement to relational dynamics between and among teacher, student, text, and context leads to actualizing the potentiality of all participants without imposition. Attunement suggests creating pedagogical conditions for students to take initiatives, explore alternatives, seek possibilities, and question the given. By not forcing a particular direction, the potentiality of students' lived experience can be opened. In my own teaching, I've found that when students practice their freedom and when matching conditions are created, students can travel far beyond what I can imagine. The teacher's willingness to offer companionship to accompany students' exploration is an anchor for their free exploration. Perhaps the sense that "You are not alone" is more important than "you belong here" in releasing the potential for students to find a deeper sense of connectedness, not with the crowd, but with a sense of purpose, meaning, and commitment to our shared life. The teacher's critical self-reflexivity is also important. When pedagogical relationships have broken down, I examine my own inner world to understand how I have

contributed to the curriculum of difficulty and how I must integrate my own inner shadow rather than projecting it onto students who resist my teaching (Wang, 2016). Self-reflexivity must go deeper into subjectivity and the psyche to enlarge the interior space in order to make better connections with others so that we can co-create conditions for different perspectives to mingle, juxtapose, and integrate to generate new directions.

Attuning to history, culture, politics, nature, and personhood, curriculum as a practice of freedom embedded in interconnectedness embraces the starlight in the night sky, moves to the sounds of steps on sustainable paths, and playfully wanders in the world to enrich the inner space and enable alternative visions of public life for the mutual flourishing of society and the planet.

Notes

1. This paper was the keynote for the 42nd Annual Bergamo Conference. My deep thanks to Professor Thomas Poetter and his team for inviting me. It brought back the memory of the first Bergamo Conference I attended in 1996, when William E. Doll, Jr., drove me and a few other students to the conference. He passed away five years ago in December, and I miss him and his optimism, especially in today's time of crisis. My heartfelt and profound gratitude to William F. Pinar for founding this conference and journal and Janet Miller for her tireless work on leading both for decades, to provide an open, transformative, and inspiring intellectual space for a complicated conversation that is curriculum. Acknowledging my intellectual debt, I also pass this gift to my own students.
2. There are debates about Zhuangzi as a person. I mostly use *Zhuangzi* as a book, but when needed, I use it as a person as well. All of the translations are my own after consulting Chinese texts of *Zhuangzi*. A Chinese version of *Zhuangzi* is listed in the reference list. Since there are many different translations, my citation gives the chapter number and title, rather than page number, which makes it easier to locate them in different translations.
3. It might be worthwhile to mention that the *JCT* editorial I wrote in 2010, "A Zero Space of Nonviolence," was the first of my publications that advocated nonviolence (Wang, 2010). Since then, I have worked on formulating nonviolence as a daily practice of education in multiple dimensions, with a book (Wang, 2014) and a dozen articles.

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Curriculum as Shadow Play

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

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

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

Shadow Play

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

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

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

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

Shadow Play, Co-opted

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social Media

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Black Twitter

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

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

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

Cancel Culture

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

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

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

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

The Dark Web

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

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

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

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

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

Implications of Shadow Play

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Curricular Hauntings

Confrontations with Ghosts in Pursuit of a Place of Freedom

HANNAH EDBER
Mercer University

Catch if you can your country's moment, begin
where any calendar's ripped off: Appomattox
Wounded Knee, Los Alamos, Selma, the last airlift from Saigon
the ex-Army nurse hitch-hiking from the debriefing center; medal
of spit on the veteran's shoulder
–catch if you can this unbound land these states without a cause
earth of despoiled graves and grazing these embittered brooks
these pilgrim ants pouring out from the bronze eyes, ears,
nostrils,
the mouth of Liberty
over the chained bay waters
San Quentin:
once we lost our way and drove in under the searchlights to the
gates
end of visiting hours, women piling into cars
the bleak glare aching over all

(Rich, 1991, p. 12)[1]

IN *AN ATLAS OF THE DIFFICULT WORLD*, poet Adrienne Rich toggled between scenes of struggle and survival to craft a shared poetic cartography of wounded, ongoing history. In this work, the past pierces the present, entangling freedom and detention, memory and forgetting. Language and imagery scratch at possibilities for freedom—the desire to connect across difference—the historical failures, or refusals, to do so. Driving the Bay Bridge from Oakland to San Francisco, the speaker is haunted by the ghosts of the dead—Chinese immigrants stashed and silenced at Angel Island, and the ghosts of the living—the incarcerated men sequestered across the bay at San Quentin State Prison. The speaker asks:

> Where are we moored? What are the bindings? What behooves us? (Rich, 1991, p. 12)

And: What do we do with our ghosts? How are we bound–and what is made possible–when we are haunted by the histories we have inherited? What are our investments in histories, in institutions, in hierarchies, in the oppressions of ourselves and others? And again—what do we do with them?

In this paper, I will produce two case studies of curricular hauntings and suggest attention to affect as a methodological possibility for the "something-to-be-done" haunting demands (Gordon, 1997, p. xvi). Drawing from racial and historical hauntings (Derrida, 1994; Gordon, 1997), affect studies (Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Stewart, 2007), agential assemblages (Barad, 2007; Wozolek, 2021), and the literary ghost of Toni Morrison's (1987) novel, *Beloved*, I will theorize possibilities for collectivities and solidarities in education through attention to the embodied, enfleshed shadows—the specters—lingering at the edges of curricular sites. After providing some background in what Derrida (1994) called *hauntology* and a brief discussion of how theories of haunting have been taken up in educational discourse, I will move to describing and adjudicating three sites of ghostly curricula: the gentrifying neighborhood where I live, the teacher body I have inhabited, and two poems that offer scenes of managing what (and who) is haunted.

Specters, Hauntings, Ghosts, Materialism

In the opening of his *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (1994) described *Hamlet* as a haunted play. "Everything begins by the apparition of a specter," he wrote. "More precisely by the *waiting* for this apparition" (p. 2). When I taught narrative structure in middle school classes, we called this the *inciting event*—the event that lures the protagonist out of their ordinary world and into the conflict and, thus, the action that will shape the story. When I moved to teaching high school, I taught Toni Morrison's (1987) *Beloved*, a novel that imagines the interior lives (Morrison, 1995) of enslaved and formerly enslaved people right before and after Emancipation. The novel tells us that this is "not a story to pass on" (p. 275), a line that troubles narrative redemption at the same time it demands narrative (re)tellings; my students delighted in the dual suggestion of not "passing on" a story. Events in *Beloved* are taken up from Morrison's introduction to a version of Margaret Garner—a woman who killed her child rather than see her being taken back to slavery—as reported in an Ohio newspaper in 1856. The novel opens on Sethe, who fled from enslavement in Kentucky to relative freedom in Ohio 18 years prior, and her sudden reunion with Paul D, who reappears in her life for the first time since they were both at the Sweet Home Plantation. The novel doesn't introduce its ghost until Chapter 5, but when she arrives, she is fully dressed, dripping wet, and "mighty thirsty" (p. 51). She is sexual, enfleshed, "shining" (p. 64) in a way that is both disturbing and alluring—dislocating Paul D's desire from Sethe to what we must know is her back-from-the-dead daughter. The arrival of the ghosts, in this text, do not just propel narratives to move forward; they implicate all actors in a swirling, indeterminate, disarming network of past/present/future.

My high school students always wanted to know: Is the ghost *real*? We would debate this topic, but one side always won. Yes, the ghost is real. Not only does she throw chairs and plates, she demands—she speaks. She touches; she pouts; she flirts. She eats and eats and eats. She has

sex. She is touched, by Sethe, by Paul D, by her sister, Denver. She is loved, in every possible way. And yet she is a haunting presence who scrambles not just attachment and connection, but place and history and time, responsibility to the other and to ghosts. Once it is clear that the ghost is Sethe's murdered daughter, returned, her voice in the text is merged with Sethe's, and with the trans-Atlantic journey of Sethe's kidnapped grandmother: "I am Beloved and she is mine… I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop… there will never be a time when I am not crouching… I am always crouching." (Morrison, 1987, p. 210)

Theorizing this temporal wrinkling as a *haunting*, rather than a *trauma*, produces a "something-to-be-done," wrote Avery Gordon (1997, p. xvi). This "something-to-be-done" is a methodological question, and Gordon's work suggests a method of confronting ghosts, to ask what is out of place, what "time is out of joint" (Derrida, 1994, p. 21). This confrontation is always a political project because it requires us not just to understand but to *be with* ghosts, to return their gazes, to see haunting as "one way in which abuses of power make themselves known" (Gordon, 1997, p. xvi). This confrontation also forces, as I will argue, an examination and uncovery of our own attachments to the ghosts and to the abuses of power that produce them.

Curricular Hauntings

Teachers, students, and schools are haunted by "Ghosts of Curriculum Past" who "rattle the foundations of current curriculum policy" (Kenway, 2008, p. 5). These ghosts, Kenway has written, are the forgotten figures of teachers as trustworthy, teachers as knowledgeable, teachers as experts. But those ghosts must then also be haunted, by histories of a profession shaped by gendered, classed, and raced constriction and coercion, promises of freedom for women from family duties or unsavory home lives (Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988), violent responses to Black teachers and schools dating from enslavement to the ongoing historical present. Haunted, too, are our "socially marginalized children … so readily turned into ghosts" by dehumanizing policies and practices of contemporary schooling (Regenspan, 2014, p. 24).

Snaza (2014) has examined the rhetoric of "haunting" in curriculum studies in works by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman and argued that this rhetoric emerges in moments "where the pressure of globalization upsets the disciplinary assumptions of the field" (p. 1). Maxine Greene (1985) has also written, in her essay, "Jeremiad and Curriculum: The Haunting of the Secondary School," that American ideology and public policy has "deliberately nurtured" "a sense of crisis … along with a sense of broken promises" (p. 333). Greene traced educational reforms in the second half of the 20th century as a project of nationalism and militarism, of deploying educational spaces "to defend America, to remind the world of the Dream" (p. 338). This Dream is what Baldwin (Baldwin & Buckley, 1965) and Coates (2015) would call the dream of white innocence, the dream that has built America, the dream from which whiteness has still not awakened. The Dream that Greene describes is what abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022) called "American racialized political culture," a culture "dependent on a perpetual enemy who must always be fought but can never be vanquished" (p. 176). Education as national defense—defense of borders and defense of the Dream—is thus not just a metaphorical dream (or a nightmare), but a material haunting, the shadow that throws the blinding project of whiteness as a national investment into visible relief.

These works from the 1980s—Greene's, Apple's, and Grumet's—are critical today because they speak to what Benjamin (1968/2019) would have called today's "moments of

danger," which yield "flashes of memory" to be recognized, held, seized (p. 198). What was dangerous to Benjamin was not just past events themselves, but the use of memory "as a tool of the ruling classes" (p. 199). This is why I find Gordon's (1997) conception of haunting useful: instead of focusing on the haunted as an individual victim, or memories dislocated in time, Gordon found that haunting "mediates between institution and person, creating the possibility of making a life" and refusing the understanding as simple cause and effect, what Benjamin would have called "beads on a rosary" (Benjamin, 1968/2019, p. 208). Attending to this mediation allows me to watch, and to address, the ghosts that accompany me in my own messy, complicated, and confusing navigation between my work in classrooms, the institutions that govern that work, and my multidirectional attachments to history, to place, and to text.

Globalization and its pressure do not just threaten education by disrupting bounded disciplines of knowledge. Through neoliberal expansion (Harvey, 2005) and its attendant rhetoric, globalization displaces concerns for accountability in schools from students to districts and state powers. Gordon (1997) has argued that accountability is a key concern of *Beloved*, as the novel asks readers to confront its central questions: "How can I be accountable to people who seemingly have not counted in the historical and public record?" (p. 187), and also, "How are we accountable for the people who do the counting?" (p. 188). These two questions ask educators and education scholars to consider the multidirectional and affectively saturated accountabilities, responsibilities, responses, and resonances that structure our orientation to teaching and learning, and that structure us, as well.

In other words, to call back to Adrienne Rich: Where are we moored?

Haunted Geography

Driving the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge
no monument's in sight but fog
prowling Angel Island muffling Alcatraz
poems in Cantonese inscribing on fog
…
                                        poems on a weary wall
And when light swivels off Angel Island and Alcatraz
when the bay leaps into life
                                        views of the Palace of Fine Arts,
                                        TransAmerica
when sunset bathes the three bridges
                                                  still
old ghosts crouch hoarsely whispering
under Gold Mountain

(Rich, 1991, pp. 12–13)

I drove the bridges in this poem for years: the Bay Bridge, from my apartment in Oakland west to the glittering city center of queer life, San Francisco. I watched these cities change, sprout yoga studios and coffee shops, drive up rent, drive out growing encampments of tents and sleeping bags huddled under CalTrans overpasses. On Tuesdays, I drove north across the Richmond Bridge to teach writing to men incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, gray and horrible above the

glittering bay waters. And with my high school students, I went to Angel Island, the detention center that housed thousands of Chinese immigrants barred from entering California by the 1881 Chinese Exclusion Act. There men and women carved homesick, defiant, insistent poems into the rock of their cells. Writing and landscape, prison, detention, the shadows of freedom—these things haunted me, drew me close, demanded confrontation with so many ghosts. Beneath the barbed wire walls of the prison yard, I felt the ghosts of my family's detention in Auschwitz; between the lined pages my students handed to me, I read my attachments to systems of oppression, to writing as discipline, as disciplining.

Following Helfenbein's (2021) work on the *spaciocurricular*, in this section I focus on the haunted spaciocurricular site of the neighborhood where I live in Southwest Atlanta. Helfenbein established the spaciocurricular as "the consideration of *what is taught where*" (p. 35) and an analytical mode that allows scholars to examine how "spaces and places … are ontological processes filled with living politics that shape who we are as subjects" (p. 7). I will argue that attending to the ghosts of this space—the displaced, foreclosed, and shut out, as well as the material histories that have shaped the racial aspects of this neighborhood's gentrification—can help us identify critical impasses (Berlant, 2011) and shape what Guyette and Flint (2021) call "a methodology for slowing down" (p. 641) and attending to what is alive in the emerging processes of a political and economic scene.

In 2020, I moved to Atlanta. My partner and I, who are both white and queer/lesbian, bought a house in a neighborhood called Adair Park, in the city's southwestern edge. In the 1920s, this neighborhood, like others on the west side, was zoned for segregated Black life (Bayor, 1996). The creation of the western part of the Atlanta BeltLine, an ongoing redevelopment project that aims to transform unused railway lines throughout the city into pedestrian and cycling footpaths, raised home prices in Atlanta's historically Black communities by 10.6% between 2019 and 2020 alone (Pendered, 2021), with housing values increasing by 58.8% for parcels located within a half-mile of the BeltLine (Raymond et al., 2015). In addition to foreclosure and displacement for legacy Black residents, the BeltLine project provides a "new model of governance aimed at solving urban 'problems' of various sorts," which often concern "the perceived quality of life as it affects desirable new residents, especially those with more disposable income and spending power" (Immergluck, 2009, p. 1724), like my partner and me.

While the numbers I have mentioned above provide a sense of some of gentrification's impacts on displacement, Leslie Kern (2022) has pointed out that quantitative measurements like these miss the "multi-layered, multi-temporal, and relational" (p. 104) aspects of gentrification as a process that "includes the affective, everyday, banal, and interpersonal experiences that accumulate over days, months, years" (p. 108). Kern has called for interdisciplinary approaches that are "attentive to the emotional, psychological, embodied, material, relational, and even intergenerational elements of displacement" (p. 109). The approach I take here—an examination of gentrification as a haunted spaciocurricular process "in which abuses of power make themselves known" (Gordon, 1997, p. xvi)—attempts to explore what echoes (Massumi, 2002) between shifting and insatiable relations to power, place, and memory.

While "gentrification as an economic process is never divorced from culture" (Kern, 2022, p. 69) and from cultural markers that are raced and classed, gentrification is also a story about globalization, neoliberalism, state, local, and corporate actors. It is a story about gender, race, class, sexual identities, and the ways in which all of these points are always in relation to each other through capital, cartographies, and discourses of home and belonging. In a post-industrial city like Atlanta, legacy Black residents either hold fast to their homes, watching new moneyed neighbors

move in, or they are sidelined and displaced. Blue collar workers, laboring in the dark to clean gleaming offices, in cramped drive throughs, in smoky gas stations, form the "shadow city of service work" (Kern, 2022, p. 59). Derrida (1994) wrote that haunting is "a habitation without proper inhabiting" of time, place, and language (p. 20), that to be haunted is to exist both without time and outside of it, in a time and place that is "out of joint." It's the liminal experience of being here without being here, of being overlooked, forgotten, mapped over, moved in on. I think about an interview my mentor conducted with a school worker in this neighborhood. He said,

> To witness your neighborhood failing around you and then what looks like, from the outside looking in, now that white people are moving into our neighborhood, it's getting fixed up, and we're getting access to all these cool things … like the BeltLine, but the kids don't think that's for them, and I don't know that they're wrong.

"From the outside looking in." To find yourself a ghostly presence, a shadow, a flash in a moment of crisis—this is what it is to be haunted by history, by place, by dangerous maps (Helfenbein, 2021). The 1950s saw the building of I-20 as a cartographic and material boundary between white and Black life (Bayor, 1996); the 2020s have seen breweries and condos do the same. And the ghosts remain.

A few weeks ago, on a muggy August afternoon, I was walking my dog around the park just a block or so from my house. I passed by several people who had pulled their cars up alongside the park's edge, their heads bent over their phones. We all said hi to each other; I think people come to use the park's WiFi on their lunch breaks. I passed around the playground, which is slated to be updated soon and past a set of fuchsia rose bushes, wilting in the heat. As I looped toward the other side of the park, a young Black man and a young woman got out of their car and made their way to a metal bench, one that overlooked the park from an elevated, hilly vantage point. The woman lit up a joint and looked outward, toward the expanse of close-cropped grass and the newly planted rain garden just below. As I passed them, the man called out to me:

"Do they still have basketball hoops here?"

I said I wasn't sure. I didn't think so. I don't remember seeing any.

We spoke across some distance, and it was difficult for me to see his face. I felt my own harden uncomfortably, and I labored to soften it, to lean into an opening between us. What was alive in this exchange? What sparks, flickers, glows, and possibilities? I felt the opportunities pulsing open and shut in the breaths and pauses of our conversation across the grass.

"I used to stay over here; I haven't been back for a while. They used to have basketball hoops," he told me. "They took them out because they thought there were too many Black people over here. I haven't been back in so long. They never used to cut the grass like this."

"I bet you're right," I said. The woman on the bench next to him looked away.

I said goodbye and take care, and I turned to finish my walk, away from their bench and toward the basketball court in question. I saw that the court had been freshly painted with a bright design of flowers and suns; I saw that the hoops were there.

"Hey!" I called. "There are hoops here!" I couldn't tell if he had heard me or if it mattered. I was embarrassed by my gesture, by the landscape that made it possible—the mowed lawn, the painted court. You are welcome here, in your home. It will just be on my terms. Isn't it nice like this?

What does gentrification teach? That those who have lived here before, the returning *revenants*, are rendered ghostly, that haunting is a violence that merges past, present, and future

by collapsing temporal bounds and providing material reminders that history is not over. These ghosts are not metaphorical; they are material and affective. They actively shape our imbrication with the worlds we have inherited. The haunted spaciocurriculum of gentrification teaches who and what cities are for, who and what gets to enjoy progress, to decide what progress is, to imagine themselves as outside of history.

Gentrification as a curriculum also teaches how to look out for ways communities and individuals imagine and take part in resistance—how people navigate the experience of living among the spatiotemporal impasse of gentrification as an agential process of its own. Kern (2022) has described seven ways communities resist gentrification, including by taking control, making policy, getting creative, being disruptive, coming together, drawing from the past, and creating alternatives. In Atlanta, activists have organized and occupied 300 acres of forest to stymie city plans to use the land for police tactical training and to house a major production company (Defend the Atlanta Forest, 2022). Others have organized mutual aid projects to deliver free groceries to low-income residents during and after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Atlanta Survival Program, 2022). Both of these projects explicitly name housing, displacement, and gentrification as part of what necessitates collective movement.

Alternatively/additionally, there are some methods and modes of (Black) resistance that are not accounted for within mainstream discourses and/or that would not be visible to me, a white woman. Reflecting on my interaction with the young man and the park, and his quiet companion, I wonder about how he or she or both of them resist racial and spatial domination in ongoing ways, maybe even within the exchange I described above—even as those systems of domination conceal, as Katherine McKittrick (2006) has written, "sites of resistance, geographies of human pain or love, locations of subversion, the place of the Black everyday, or diasporic geographies" (p. 13). I wonder about the ways my own investments in these systems of domination render these modes of resistance invisible to me and how my own participation in them tears at the possibilities for solidarity I have sought by participating in some of the activities I described above.

The way gentrification is narrativized also matters, as Kern (2022) has written. A story about gentrification that frames it as unstoppable and places human actors as pawns in the grip of an inevitable process "only serves the powerful" (p. 174). Following Rosiek (2018), if gentrification, like racism, is "a being in motion" then documenting and responding to that movement "will require a mode of representation that unfolds in time" (p. 15), i.e., narrative methodologies. But narrative, with its beginning-middle-end structure and distinguishable actors and settings, might miss the ways responsibility, agency, place, and time are often indeterminate, difficult to separate, co-constituted. Below, I will explore how poetic methodologies might offer a way to examine how, when, and where actors are bound up together in the spaciocurriculum of gentrification.

Something-to-be-done: Cartographies of Affect and Entanglement

Quantum theories of entanglement (Barad, 2007), of touch (Barad, 2015), and of affect (Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Stewart, 2007) invite us to reconsider ourselves and our bodies, not as individually bounded entities, but as co-constituted and always-emerging uncertainties within agential assemblages. Theories of affect refer to "those intensities that pass from body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), and in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1). Affect can

be thought of as "potential: a body's *capacity* to affect and be affected" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). Attending to affect also helps us think about not just what we feel—because affect refers to the embodied, in-process experiences before they are captured by naming. This focus on process and emergence can help educators and curriculum scholars to address our students, ourselves, our classrooms, our subject matter, our texts "not as things already laid out on the table, the only task being to represent and evaluate them, but with an eye to their hardenings into something recognizable, their ironclad investments, or slippages, or failures to endure" (Stewart, 2021, p. 33).

Affect is a useful theoretical and methodological approach because it helps us sense how we connect to students and how we fail them and how we are always entangled in a process of being and becoming, taking shape and shaping within/against/among a swirling galaxy of concerns, demands, allegiances, and curricular projects. Haunting, I argue, is about an affective entanglement with embodied traces; to be haunted is to feel and know history's sticky residue on the present. Acknowledging this entanglement is what Flint (2018) called "the event of remembering, of being moved to remember" (p. 15). To be haunted is to be forced to confront and recognize our attachments in relation to one another—including attachments to assemblages of violence (Wozolek, 2021)—and to notice how we manage those attachments in search of understandings of what Patti Lather (2016) called the "intra-active, webbed and networked … messy and fluid objects of the world" (p. 22).

Ghostly Bodies

What are the bindings?

Moving through cartographies of scale, I will here discuss the second site of a haunted curriculum: the teacher body/my teacher body as I have come to know it, that is, shaped, blurred, and unbounded within a network of friends, colleagues, and comrades. Again borrowing from Helfenbein's (2021) *Critical Geographies of Education*, I think about these bodies (my body) as an element of curricular geography because of the way they have been "mapped, bordered, defined … even erased" (p. 7). As Katherine McKittrick (2006) has written, "geography is always human and … humanness is always geographic—blood, bones, hands, lips, wrists, this is your land, your planet, your road, your sea" (p. ix). Our/my teacher body is and has been managed—by neoliberal efficiency models, by "data-driven" accountability measures, by the demands of the clock and the bell and the hallway. This body also *manages* the movement and sound of children, the language, how and what they read and write, and to what ends. This body (my teacher body) is haunted by histories of managing and being managed that are racialized, gendered, and classed.

In *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, Madeline Grumet (1988) examined "the study of curriculum as gender text" (p. 34) and American schooling as an institution that reifies gender and class hegemony through the apparatus of the state. After describing schools as a site for women to escape domestic life and responsibility and to claim financial and social independence at the onset of early 20th-century industrialization, Grumet wrote that "the overwhelming presence of women in classrooms and the continuing identification of men as the only persons with the capacity to know are still present in the culture of schooling" (p. 45). As a woman teacher, I contend that the gendered and embodied battle for epistemological agency has been at the heart of women in schools—but also that this battle is imbricated and deployed within a field where white supremacy and class antagonisms are always already in play.

In *Beloved*, Sethe is caught in what she calls her rememory, which Avery Gordon (1997) has described as referring to memory that is not personal or individual, but "prepared in advance," lingering "beyond our individual time, creating the shadowy basis for the production of material life" (p. 166). One of Sethe's rememories concerns Schoolteacher, the instructor brought to the Sweet Home Plantation to instruct the white sons of her enslavers. In a horrifying moment, Sethe realizes that the ink she has been preparing for Schoolteacher's use has been used to teach these children to describe—following Gilmore (2022), to thus produce (p. 109)—the human vs. animal characteristics of Sethe's being. This brutal action of textual violence, with its attendant material consequences, is what explodes Sethe's decision to flee Sweet Home and to cross the Kentucky River north into Ohio.

"A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice," Gilmore (2022) wrote. "If justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of a process of making a place" (p. 137). Sethe's plot-moving act of resilience here is to refuse the way her body is rhetorically and materially managed, invaded, overdetermined, and violated, and to make a place for herself in freedom by crossing that river. When Schoolteacher and his posse arrive in that place—chasing her North to bring her home—Sethe kills her infant daughter rather than send her back to Sweet Home. The return of her daughter, who is known only as Beloved (named for the partial phrase carved on her tombstone) offers another rhizomatic geography—her emergence from the river calling up her own mother's crossing, her crossing from the birth canal, from the River Styx, from the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993). The multiplicity of this crossing is spatial and embodied. History is here with her. Her skin is still wet from the crossing.

In the classroom at Sweet Home, Schoolteacher controls the means of material and intellectual production, and of meaning-making through language and text. Schools, and *writing* as a production of schooling, belong to violent histories of geography and American racial production. This production is an assemblage of education as a nation-building project, which Michael Apple (1986) argued must be articulated and critiqued through analyses of gender and class; critically, Zeus Leonardo (2013) tied educational standardization as a project of nationalizing whiteness. The move to control what is learned in schools, and the demand for disciplined bodies, spaces, and time, is couched in what Apple (1986) called the state-produced crises in education, what Maxine Greene (1985) described as "the link between education and the American mission … now formulated in terms of efficiency and functional specialization … to be achieved by means of scientific management" (p. 336).

This management is also achieved by ever-multiplying calls for accountability—to families and communities (borrowing from corporate worlds, these are called "stakeholders"), to administrators, to districts, to states and courts. Drawing on the scene of Sethe's rememory of Schoolteacher, Avery Gordon (1997) has commented that "Morrison's call for accountability suggests that it is our responsibility to recognize just where we are in the story, even if we do not want to be there" (p. 188). Where am I in this story? Neoliberal structures and histories are not "world-homogenizing sovereign[s]" (Berlant, 2011, p. 15); there is more at play on the scene of the teacher's body—agency, attachment, desire, history.

As Erica Warren and I (2022) have written:

> The weight of accountability bears down on the body. If we are considering the scattered accountabilities—to students, communities, and the bureaucracies in which we work—we must consider how and when teachers will account to themselves and to the affective

> curricula. Our bodies are pedagogical sites that teach us and our students to examine our attachments and to imagine new orientations toward liberation. (n.p.)

Educators and educational researchers need to encounter the ways in which we are born of these histories, just as we are haunted by them. The ghosts that force this encounter demand an engagement with the affective glows and flickers, the echoes and resonances, the "rhythm, relay, arrival[s] and departure[s]" in "relations of motion and rest: *affect*" (Massumi, 2002, p. 20).

Attending to affect can visibilize an attachment to power that emerges at the expense of another. Here I am thinking about those of us who can claim benefits from structural violence—including teachers, scholars, policy writers, city planners, those of us who are white, those of us who have access to capital and choice and movement. Zembylas (2020) draws from Foucault (1983) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to comment on "the fascist tendencies that exist within all members of society, that is, all of us … the yearning that all of us have to want others to conform to our own rules and beliefs" (p. 2). Desire, itself socially produced, is more central than ideology in our attachments to control and to domination, Zembylas (2020) argued. To unmake fascisms, educators must identify the ways in which desire for control, repression, and order is mobilized and to bring these desires out of the shadows and into the light. As Warren and I have written (Warren & Edber, 2022), as female and/or queer and/or Black teachers, our desires for control are complicated by the ways in which we have been socialized to please authority, the ways in which we have been conditioned to be valued and valuable, and the ways in which our own bodily control has been curtailed by socially, politically, and geographically gendered governance.

Teacher bodies are shaped by the ghosts of educational and curricular inheritance and by our bodily orientation to networks of care and connection to young people. I remember the sweat that sprouted from beneath my arms when my seventh-grade students were "out of control" during an intense classroom observation from my principal, the creep of anxiety when I raised my voice and felt the relational openings between us slam shut. The grim tension of testing season, the delight of catching a joke launched through the air in a moment of connection. I feel these memories on my body, in my dreams. The moment during my first year when two students went through my desk, found my stash of pencils, and broke each and every one; the fury I felt between my eyes and the shaking in my hands as I worked to steady myself to address these children. Why was I so angry? Whose learning was interrupted? Whose time was taken up? Whose property?

I remember another moment, in another school, when a conversation I led with students buzzed with excitement and possibility, the silences not awkward and stiff but full of potential. The feeling in the room, the red and white floor tiles gleaming, the window letting in the smeary light of the Bay Area's early afternoon. My apprehension as I approached the security desk at San Quentin State Prison, handed over my ID to be cleared to teach my evening class, the orchestration of control and surveillance in this pedagogical space heightened to the extreme. The way my students spoke to me, with care and kindness, as they walked with me across the twilight of the darkening prison yard. "Get home safe," they'd say. And that word stayed with me, stuck with me, as I got back in my car and drove home. Whose safety? Safe for whom?

As a teacher who is committed to countering school as a controlling apparatus, an examination of my own investments and entanglements with racist state control elicits discomfort, embarrassment, even shame. Yet these affective flickers can be instructive. Zembylas (2021) called them *pedagogies of shame* and argued that attending to this shame, and making space to witness it, can create "a point of departure for a new level of ethical responsibility and political community" in schools (p. 62).

Poetic Possibilities

What behooves us?

Finally, I turn to poetry as a genre site that might help educators and education scholars wrestle with ghosts by putting us "in touch with the possibilities for sensing the insensible, the indeterminate" (Barad, 2012, p. 216) and for imagining freedoms to come.

In classrooms—spaciocurricular sites overdetermined by racialized geographic processes—these fatal couplings multiply through the work of controlling bodies *and* by controlling texts. As a former English teacher, I think about Schoolteacher's scene in *Beloved*, and I also think about the project of literary analysis as described by Common Core State Standards: Determine the meaning. Determine a theme. Analyze the author's choices for plot, characterization, and setting (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). These standards suggest that meaning is fixed within text, hidden between the lines, available to be uncovered by finding clues about the author's intention, to evidence. A turn to poetry—in particular to work that entangles space, bodies, time, history, and language—offers a generative literary destabilization of meaning, matter, and self. In making this turn, I am taking up posthuman and new materialist interests in poetic analysis and methods (Cannon, 2018; Cibils, 2019; Guyette & Flint, 2021; Shelton & Flint, 2021). Barad (2012) described her own increasing interest in poetics for "being in touch with the infinite in/determinacy at the heart of the matter" to "open up the possibility of hearing the murmurings, the muted cries, the speaking silence of justice-to-come." (p. 216). Poetic readings move us from textual work that pokes at the shadows of meaning and intention and opens ways of noticing flickering, fleeting, freeing ways of being. Here I argue that poetic readings offer a way to force encounters with ghosts as they are co-constituted within and among historical, spatial, and embodied points in an ever-emerging field. Examining poetry in our haunted present is, thus, not just dreamy. It is materially urgent.

Throughout this essay, I have used Adrienne Rich's (1991) *An Atlas of the Difficult World* to engage with the elusive, unstable, unmanageable work of examining the emerging self as it is networked within coconstituted haunted cartographies. I would like to offer a second poetic scene: an excerpt from Ocean Vuong's (2016) volume, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. This volume engages with the author's experience as a Vietnamese refugee, the specter of his missing father, and the emergence of his queer life. In his poem, titled, "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong," the speaker's body, his memory, his family, and his movement through space are interdependently figured, each woven through the other in a way that refuses boundedness, singularity, or stability. The poem opens:

> Ocean, don't be afraid.
> The end of the road is so far ahead
> it is already behind us.
> Don't worry. Your father is only your father
> until one of you forgets. … Ocean,
> are you listening? The most beautiful part
> of your body is wherever
> your mother's shadow falls.
> Here's the house with childhood
> whittled down to a single red trip wire.
> Don't worry. Just call it *horizon*

> & you'll never reach it.
> …
> Ocean. Ocean—
> get up. The most beautiful part of your body
> is where it's headed… (Vuong, 2016, p. 82)

Cities, memories, bodies, shadows—all of these are neither collected nor reconciled, but rather float and flicker, meaningful for their connectedness, the way one point momentarily sticks to another in the poem's field, before joining and sparking with another.

Consider this poem as a genre site for examining affective buzzings and resonances (Gershon, 2020; Stornaiuolo & Hall, 2014) within a haunted landscape. First, the poem opens by the speaker's address of himself, using a name for both a person (himself) and calling up a place that suggests not just any ocean, but the one crossed by his parents as they fled post-war Vietnam. "Don't be afraid," the speaker invokes to himself (himself, the ocean), before collapsing time, place, body, and memory along with inheritance: "Your father is only your father/until one of you forgets." What does this forgetting do for the speaker? For us? Here, the connection between father and child is only a whisper on the page, a shadow self traveling from one place to the next (Tolentino, 2019).

Next, the house: "with childhood/whittled down to a single red trip wire." The house is a place and a time, a threat, where technologies of war and memory fuse into what is always already a challenge to survival, a life. Whose memory? Whose war? The mother's shadow *is* the speaker's/audience's body—the most beautiful part. And this most beautiful part, in the next stanza, is headed in an unnamed direction—gesturing toward a future orientation, leaning forward and at the same time, like Benjamin's angel, remembering back. This poem shifts an orientation to the ghost by allowing the speaker and reader to *touch* the ghost, to *be with* the ghost, to *be* the ghost.

Vuong said that, in his life, speaking to his father felt like speaking to a ghost. But within this poem, "I speak to my own shadow … these three characters that are built on mythologies and unbounded by the physical world became fluid to one another" (quoted in Winter, 2016, para. 14). The ghost is inscribed on our bodies, made visible—fleetingly—through our bodies' work in spaces. We are what haunts us. To know that is to know freedom—from fear of ghosts, from fear of the stranger, from fear of the work to come to claim this ethical way of being within history.

I offer these poems as a site for helping readers and scholars to identify where we are haunted and where we haunt and to locate our own agency as we manage haunted scenes. I draw from Lauren Berlant's (2011) work on analysis that

> moves us away from the dialectic of structure (what is systemic in the reproduction of the world), agency (what people do in everyday life), and the traumatic event of their disruption, and toward explaining crisis-shaped subjectivity amid the ongoingness of adjudication, adaptation, and improvisation. (p. 54)

Work from poets like Rich (1991) and Vuong (2016) engage a self/human subject as embedded in historical processes, structures, memories, and geographies, not to erase the human subject's agency, but to speak to the agential assemblage (Barad, 2007) co-constitutively shaped by human and non-human actors. These poems

> specify how the activity of affective attachment can be located formally in a historical, cultural, and political field in ways that clarify the process of knotty tethering to objects, scenes, and modes of life that generate so much overwhelming yet sustaining negation. (Berlant, 2011, pp. 51–52)

If readers can see/feel/experience how, where, when, and to what we are bound, to what we are "moored," we can continue the ongoing work of navigating and organizing within agential networks with an emergent strategy (brown, 2017) that responds to the demands of an assemblage that shapes and is shaped by human actors.

Rosiek (2018) argued for an orientation toward racism as a "constantly moving target" that merges and re-emerges "in and through various substances," including "individual attitudes, economic materiality, formal and informal institutional practices, cultural and linguistic discourses, etc." (p. 15). If "racism is a being in motion" (p. 15), and structural and individual racism are root causes of gentrification, for example, then scholars, activists, and educators need to take up methodological and representative tools that attend to that motion. Rosiek suggests the use of narrative representation as one that "unfolds in time" (p. 15). Narrative, however, has a tendency to identify and name actors (protagonist, antagonist) as separate and bound both from each other and from the setting, events, plot, themes. On the other hand, poetry can "lure us toward the possibilities of engaging the force of imagination in its materiality" (Barad, 2012, p. 216), the force that Audre Lorde (1985) described as forming the "light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (p. 37).

I will return briefly to Rich's *An Atlas of the Difficult World* to expand on how haunting within poetic configurations can offer a curriculum of emergent solidarity. As the poem continues, the speaker mediates and manages her own attachments to assemblages of violence that threaten the lives of others as well as herself, that threaten her *because* they threaten others.

> I don't want to know how he tracked them
> along the Appalachian Trail, hid close
> by their tent, pitched as they thought in seclusion
> killing one woman, the other
> dragging herself into town   his defense they had teased his
>   loathing
> of what they were   I don't want to know
> but this is not a bad dream of mine   these are the materials
> and so are the smell of wild mint and coursing water remembered
> and the sweet salt darkred tissue I lay my face
> upon, my tongue within. (p. 14)

The stanza layers and weaves its histories—of a specific murder of a lesbian couple, of a landscape of homophobia and misogyny, of a specific location of terror within a spaciohistorical context of a land violently settled and colonized. There is no possibility of "seclusion" from these ongoing histories. The speaker does not "want to know" but nor can she *not* know, as the "materials" of this instant echo and resonate across time, place, and self and haunt her dreams.

A crosshair against the pupil of an eye
could blow my life from hers
a cell dividing without maps, sliver of ice beneath the wheel
could do the job.   Faithfulness isn't the problem. (p. 14)

Beyond merely describing social and political problems, the poem is a curricular site in that it engages the reader in naming these attachments *so as to unravel them*. The "pupil" here takes on a double meaning, as both the bodily apparatus of sight and as a subject who is being taught, who is subject to a curricular message. In identifying how she is bound up within the lives, times, and geographies of others, how she is inseparable from them, the speaker is able to divest from the idea that "faithfulness" to the dividing lines of "me" vs. "them" will protect her.

Poetic worlds that blur the distinctions and boundaries between actors present realities as complex, shifting, and co-emergent. Read as a haunted curriculum of poetics, these works stir action by demanding a restless, active, critical orientation that traces the non-linear emergence of attachments, solidarities, and relational openings—to ghosts, to each other, to the work ahead.

Freedom is a Place

"Since scholars believe that looking is sufficient," Derrida (1994) wrote, they do not always "do what is necessary: speak to the specter," to "unlock the possibility of the specter" (p. 11). The poetry I presented here allows us to speak and listen to this possibility by challenging stable meanings and watching ourselves cohere only through the acceptance of what can't be fully known. These genre sites help us merge "the darkness of forgetting and the shadows where ghosts lurk, but also the flashes of action and brilliance of collective love (posthumanist) labor" (Snaza, 2014, p. 170). The posthumanist work here entails confronting the ghosts, speaking to the ghosts, being with the ghosts, being the ghosts. Tracing the grief, joy, uncertainties, sparks between the boundaries of time, space, body, place, and text.

"At the end of the day," wrote Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022), "freedom is a place" (p. 93). This place is not metaphorical, but material: it is where my safety is not won at the expense of yours, where my existence does not diminish yours. It is a place, as Allen Ginsberg (1956/2022) wrote in *Howl*, where I understand that "while you are not safe, I am not safe" (Section I). In search of freedom, I touch the historical ghost who haunts the present—the ghost who is me. We greet the ghosts, and the ghosts can teach us: to feel ourselves bumping against history, to account for the ways we are always entangled with the ongoing historical present, and to move in solidarity with the attachments that shape our collective survival.

Notes

1. Editorial note: We have attempted, to the best of our ability, to match the appearance of Rich's (1991) published version of the poetry quoted in this essay, as spatial representation is a significant aspect of *An Atlas of a Difficult World*.

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Doesn't Your Work Just Re-center Whiteness?

The Fallen Impossibilities of White Allyship

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OUR PURPOSE IS TO PRESENT A PERFORMATIVE DIALOGUE responding to a central question on White allyship in anti-racist scholarship and activism: Doesn't your work just recenter whiteness? Seeking to unravel the whiteness in our disciplines, we came together at the intersections-controversies in critical White studies (CWS) and curriculum studies (CS) to provide our performative dialogue. Via our performative dialogue, we grapple with but do not provide

answers, solutions, or implications to our question, but instead think through three convolutions articulating the fallen impossibilities of White allyship.

Performative Dialogue

Before we start, we need to define what we mean by performative dialogue and explain our purposes, representations, and aspirations. *Performative dialogue*, as definition, refers to Pauli and Jim's dialogic reading, rendering, and analyses of an open-ended, generative, yet revised exchange on a central question emerging from but with potential to transcend academic disciplines. Following this definition, our performative dialogue emerges from intersectional controversies in CWS and CS yet seeks to unravel, intervene on, and pedagogically work through both disciplines' historical and contemporary whiteness.

Working through, our performative dialogue is *non*-disciplinary in its deployment of experimental text as a conduit of aesthetic, moral, analectic, and revelatory reasonings rather than disciplinary research text following transmissive-administrative frameworks, methods, and other disciplinary whiteness machineries or prefab whitened cognition "formats." Emphatically, the performative dialogue is not a "research method" or any other means of exteriorizing data, experiences, or documents from our-"selves." Rather, our dialogue assumes critical inter- and intra-subjectivation processes, open-endedness, un-suturing, and identification intimacies (Jupp et al., 2022; Yancy, 2015, 2017). Our aspirations are that our dialogue *performs* critical whiteness pedagogies (Casey, 2016; Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Lensmire et al., 2013; Miller & Tanner, 2019; Tanner, 2018) that unfold anti-racist subjectivization processes necessary to inform alliance-oriented interventions in whitened disciplines like ours but also in anti-racist social movements, institutional work, and curricular-pedagogical praxes.

Organizing Statement

What follows is an organizing statement to scaffold readers' experiences of our non-disciplinary text. First, as mentioned above, we locate our performative dialogue as emerging from generative controversies at the intersections of CWS and CS. We recognize work in CWS and CS (but really *most-if-not-all* "disciplines," "fields," "divisions," "conferences," and "organizations") as either historically-and-presently constituted in or doubly-bound by resistances to a pervasive world-constituting whiteness, on all sides, implacable, *ontological*.

Second, we provide the performative dialogue narrated with the experiential, intellectual, and emotional panel exchanges of six CWS or CS scholars, including two scholars of Color and four White scholars. As the main section, the performative dialogue grapples with and works through our central question, seeking to instantiate whiteness pedagogy for readers.

Third, via the dialogues' emergent contours, Pauli & Jim discuss the politically-germane convolutions, or tension-filled coils, that reveal the fallen impossibilities of White allyship. We believe the convolutions might inform greater criticalities and reflexivities for White scholars and activists seeking to do alliance-oriented anti-racist work in historically White or presently whitened "disciplines" like CWS or CS, but we also hope that convolutions might inform social movements, institutional interventions, and anti-racist curricular-pedagogical praxes.

Finally, in our closing, we emphasize situated, relational, processual, and alliance-oriented anti-racism*s* for White scholars and activists. Via situated *topoi*, White anti-racism*s* allyship*s* are always historically-socially shot-through with and haunted by White supremacist subjectifications and disciplinary machineries yet also seek to ethically engage in anti-racist pedagogie*s*, recognizing the demands of this historical moment.

Authors' Positionalities

Each of this paper's eight authors—whose published order in the paper emerged across the dialogic process—work along the intersections of CWS and CS. The scholarship of Pauli, a White man, and Jenna, a 1.5 generation Korean-American woman, applies critical contemporary and anti-racist readings of psychoanalysis for CWS and anti-racism work in schools and society. Critical anti-capitalist anti-racism informs the CWS scholarship of Jim and Zac, both White men interested in whiteness pedagogies. Additionally, the CWS scholarship of Tim, a White man, and Veronica, an African-American woman, theorizes whiteness in historical, contemporary, social, pedagogical, and literary contexts. Finally, Sam, a White man, and Erin, a White woman, explore the tension-filled practice of whiteness pedagogies in schools and classrooms. We understand our lived experiences, subjectivities, and study of race and whiteness are all complexly and reflexively intertwined in this text.

"Controversies" in CWS and CS

Whiteness intersects with "controversies" (*read* Whitely) in both CWS and CS. Though instantiated in or doubly-bound against whitened disciplines, CWS and CS emblematize whiteness's controversies, briefly genealogized below. We trace whiteness's controversies in order to work through whiteness in both but also to conduct whiteness pedagogies, unraveling and loosening whiteness within and beyond CWS and CS.

CWS

CWS scholarship and related activisms overflow with controversy, seemingly carrying controversy in their DNA. The 2019 annual American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference in Toronto provided a new flashpoint. Emblematic of conservative critiques, the Manhattan Institute's (Eden, 2019) coverage of the 2019 AERA Conference led with a flat dismissal of the four-hundred and twenty-two sessions across the AERA conference program that populated the reporter's search for the term *whiteness*. The dismissal accused CWS and related whiteness scholarship as "promoting a virulent new brand of racism" (para. 2).

From another direction, at another session on anti-racist scholarship (e.g., Tanner & Lensmire, 2019), some scholars of Color along with critical White scholars objected to CWS researchers as "re-centering whiteness" in an excoriating critique. More than the first, this second critique had a particular *sting* for the CWS White scholars and activists authoring this piece. This second critique insisted that our work reproduced the White supremacy we say we are fighting

against. Time has passed since Toronto 2019; nonetheless, the central question constituting our dialogue remains salient for CWS, White anti-racist scholars, or White activist subjectifications.

For those initiated in CWS, the controversy boomerangs from the past. Since the 1980s, conservative critiques (e.g., A. Bloom, 1987; H. Bloom, 1994; Hirsch, 1988; Kimball, 1990) like the Manhattan Institute’s have sought to insulate “liberalism,” the “Western canon,” “the humanities,” “academic disciplines,” “race neutrality,” “positivist social science,” and “objectivity” from emancipatory human sciences born of Civil Rights and anti-colonial movements. These conservative critiques, antagonistic to the historically- and socially-situated work our dialogue advances, for us amount to but an encapsulated rearguard defense of neoliberal capitalism’s *holy quaternity*: individuals, private property, “free” markets, and merit (Jupp et al., 2022).

Complicating conservative critiques, critical White-on-White critiques of White anti-racism are also a regular feature of CWS controversy. In these critiques, ostensibly “superior” conscientized White scholars paradoxically position themselves (clearly via class hierarchy of the White “Unwashed”) to other White scholars or White research participants as singular oracular voices or “right reason.” Taking their place on the whiteness observation deck (e.g., Hytten & Warren, 2003; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Thompson, 2004), these White anti-racist scholars, instead of recognizing they work from within the same problematic and contradictory and whitened social boundedness, simply critique other Whites’ false consciousness in transmissive and oversimple ways, exteriorizing other Whites and whiteness, via heightened consciousness formulas.

From a different positionality (and more importantly), since the early 2000s some scholars of Color have waged a differently-oriented critique of CWS and related scholarship (e.g., Ahmed, 2006; L. M. Jackson, 2019; Matias, 2016; Yúdice, 1995), with Sheets Hernández (2000) especially encapsulating this argument. Commenting on the “White movement in multicultural education” (p. 15), Sheets Hernández wrote that CWS was potentially appropriative of Black anti-racist voices and texts, reductive of racialized complexity, politically-sterile, narcissistic for White scholars, and re-productive of White supremacy. Addressing this controversy of White subjectivizations in anti-racist work, our dialogue responds primarily to the critiques of scholars of Color and White scholars.

We also note contributions of, especially, Black scholars to theorizations of whiteness by activists like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X; intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and James Baldwin; historians like Carter Woodson and Arturo Schomburg; or decolonial theoreticians like Aime Cesaire and Franz Fanon, all of whom are frequently left out of so called “controversies” as Black “originators” of CWS who wrote for both Black and White audiences. Moreover, we understand our dialogue certainly proceeds against-the-grain and under the threat of the neoliberal quaternity looming large within the rising tide of interlocking-multinational White nationalist fascisms (Amin, 2014; Grossberg, 2018). We see the performative dialogue here as necessary to working through CWS’ pedagogical moment (Jupp, 2013; Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021b; Shim, 2018, 2020) or pedagogical analytical arc (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a) that necessarily deploys the complexities and contradictions of psychoanalytic revelatory reasonings within Europeanized *and* non-European subjectivization processes (Cheng, 2001; Fanon, 1964/2004; Gaztambide, 2019; Said, 2004).

CS

CS' whiteness controversies have also served as a flashpoint in conference space over the last two decades, when not smoldering silently under the surface. The 2006 Purdue Conference (Malewski, 2010) provided a specific conflagration courageously led by scholars of Color that continued in Curriculum and Pedagogy Conferences in Akron, Ohio, between 2009 and 2011 but also repeated at Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative Conferences in Savannah 2014 and 2015. Many of us also grew up in whiteness's conflagrations, trying to sort out CWS within CS.

It is worth recalling the protagonic and courageous forays of Gaztambide-Fernandez (2006) who indicted CS as "an overwhelmingly 'white' space" (p. 60) and emphasized that in CS "white colleagues rarely have to consider what it means to be White and how they are implicated in the racialization of the field" (p. 63). Within the project called the Browning of Curriculum, Gaztambide-Fernandez and Murad (2011) excoriated established curriculum histories as "genealogies of White supremacy" (p. 14) and laid out a newly organized multi-critical field, following critical reading of race, class, gender, ability, and other differences.

Brown and Au (2014) also identified "the predominance of whiteness at the center of the narrative arc of the foundations of curriculum studies" (p. 360), and Au et al. (2016) proposed racialized curriculum genealogies of African American, Mexican American, Asian American, and Native American traditions of educational and cultural criticism as areas of curriculum scholarship. Extending these directions, Grant et al. (2016) also critiqued the deployment of "mostly White European male scholars to illustrate the complex and implicit ways that schools reproduce inequities" (p. x). Grant et al. countered with a tradition of Black intellectual thought in education to promote differently organized understandings and curriculum praxes.

Preceding and extending these publications, Paraskeva (2011, 2018) followed anti-racist decolonial positions in critiquing curriculum epistemicides and argued for "going beyond the Western epistemological platform, paying attention to other forms of knowledge and respecting indigenous knowledge within and beyond the Western space" (2011, p. 152). Following decolonial Marxian foundations in multiply located discursive swirl, Paraskeva has ambitiously and consistently laid out alternatives to CS' whiteness or what he has called the curriculum epistemicide. Resonating with and preceding Paraskeva's work was an anti-imperialist body of Latin American curriculum studies (De Alba, 1995/2006, 2007; Diaz Barriga, 1985; Puiggrós, 1983/2016, 2004), well aware and resistant to curriculum studies' Global North and Anglophone epistemological whiteness. All of these directions pointed out not only that White or Anglophone scholars occupied privileged positions in CS academic economies but also how whiteness was imbricated in the realities of conference space and CS' historical and ongoing knowledge production.

Embroiled in CS' history and present, we sustain that working through the conflict over the field's whiteness remains unresolved and will likely remain so as whiteness extends beyond concerns about scholars' "identities" into notions of disciplinary histories along with research writing genres, language, cognition, and ultimately, Europeanized cosmovisions implied even in social and educational research terms like frameworks, methods, findings, implications, and conclusions. Controversies in CS will continue because many White scholars and some scholars of Color are content with race-based work remaining as one or two "discourses" within a largely pan-Europeanized multiply discursive field. Contrastingly, many scholars of Color and some White scholars understand CS as always already being a racialized-whitened field and, as a

consequence, push for an historically re-organized and transformed race-based field against whiteness's grain.

De facto, the former group of scholars advocate for a continuation of a predominantly-whitened multiply discursive field documented in Pinar et al. (1995), Schubert et al. (1980/2002), and other subsequent compendium volumes and guidebooks (Connelly et al., 2008; He et al., 2015; P. Jackson, 1992; Malewski, 2010; Morris, 2016). In contrast, the latter group of scholars drive at a radically transformed decolonial and race-based field that requires differently organized historical-documentation, theoretical production, empirical conceptualization, and work on critical race-based pedagogies. The latter group *decenters* the whiteness of the U.S.-based field as but one genealogy of curricular-pedagogical praxes instead of the "historic Roman metropolis" to which all roads must lead.

Working through CS' controversy, we think our performed dialogue below differently resonates with notions of many-sided psychoanalytic autobiography in CS from Pinar (1975, 2004) and feminist colleagues (Miller, 2005; Grumet, 1988) along with students (e.g., Casemore, 2008; Jewett, 2008; Whitlock, 2007), especially students who began to read race psychoanalytically through located critical understandings of place. Nonetheless, here we place special reference on the historical complexities and social multidimensionalities of critical race feminist autobiography in Berry (2014), Guillory (2012), and Baszile's (2010) instantiations. Though not conceived of as collective critical race *currere* at the time of the panel presentation, we believe our performative dialogue adds to *currere* and other approaches imbued with the tensions of Europeanized (Britzman, 1998, 2011; Butler, 1990; Freud, 1958a, 1958b) and non-European psychoanalysis (Cheng, 2001; Fanon, 1964/2004; Gaztambide, 2019; Said, 2004).

The Performative Dialogue

At the intersection of CWS and CS, we present the narratives of six CWS scholars, two scholars of Color and four White scholars, who variously respond to, grapple with, and work through our central question: Doesn't your work just recenter whiteness?

Tim

I gave a talk last February that included a discussion of scapegoating rituals performed by White people in order to reassure ourselves of our own whiteness and superiority. Ralph Ellison (1953/1995, 1986) thought that everything from racist humor and stereotypes to lynching were examples of these violent rituals. After the talk, a woman raised her hand and said that as a Black woman, she didn't know what she was supposed to learn from my presentation. She already knew that White people wanted to do violence to her, and where were the experiences of Black people in my work?

I think that this woman's response to my talk is akin to the question organizing this article. That is, doesn't your work just recenter whiteness? And my answer to this question is yes, *this work does re-center whiteness. However, what I cannot say* yes *to is that this work* just *or* only *re-centers whiteness.*

The woman's response to my talk focused on things I had shared about Norman, who was the troubled and intolerant uncle of one of the key participants in my study on race and identity in

rural Wisconsin (Lensmire, 2017a). *When Norman was drunk, he sometimes wept and said that he worried that he might have been the person who assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr. The woman said that my discussion of Norman and scapegoating repeated things that she already knew and had experienced.*

This is a serious point. The decolonial scholar, Katherine McKittrick (2014), in commenting on her own and other's attempts to make sense of slavery using the available "documents and ledgers and logs that narrate the brutalities of this history," worries that these archives simultaneously "give birth to new world blackness as they evacuate life from blackness" (p. 16).

I draw two morals from the story of my February talk. The first is that work on White racial identity is dangerous and that it will often repeat and participate in violence done to people of Color. The second moral is that we need to be aware of and humble about who might then benefit from this work. On the one hand, I have had students and colleagues of Color who have told me that critical whiteness studies work is important to them because it helps them theorize and respond to a violent White supremacist world. On the other hand, that does not mean that our work will always be helpful, and sometimes the violence of this work will overwhelm its possible benefits.

I tend to assume that any story, or discourse, or theory, performs various kinds of violence. Sometimes, this will be in the recounting of violent actions and events, but at all times, there is another kind of violence that has to do with the partialness of any story or theory. To focus on something means to not focus on something else. This seems undeniable to me and also unavoidable. To focus on White racial identity or whiteness in the United States means that we are not focusing on, say, the experiences of people of Color.

Too much work on race in education has focused on persuading White people of the fact of White racism, the fact of violence against oppressed peoples, the fact of White supremacy. While such work is necessary, I think that it might be more helpful—or helpful at least at this moment—to assume that White people already know that they live in an unjust society. What they don't know is how *and* why *this is so, how and why they continue participating, in so many different ways, in the reproduction of this unjust society.*

On the night of that talk, I took a long time responding to that woman's questions, but, boiled down, I said basically two things. First, I said to her that it probably was not my place as a White scholar to try to tell White people about Black people's experiences. I watched as her body seemed to relax as I said this. Second, I said that I wasn't sure that my work would actually help her learn new things. I can't remember if I said that I was sorry that she experienced parts of my presentation as violences against her. I hope that I did.

Jenna

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the question, doesn't your work recenter whiteness, *may be a defense against what's difficult about our work—anxiety over ambivalence, unknown, and complexity in the work (Britzman, 2011). I see the work on White racial identity as an emotional situation, and emotions are difficult to handle, let alone to understand. As Freud (1913/1958b) has taught us, emotions have meaning, and not only emotions have meaning, but emotions are always about someone or something even if we may not always understand. Leaning on Deborah Britzman's (2015) assertion that the more fluid and open you are about your own*

emotional life, the more welcoming you will be about emotional lives of others, my discussion will focus on the exploration of my own emotional world in engaging with the work of White racial identity in a predominantly White institution and state.

According to Freud (1917/1958a), unlike mourning, which has a resolution by declaring the lost object as finished, melancholia resists a separation with the lost object. Therefore, melancholia is a form of grief without end. The contemporary scholar, Anne Anlin Cheng (2001), adapted Freud's (1917/1958a) concept of melancholia to group identifications for Asian-American groups living in America and called it racial melancholia. Cheng (2001) also discusses internalization of a set of dominant norms and ideals often proposed to the Asian-American groups that continually evokes the unattainability of ideals of whiteness, hence, the racial melancholic framework.

Some other scholars have noted that, despite the long history of Asian immigration in this country, the myth of Asian-Americans as forever foreigners is still pervasive (e.g., Takaki, 1989; Tuan, 1998). In trying to locate the trigger points where I am most susceptible in race discussions, teacher candidates' frequent questions about my origin and asking me, "Where are you from? And where are you really *from?" invoke disgust in me. Teacher candidates' repeated comments on how I should be teaching them about different cultures, while seemingly denying their whiteness and making comments like, "It's a human nature to marginalize others as they are pretty sure if they went to Korea there exists Korean privilege," arouses feeling associated with racial harassment—something I knew not what gets under my skin and makes me furious with my students.*

When some teacher candidates confess that I'm easier to understand than most other Asian instructors that they have had previously, I often feel I have been put back into my proper place—that of an Asian foreigner with an accent in a White land. Then I ask myself, "What is being displaced in my emotional response to my students' comments and questions, and what do those comments and questions trigger within me?" An attempt to better understand my seemingly irrational affective response to teacher candidates is encouraged by Freud's (1913/1958b) notion of working through *an experience as I'm putting together pieces of life by symbolizing what may have been forgotten.*

Cheng (2001) proposes that racial melancholia must be understood both as a sign of rejection and as a psychic strategy in response to the rejection. Then, am I interpreting the teacher candidates' questions as an enactment of their rejection to see me as one of them? What do I feel is being enacted in the whiteness work by emotionally responding to the students in ways that I do? What I know for sure is that these exchanges with my students have the power to get inside of me in a most disturbing way and eat into my being.

Through racial melancholia, I begin to see a very blurry glimpse of what teacher candidates' comments and questions may represent for me and what may be intolerable about what they represent—a sense of alienation and difference even though in my mind I am embracing who I am and my heritage. I'm a Korean-American, and my parents immigrated to the U.S. over 40 years ago. My memories of childhood schooling include wanting to speak English with no accent and disliking my appearance as it was very different from that of my peers.

Cheng (2001) proposes that racial melancholia is the inevitable consequence of hegemonic power and racial hierarchies, and reflecting on how I must struggle with and negotiate lost objects demonstrates the incredibly complex dynamics of White racial identity work and the implicatedness of myself as a teacher educator of Color. In my case, the psychic process in which the loved ideal object to which I unconsciously desired to belong was shattered, and this troubled me.

While recognizing that my analysis is at best partial, what I learned is this: rather than asking whether or not the work on critical whiteness re-centers whiteness, perhaps we may wonder more about what can be understood and worked through from various sides of the work on critical whiteness and why we must continue this work.

Erin

In 1993, the African American writer and social critic, Toni Morrison, responded to a question posed by the White journalist, Charlie Rose. Rose asked Morrison what it felt like to be a victim of racism, and Morrison pointedly responded, "That's the wrong question. Don't you understand that the people who do this thing, who practice racism, are bereft?" She continued, "There is something distorted about the psyche. And my feeling is that White people have a very, very serious problem, and they should start thinking about what they can do about it. Take me out of it."

There are two points I wish to make in my response to the question, doesn't your work recenter whiteness? *The first has to do with the question itself. The second has to do with the serious problem that Morrison indicates White people have. I believe the question with which we are engaging, like Charlie Rose's question to Toni Morrison, is the wrong question.*

It's the word whiteness used in the question that worries me the most. It worries me because I do not think we share a common enough understanding of the term whiteness. So, let me be clear. I don't hold whiteness to literally mean "White people" or "structural White supremacy." I imagine whiteness as a normalized way of being, a shared cultural understanding among people who know themselves to be White, a way of being that is predicated upon the on-going oppression of persons of Color globally, nationally, and locally.

In a recent critique of whiteness studies, whiteness was metaphorized as a "poisonous plant" (Ohito & Collective, 2020). Poisonous, yes, I can agree. But whiteness, to me, is not a thing we can objectify and easily locate. It is both within and outside of the consciousness of White people and perpetually shaped by interactions with each other and the world. At one moment it is a conversation between White children playing with an English castle and imaging sailing to Africa to "get land"; the next, it manifests as anti-blackness when a White person, driving down the road, pities the homeless Black people she sees. Whiteness is not as much is as it is evoked.

I studied the ways whiteness is evoked among White children in small interchanges in familial contexts. I found whiteness is evoked when White children walked down a church hallway to learn about God's love for humanity and, on the way, interacted with a bulletin board that, without mentioning people of Color, stated the inferiority of people of Color while, without mentioning White people, stated the godliness and holiness of White people. Whiteness spilled out of picture books and history books and curricular materials, and while those books and materials conjured *whiteness more than they* contained *whiteness, they nonetheless left White children to make sense of its wake.*

I'm not only interested in studying this surreptitious phenomenon but the enigmatic forces that compel it. Why—when whiteness is evoked—do White people run with it? Why don't White people close the books … challenge the systems … question the messages? What drives White people to set the colonial monsters loose and then throw our hands up as if we played no part? What makes our psyches so distorted? Like the others on this panel, I do not believe the answers

to those questions lie in concepts of privilege alone but have more to do with our internal longings and our deepest fears.

In these conversations, I think we sometimes miss our potential to be in relation to each other, to have productive dialogue, because we aren't clear about what we mean. If I translated the question at hand according to my understandings of whiteness, I might ask instead: "Do studies about White peoples' distortions bring into focus the ways that White people—against our apparent own desires—work with other White people in everyday moments to cause harm to people of Color? I think the answer to this question is, "Yes. Yes, they do." And, that is the point: to understand whiteness transacts and why it transacts.

Veronica

I have never been asked, doesn't your work re-center whiteness. *Never. Which leads me to wonder why the question is put to others.*

Perhaps there is a presumption, a willingness to give me, as an African American woman, the benefit of the doubt. Maybe no one imagines that my work would be anything other than critical, *located in the heart of someone who wants to see change, participate in change, to be a path through which change is made possible (me, my body, my experiences, my knowledge, as a path through which change is made possible). Perhaps there is just a way of reading* me*, in this skin, that looks for and anticipates a certain content that is laser-focused on* de-*centering whiteness.*

But maybe that's also about the fact that my experience and my critique are not located only with me. My engagement with whiteness is through the work of Black intellectuals and artists, our collective thinking, theorizing, dreaming, and world-making. My foundation, the scholars I cite, the approach I take, is to ask the question, "How have Black people tried to de-center whiteness?" Perhaps there is less chance of being confused as one who "re-centers whiteness" when I start with the thinking, voices, and experiences of people of Color.

I suppose, "Doesn't your work simply re-center whiteness," could be offered as a genuine question, from a place of real concern that the efforts to dislodge racist and colonial logics are undermined when we focus our scholarship on the very source of much of that oppressive thinking. But on the face of it, that seems an unlikely position for a scholar to take. So, it leads me to wonder what anxieties might be fueling the question. Was something offered or theorized that activated a desire to shut down or debunk the analysis? Did I say something that called into question your sense of yourself in the world or your sense of the world itself?

*I'm also cognizant of what pondering the question activates in me as a person doing this work. I would feel misread, misheard, mis*recognized *if I were on the receiving end of that query. I would wonder, "What did I say or do that makes this person think that my work is about shoring up the tenets of an exploitative and destructive whiteness?" Would I even want to continue if I felt there was a real possibility that it could be perceived as part of the problem rather than part of the solution?*

In short, I'd want to know the "why" of the question—to know more about the motivation of the particular person *who offered the question—which suggests to me that, at the heart, the question really is (or perhaps, could be) about relationships. So, the best reply I can imagine now is simply to ask, "Why do you ask the question?" Maybe that follow up could build a bridge upon which the questioner and I could begin a dialogue.*

To my White colleagues and friends who are shoulder to shoulder in this work, I am reminded of the now almost apocryphal exchange between Malcolm X and a young White attendee at one of his lectures (Columbia U). Excited and fired up to help after hearing Bro. Malcolm speak, she asks, "What can I do [to help]?" His response, which was heard by young White liberals everywhere: "Go back to your own community" to do anti-racist work. Malcolm was not concerned about re-centering whiteness; he was concerned with creating White allies and activists. Like him, I want to hold a space of hope as we do this work.

There was never a time when whiteness was not in the center. But the work of attacking its strongholds to weaken its foundations should not be seen "re-centering." We who do this work are disrupting the hold whiteness has in our lives. We are freeing our own minds for emancipatory work and joining, partnering, even collaborating with those who are doing the revolutionary work.

Zac

For me, whiteness has never left the center. George Lipsitz (2006) provides the definition of whiteness as "the unmarked category against which difference is constructed ... Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (p. 1). This conception of whiteness, as a conceptual standpoint coupled with material advantage, has come to be the dominant way in which whiteness scholars approach the study of White racial identity.

So, what of the question of "re-centering" whiteness? One might start with a temporal argument: when was whiteness not at the "center," and what is new or unique about present work that calls for it to not be "re-centered?" We could thus answer a question of "re-centering" whiteness with an historical inquiry: when was whiteness not at the center of our social experience? Perhaps we could argue over 17th century laws from the Virginia colony that stipulated particular protections for "Christian" slaves and contrasted them with "African" slaves and whether or not whiteness was centered in such policies. But, of course, "Christian" was synonymous with White, and thus a legal system that centers "Christians," in this context, is one that centers "whiteness." We would likely be forced to look to other continents to find a moment when "whiteness" was not the hegemonic racial location before settler colonialism, though Nell Irvin Painter's (2010) work would leave us with little recourse—from the time of the Ancient Greeks, inklings of whiteness as the ideal, as the "unmarked category against which difference is constructed" have been present. And thus, we are left with a significant limitation on the framing of the question of recentering whiteness: if we can't find a moment when whiteness was ever not central to the social organization of the modern world, why would we be concerned about notions of "re" centering what has never left the center?

From my perspective, recentering whiteness is a misnomer—it seeks to address a tension that is real but locates it inaccurately, and thus, the critique becomes absurd. Having been engaged in the field of whiteness studies in education for a while now, I have become accustomed to hearing questions of whether my work "re-centers" whiteness. What I actually think such questions are concerned with is largely to do with who is offering a particular analysis of whiteness. Roediger (2007) was concerned about this almost immediately after his book, Wages of Whiteness, *was released and subsequently identified as the seminal text in the new interdisciplinary field of whiteness studies. Roediger (1998) was explicit in his rejection of this characterization of his work: he pointed to Black scholars from W.E.B. DuBois, to Anna Julia*

Cooper, to Ralph Ellison, to James Baldwin, and many others who had theorized whiteness for decades prior to his work. He even took the step of editing a collection called Black on White *to make clear that his work built on at least a century of analyses of whiteness authored by Black scholars.*

When Black authors or other scholars of Color theorize whiteness, are they centering it? Are they re-centering it, or is the "re" something only White authors are capable of? If White supremacy as a hegemonic global order is so vast that no one individual could ever dismantle it, what are we actually critiquing when we argue a work is "re-centering" whiteness?

Re-centering should be renamed. I think something closer to "invisiblizing" captures more of the actual risks and speaks to more of the actual violence that academic work can do, to further limit what is possible for anti-racism. Invisiblizing whiteness sounds very different from the kinds of work in which my comrades and I engage—because there is no mention of White supremacy and structural racism in work that actually re-centers (that is, invisiblizes) whiteness.

So, when we see studies that make arguments like "80% of teachers …" or "2/3rds of students …" with zero engagement with race, these *are the moments that are deserving of significant criticism for recapitulating to and invisiblizing whiteness. Work that names White supremacy as the dominant logic of our global order is not "re-centering" whiteness; it is resisting White supremacy as a totalizing system of domination.*

Sam

The question, "doesn't your work re-center whiteness," makes me think of two things. First, I think about the considerable media attention my teaching about whiteness received in 2013. I'd spent the year working with a group of mostly White high school students to study whiteness. The students wrote and produced a play as the culmination of the project. A local newspaper published an article about the production, and a morning radio program got hold of the article. The conservative hosts spent a segment eviscerating the idea that a White teacher and a group of mostly White students would study or create a play about whiteness. They described my teaching as "gross," my students as "disgusting," and concluded that I was a scruffy, gay man trying to destroy America with my teaching (Tanner, 2018). *A few days after the radio segment, a national blog associated with conservative pundit Glenn Beck published a story about the teaching project. The comment section was filled with threats directed towards the students and me. My approach to whiteness pedagogy enraged conservative, White radio hosts, bloggers, and commenters—sent them into hysterics.*

Next, I think about participating in a panel on critical whiteness studies at an academic conference in 2019. I sat in front of the room with two White colleagues, excited about the size of our audience. We each shared talks about our work to create pedagogy informed by a second-wave of critical whiteness studies. I placed a story about my traumatic childhood in relation to the work of one of my White students. The student theorized whiteness in relation to her own history of depression. The intention of my talk, as I said at the time, was to wonder what teachers can learn from and with their students in explorations of whiteness. Indeed, I had been inspired by my student's work to tell and interpret stories from my childhood as a way of understanding how my whiteness was abnormal, chaotic, and weak. I remember thinking that the talk was one of the more powerful ones I've given at an academic conference. At the end of the talk, one of the audience members, a Black scholar, asked the first question. I can't remember exactly how they phrased it,

but it was essentially the question this piece addresses. The room seemed to collectively exhale and nod after the question was asked. I left wondering why my approach to whiteness scholarship—an approach that attempts to make the history of white supremacy and contemporary evocations of whiteness visible to White people—seemed to create anxiety for some members of that academic audience. They seemed so worried about a White person talking openly about whiteness.

In the stories above, I was surprised that such different audiences, conservatives and critical scholars of Color, had similar responses to my work. They both seemed to share the conviction that I shouldn't be talking, writing, teaching, or thinking about whiteness. Maybe these responses shouldn't be surprising to me. My work is guided by The Reverend Thandeka's (1999) research. Thandeka (1999) claimed that: "whenever the content of this White racial image is exposed, White self-consciousness can feel shame—and rage" (p. 26). In other words, the act of centering and consciously confronting *whiteness is extremely difficult for many White people and often results in violence and harm. This idea is useful in thinking about the reaction to my work by the White radio hosts or blog commenters. Thandeka is less helpful in understanding the anxiety of the Black scholar, other than they might have been so accustomed to White people who center whiteness* without *consciously confronting, or they might want to drive White grapplings with White identity back underground, to silence.*

My experience in improv theater deeply informs my work as a teacher and scholar. I've spent years training performers to work without scripts. It seems to me that there is something almost scripted about the question being considered in this piece. I wonder if the unscripted nature of the sort of whiteness work described here creates similar apprehension, in part, because it doesn't follow more familiar patterns of anti-racism. Put differently, there is little precedent for White people consciously and openly confronting whiteness with criticality in teaching or educational research, while the usual script is one about White silence.

So does my research just re-center whiteness? I'd remove the reductive word "just" from that question and say that yes, such research does center whiteness. But, borrowing from the improvisational ethic of "yes, and," I'd add an "and" to my response. I'd say yes, and consciously and critically confronting whiteness provides one direction for White people to resist and disrupt White supremacy in our work and living. Of anti-racism, DuBois (1968/1997) wrote that "simple knowledge" will not "reform the world," and instead, people "must be changed by influencing folkways, habits, customs and subconscious deeds" (p. 222). I suspect that on some level White people know they (we) are White in a White supremacist society and have advantages, privileges. They (we) are complicit in the death and destruction of people of Color. I worry more is needed to understand and transform the folkways, habits, customs, and subconscious deeds that influence the way White folks act. I also worry that the apprehension in the question considered in this article can obstruct conscious and critical confrontations with whiteness and, in such a way, affirm White supremacy.

Convolutions, Through-lines, Unresolved

Our grapplings uncover significant convolutions—complex tension-filled coils implicating epistemological incongruity, ontological paradox, and axiological entanglement—pervading anti-racist work and White subjectifications doing this work. Our working through the responses above, along with our own experiences, readings, desires and longings, dreams and nightmares, and day-to-day beings have led us to emergently and subjunctively read the convolutions below as thematic through-lines, *unresolved*.

Epistemological Incongruity

Epistemological incongruency implicates positionality, unintelligibility, and incommensurability, providing through-lines in the dialogue. Veronica, an African-American woman CWS scholar, states that she has never previously been met with the insinuation that her whiteness work recenters whiteness and ascribes such to the possibility of a perception that her African American *skin* by default positions her as *laser-focused on decentering whiteness*. Sam, a White man engaged in anti-racist teaching and research, in turn, recounts a very different reaction to his work on whiteness during a CWS panel at a CS conference where a Black scholar questioned whether in fact his work on whiteness was re-centering whiteness, whereafter he left wondering why the audience seemed so worried about a White person talking openly about whiteness. Of course, it is incorrect to assume that resistance to anti-racist work conducted by White people stems exclusively from people of Color. On the contrary, in the experience of Tim, Jim, and Pauli, some of the most vocal resistance to anti-racist work conducted by White people often emanates from other White people who regard themselves as liberal, non-racist, colorblind, and even critical anti-racists and who on such grounds either deem anti-racist work unnecessary or otherwise experience other Whites' racialized narratives as transgressing correct, racialized consciousness and, therefore, violating "white middle-class moral goodness" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 5). This said, significantly, both Veronica and Sam claim to ground their work in prior Black scholarship, and yet their engagement with whiteness evokes very different reactions across racial lines ranging from unquestioning acceptance to dismissive suspicion.

The positioning of anti-racist work in CWS or CS, especially regarding who is deemed to possess epistemic authority and, on such grounds, who is granted right of utterance, is determined less by ideological affinity and more by the racial collective that the scholar embodies (Ellison, 1953/1995, 1986; Fanon, 1952/1967) relative to shared prior racial experiences. Consequently, racialized epistemic authority and right of utterance involves much more than ideological alliances or citational practices, irrespective of how deeply White scholars have read and embedded their work in Black anti-racist traditions or that the category *White people* is a heterogeneous, social-identitarian agglomeration often contingent on place and demographic context (Badenhorst, 2019; Jupp, 2013; Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Winddance Twine & Gallagher, 2008). At issue is relational trust across racial lines demarcated by skin—a racial-relational *mistrust* experienced by many scholars of Color; a suspicion that representations of people of Color are being used, to quote bell hooks (2015), as little more than "spice that can liven up the dish that is mainstream white culture" (p. 14). Mistrust of White scholars by Black and Brown peoples is amplified by the recursive tendency of whiteness to at times reinscribe itself in progressive White discourses through disingenuous forms of White anti-racism (Hook, 2011) that foreground self-centered

disavowals of racism, self-promotion, and supposed benevolence and heroism as narcissist badges of anti-racism (Badenhorst, 2021; Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Matias, 2016).

Furthermore, vast is the epistemic gulf that separates what people of Color and Whites actually know about each other. As demonstrated by Roediger (1998) and Watson (2015), the Black anti-racist archive reveals profound insight into whiteness in contrast to the habitus of White subjectivity for which actively choosing not to know has historically comprised a viable historic epistemology with contemporary reach. Simultaneously, CWS work, incorporative of its pedagogical analytic arc (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Lensmire et al., 2013; Shim, 2018, 2020), when conducted by White scholars, is often forthrightly dismissed by Black and Brown scholars as essentialized *non-performative*, *White-on-White pontificating* (Ahmed, 2006; L. M. Jackson, 2019; Sheets Hernández, 2000). Such reaction, in particular, leaves White people earnestly desiring to engage in anti-racism work and solidarity between the proverbial rock-and-a-hard place of either guilt by association or non-engagement and creates a *damned if I speak, damned if I don't* quandary.

Finally, the people of Color/White epistemic gulf ensures that discourses across racial lines are often experienced as unintelligible, so eliminating both the trope of *dialog* and transmissive educational approaches as go-to, cure-all humanist panaceas, and further reifying an interracial incommensurability alluded to so hauntingly by Fanon (1952/1967) and also recounted recently by Matias (2016). At its heart, such interracial incommensurability is not one of ontological "genetics"—as scientifically discredited White supremacist eugenic pseudo-science claims—but rather of epistemology, of how and what we come to *know* based on racialized differences in experience. Such epistemological fissure and the divisive manner in which it grounds racialized identities has so far proven extremely difficult to navigate in curricular contexts (Miller & Tanner, 2019) and, furthermore, negates opportunity for gender-type (Butler, 1990) transgressive transracial identity viscosity attempted by, among others, Jessica Krug, Rachel Dolezal, and Grey Owl. And, yet, paradoxically, the epistemological rather than ontological nature of such rift begs a larger enduring question: Can anyone lay claim to a universally guaranteed positionality, or are positionalities forged within crises and struggles? As White subjectivizations in CWS and CS scholars, we came to understand that our positionalities are in no way guaranteed, and instead, to the contrary, we necessarily work through an epistemological incongruency, one that must continually instantiate unintelligibility and incommensurability.

Ontological Paradox

Ontological paradoxes in the social structure of the psyche provide through lines in the dialogue. If our racialized experiences inform what we know as a collective embodiment, our *feeling* responses to such experiences serve as the experiential nexus between the domains of self and social, personal and political. After all, raced skin comes charged with a range of accompanying feelings and emotions (Ahmed, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Matias, 2016) that either connect or estrange us in relation to others. In their accounts, several authors report either experiencing adverse feelings and emotions in response to their work on whiteness or becoming aware that it was in fact their work on whiteness that was evoking feelings of anxiety and trauma in others. For instance, Tim—a White male CWS scholar who often works in CS forums—reports on an interracial encounter during an academic conference when a Black woman audience

participant reported feeling his talk to be violent. Then, following his response, he observes, *I watched as her body seemed to relax as I said this.*

A complex array of feelings/emotions are both constitutive of and relevant to White anti-racist work in CWS and CS require deeper analysis. Jenna, in turn, identifies anti-racist work informed by psychoanalysis as essential to her coping and survival as a Korean-American teacher educator working at a predominantly White institution in a mostly conservative state. Here, she often experiences being Othered by her White teacher candidates in a manner that leaves her feeling alienated and put back into her *proper place—that of an Asian foreigner with an accent in a White land*. She continues: *What I know for sure is that these exchanges with my students have the power to get inside of me in a most disturbing way and eat into my being*. In response, she strategically mobilizes Cheng's (2001) racialized melancholia rereading of Freud (1917/1958) to make relative sense of her painful feelings and emotions that represent the paradox of racism against her, comprising the very bedrock of her racial identity.

The significance of the psyche for anti-racist work continues to prove especially important in the account of Tim who complicates the oversimplified view of Whites as essentially race-evasive when he notes:

> *White people already know that they live in an unjust society. What they don't know is how and why this is so, how and why they continue participating, in so many different ways, in the reproduction of this unjust society.*

Likewise, Erin, a White female teacher educator, poses a number of provocative questions that further uncover the psycho-affective *enigmatic forces* underlying whiteness:

> *Why—when whiteness is evoked—do White people run with it? Why don't White people close the books ... challenge the systems ... question the messages? What drives White people to set the colonial monsters loose and then throw our hands up as if we played no part? What makes our psyches so distorted?*

Responses so far presented indicate a key ontological reality, namely, the social structuring via affect of the human psyche, and underscore the need for deeper anti-racist psychoanalytic scrutiny of whiteness as a complex and violence-inflicting social-identitarian phenomenon (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Lensmire, 2017b; Watson, 2015). Of course, in spite of the emergence of a sophisticated body of redirected anti-racist and decolonizing psychoanalytic work (Cheng, 2001; Fanon, 1952/1967, 1963/2004; Hook, 2011; Matias, 2016; Shim, 2018, 2020), psychoanalysis continues to be dismissed as a colonialist, racist project (Brickman, 2018). Additionally, contra anti-racist thinkers like Fanon (1952/1967, 1963/2004) and Baldwin (1962, 1998), criticisms of more contemporary incarnations of psychoanalysis in relation to work on race and racism have sought to devalue the idea of psychoanalytic self-transformative work as antithetical to work focused on societal, structural, and institutional change, implying that a focus on the *personal* distracts from the *public*. Bearing this in mind, why does the unrealistic bifurcation between self and social persist and especially so in relation to whiteness-related work?

This reaction may partly relate to the all-too-easy means whereby some Whites use CWS- or CS-related venues to resort to autobiographical cul-de-sac confessions of racialized shame and guilt (Bonnett, 1997). Such confessions ultimately leave the unreasonable onus of emotional appeasement on the shoulders of Black and Brown peoples desiring to avert further puppy cries

for acceptance and validation stemming from White people's battle with a fear of abandonment and desire to belong (Lensmire, 2017b). Clearly, here, CWS pedagogical moment's (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b; Lensmire et al., 2013; Shim, 2018, 2020) goal of actively dismantling White supremacy, racism, and anti-blackness is a helpful step away from White privilege confessional piety and "allyship" toward ongoing self-social inner-outer psychoanalytic work.

White supremacy, racism, and anti-blackness are violent phenomena fueled by both public and psychic performances of whiteness that cannot be undone by mere passive acknowledgement or confession of White privilege (Lensmire et al., 2013). Crucially, the social structure of the psyche is a key ontological constituent of human being, albeit an ontology at tension relative to self/social bifurcation, the "variety of pathways" (Bonnett, 2000, p. 114) inhering anti-racism work, and subsequent "dilemma" as intrinsic to relationally-strained anti-racist debate (p. 145).

Axiological Entanglement

Axiological entanglement also provides through-lines in the dialogue. Taking into account the incongruent nature of how and what we come to *know* based on racialized differences in experience, as well as the reality that humans across racial lines share an ontological socially structured psyche that is nevertheless bifurcated and contested along the paradox of a self-social binary in anti-racism work, the possibility of alliance-oriented, anti-racist solidarity and work across racial lines becomes an open question—one pertinent to CWS, CS, and related White anti-racist scholars and activists.

While White participation in #BlackLivesMatter protests surged in the summer of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, Black suspicions regarding White motives abound (see, for instance, Fowler, 2020). Such suspicion also clearly persists in relation to the work of White anti-racist scholars (Ahmed, 2006; L. M. Jackson, 2019; Sheets Hernández, 2000) where a perception that CWS or critical CS work "recenters" whiteness endures in spite of the reality that this scholarship is characteristically heterogenous (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2021a, 2021b). Such perception is intimately related to the aforementioned epistemological incongruity and ontological paradox and can be read into a set of questions tendered by Zac, a White male CWS scholar: *When Black authors or other scholars of Color theorize whiteness, are they centering it? Are they re-centering it, or is the "re" something only White authors are capable of?* Zac insightfully goes on to recognize that whiteness *has never left the center* and instead proposes *invisiblizing* as a more accurate concern relating to an active attempt to obscure and disguise White supremacy and structural racism as extensions of capitalism (Casey, 2016). Bearing in mind that the White psyche itself is structured with internalized racist scaffolding deeply embedded in the invisible realm of the unconscious, the same realm occupied by other capitalist desires of consumption, does such reality perhaps further negate the possibility for durable, abiding, interracial, anti-racist alliance and solidarity?

Fiedler (1963)—referring to White subjectivity and echoing Baldwin (1962, 1998), Memmi (1957/1967), and Morrison (1992)—avers that, for the slim possibility of racial conciliation to commence, "it is with the projection of our rejected self, which we have called 'Negro,' that we must be reconciled" (para. 35). The desire for interracial relationship, alliance, and solidarity is, therefore, a deeply nuanced and fraught fantasy in which White subjectifications' "impaired core sense of self" (Thandeka, 1999, p. 127) is implicated beyond anything multicultural education with its well-intentioned yet limited listen-talk-and-hold-hands approach has hitherto

recognized. The racial divide is a relational divide that cuts deeply, historically, and presently across the psyche, and White people must confront their own inability to simply "heal" it with so-called good faith or, its converse equivalent, maudlin sentimentality (Cheng, 2001).

White subjectivizations cut the historical sociogenic lesion with an unspeakable ontic, epistemic, and axiological White gaze in colonial genocide, massacres, and all manner of ongoing unforgivable crimes too many to fathom (e.g., Fanon, 1963/2004; Yancy, 2017). Nonetheless, all the while contradictorily and hypocritically, Oedipal White subjectivizations have also disfigured and dehumanized themselves (e.g., Douglass, 1845/1982; Thandeka, 1999), historically *blinding* themselves, gouging their own eyes out and violating their lineages in a sadistic ritual understood by Whites as virtue (Fanon, 1963/2004; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002; Matias, 2016). We need to see White subjectivizations' rituals as inextricably linked to the relentless machineries of capital and greed (Casey, 2016; Echeverría, 2010/2016; Jupp et al., 2022; Scheurich, in press) while impossibly desiring union (Coetzee, 1980/1999), often blithely referred to as White allyship.

Of course, a profound and problematic ethical impossibility also underlies the idea of *White people healing themselves* from psychic pathologies that harm others and themselves. On a superficial level less mindful of interest convergence (Bell, 1980), such initiative may appear shamelessly self-serving. Yet, at a more fundamental level, the excavation and renovation of White psyche in anti-racist work is dangerous in that it possesses the dire potential of hurting peoples of Color. Tim provides us with a prescient caution:

> *Work on White racial identity is dangerous … we need to be aware of and humble about who might then benefit from this work. On the one hand, I have had students and colleagues of Color who have told me that critical whiteness studies work is important to them because it helps them theorize and respond to a violent White supremacist world. On the other hand, that does not mean that our work will always be helpful, and sometimes the violence of this work will overwhelm its possible benefits.*

Perhaps the possibility of greater, alliance-oriented, anti-racism work lays cocooned in an insight offered by Veronica who paints an alluring image of what such interracial *embrace* may look like. Consequently, it is only appropriate that this section draws to an end with her poignant articulation:

> *To my White colleagues and friends who are shoulder to shoulder in this work, I am reminded of the now almost apocryphal exchange between Malcolm X and a young White attendee at one of his lectures (Columbia U). Excited and fired up to help after hearing Bro. Malcolm speak, she asks, "What can I do [to help]?" His response, which was heard by young white liberals everywhere: "Go back to your own community" to do anti-racist work. Malcolm was not concerned about re-centering whiteness; he was concerned with creating white allies and activists. Like him, I want to hold a space of hope as we do this work, that we will find a language that can be critical of the role that whiteness has played in this world while offering new possibilities for anti-racist identities among people who identify as white.*

Malcolm X's refrain, *Go back to your own community*, remains one, overarching, contemporary concern of work interrogating whiteness still necessary in CWS or CS work, undeniably built into

both Black and White authors' attempts to intervene on White psyches. Here we find the impossibilities of White allyship, embedded within alliance-oriented CWS and CS.

The Fallen Impossibilities of White Allyship

The foregoing performative dialogue and its discussion presented the complex, nuanced, narrativized subjectivization of six scholars at the intersections of CWS and CS, responding to the central question: Doesn't your work just re-center whiteness? We grappled with and worked through contortions, rather than providing "answers," "solutions," "implications," or other absurdities tied to instrumentalist understandings of social or education sciences, always-already-dyed-in-the-wool with whiteness and whitened cognitions to begin with.

Via contortions, we found only epistemological incongruencies, ontological paradoxes, and axiological entanglements that emerged as we worked through and attempted to perform whiteness pedagogies in CWS and CS, two disciplines emblematizing the legion of disciplinary machineries differently instantiating ongoing whiteness shot-through, imbricated, constituted in doing and thinking. Indicted in the subtitle of this piece, we worked through our aspirations to perform alliance-oriented anti-racism, directly taking on notions of facile White allyship, and instead we zero in on the concept's fallen impossibilities.

White allyship in anti-racism remains an unresolved tension and open question across CWS, CS, whitened disciplines, and even social movements within larger, anti-racist alliances with intellectuals and activists. At its heart, the racial divide is incommensurable and complicated by contorted, blinded Oedipal White subjectivizations, desires, and sentimental fantasies. Paradoxically, our acknowledgement of the convolutions articulating the fallen impossibility of White allyship might seem to postpone or negate the alliance-oriented work embodied in our performative dialogue. To the contrary, we find our acknowledgement as absolutely fundamental to the authentic, ongoing, situated, alliance-oriented anti-racism*s*, specific *topoi* of anti-racism*s*, rhizomatic, impossible to regulate yet whose grand critical arc is unifying against whiteness, unraveling whiteness, and as Jupp et al. (2022), Casey (2016), Kendi (2019), and Scheurich (in press) insist, *destroying capital*.

A rejoinder, articulating analectic subjectivizations, may be Sylvia Wynter's (1995, 2003) epochal vision—closely aligned to that of Fanon (1963/2004)—centering on the invention of a *new* human:

> a shattering of the imperial concept of Humanity based on the ideal of White Man … to reconceptualize it not by providing a new definition or image but by starting with the question: What does it mean to be Human? (Mignolo, 2015, pp. 121–122)

Ironically, initiating greater movement towards this vision would require enhanced non-disciplinary collaboration*s* between CRT, CWS, CS, decolonial, and other race-critical traditions—a requirement that reintroduces the necessary acknowledgement of persistent convolutions or racial-relational chasms and re-exposes the inadequacies of oversimple assumptions of White allyship, contorting yet again.

Via the convolutions—epistemic incongruity, ontological paradox, and axiological entanglements—emerging from the dialogue, White allyship is a fallen and impossible concept, yet such acknowledgement underscores the need for tentative, subjunctive, modest, situated,

process-oriented, locally-meaningful, and psychoanalytic White anti-racist scholarship and activism grounded in ongoing, unrelenting self-social criticism that might result in transformative praxes *in situ*. Such praxes will prove messy, risky, emotionally exhausting, recursive, (im)possible, with *no* identity-position guarantees.

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"Weaving an Otherwise" Through Black Lives Mattering in U.S. Schools
A Book Review

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> We are responsible for doing whatever we can to make this world into the best one for everyone by increasing education, teaching acceptance, and demanding diversity in voice and perspective across contexts.
>
> (Williams, 2022, p. 70)

> But he also writes … about the capacity of Blacks, in the absence of curricula designed to affirm Black life, to create the spaces and the institutions necessary to do so.
>
> (Spence, 2022, p. 203)

B*LACK LIVES MATTER IN U.S. SCHOOLS*, edited by Boni Wozolek (2022), brings together present-day thinkers and curriculum theorizers, including Walter Gershon, Roland Mitchell, Denise Taliaferro Baszile and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, to make meaning of the Movement for Black Lives in the polyvocal curricula of U.S. schools from K-12 through higher education. Taking curriculum seriously, the volume considers "the many ways we learn from the presences and absences of Black lives across forms of curriculum—formal, enacted, hidden and null—and the way that such lessons have impacted socio-political and cultural norms and values" (Wozolek, 2022, p. 3). While the book primarily focuses on forms of curricula within schools, it also acknowledges and engages curricula that exist outside of formal schooling, like media coverage and representation of the Black Lives Matter movement, Hurricane Katrina, and Black people in general. In taking Black lives seriously—as well as the resonances of their presences and absences across curricula—this volume allows readers and scholars tied up in the Movement for Black Lives to gain a sense of the curricular implications of these absences, presences, and half-truths.

The authors, perhaps intentionally, do not delve into the concrete actions necessary to bring a curriculum of this magnitude to the fore in U.S. schools. Practically speaking, the present violence enacted through racist, homophobic, and transphobic laws and book bans makes it difficult to see where any inroads may be made in K-12 schools in a practical sense. Simultaneously, the curriculum of violence enacted against Black lives on college campuses

includes the erasure, devaluation, and bastardization of Black theory, white flight in the wake of protests, and defunding all levels of education. Readers should not expect a "how to" guide for implementing a curriculum of Black life mattering in schools. Instead, the authors theorize a polyvocal curriculum of Black life mattering and inspire generative thinking around ways to organize and operationalize Black life mattering in schools. For readers yearning for curricula that reflect and celebrate the beauty, genius, and innocence of Black life, this book is a bittersweet reminder that the urgency to actualize this future is often met by resistance.

Leaning on the works of Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Pauli Murray, Sylvia Wynter, Marimba, and other Black scholars, the authors offer many examples of the historical and current ways Black life does not (yet) matter in U.S. schools, but they also acknowledge, through an afro-realist lens, that Black lives have always mattered to Black people. Theorizing and historicizing Black life in the curriculum is not a new project, but it is still a pressing one.

Do Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools?

As Wozolek (2022) explains in the introduction,

> the purpose of this book is to think critically about how such violence is tangled up in systems of schooling (Nespor, 1997) while considering the curricular implications of what it would mean for Black lives to *actually* matter in schools. (p. 2, emphasis in original)

The urgency of the text comes to a field that has been engaged in colorblind and neoliberal logics resulting in an entrepreneurial model of educational leadership (Rigby, 2014). Although the entrepreneurial model was meant to spur innovation and close achievement gaps, time has revealed a reliance on the same anti-Black foundation as prior leadership models and a failure to address the ways "schooling normalizes the dehumanization of all bodies outside of the white cis-hetero patriarchy" (Wozolek, 2022, p. 12). Rather than develop innovative ways to realize educational equity for all students, the entrepreneurial model has led to a foreclosed understanding of curriculum that detaches it from history, geography, and socio-political entanglements. Recent calls to teach history without reference to certain parts of history, to teach reading without representation from certain groups, and to teach science without reference to widely held and accepted theories on evolution and climate change are borne from a misguided belief that young people can or should learn how to be "good" citizens without grappling with socio-historical contexts or the value and challenges of living in a diverse society. And what realities has this line of logic written? The quote leading into Sherick A. Hughes's essay in the volume illuminates the nonsensical "TRUE FACTS" that characterize anti-Black sentiment in the current era: "ANY black that feels whites have it over them HAS to be a racist. That's a whole lot of blacks!" (Bobby, 2018, as cited in Hughes, 2022, p. 23, emphasis in original).

To counter school curricula that have led to the devaluation and dehumanization of Black life, Wozolek suggests a need to understand the "polyvocal curricula" beyond the bounds of that which is explicitly taught in classrooms and a need to grapple with "how, what, and when schools teach about Black lives" (p. 5). She asks,

> What does it mean for a child to be metaphorically lynched or choked through the schoolroom, as scholars like Du Bois (1926) and Woodson (1933) have described? As such

> how does the everyday choking away (Du Bois, 1926) of a child's way of being and knowing contribute to larger sociocultural violence against people of color? (Wozolek, 2022, p. 12)

The essays in *Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools* weave together to create a curriculum of refusal that confronts the neoliberal paradox in academia. Museus and Wang (2022) offer an apt framework for this review, posing that research seeking to refuse neoliberal logics needs to attend to issues of reflexivity, responsibility, and relationships. The remainder of this review considers *Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools* through this framework.

Reflexivity, Responsibility, and Relationships

The framework Museus and Wang (2022) present for refusing neoliberal logics in research design seeks to push researchers to move away from "tangible systemic violence that harms real lives in the communities that they love" (p. 16). The authors present three characteristics of research necessary to achieve this distance: seeing reflexivity as transformative, prioritizing responsibility to communities, and centering relationships to cultivate solidarity in and through research.

Seeing reflexivity as transformative means moving beyond reflexivity that simply "fesses up" to the biases researchers bring to their research and moving toward viewing one's positionality in relation to the community in which they work and research. Wozolek takes this on explicitly in the introduction, sharing her desire to make space for Black scholars speak for themselves in the volume. In addition to Wozolek in the introduction, several chapter authors also engage in transformative reflexivity as they shake off anti-Black ideologies that had taken hold in their own practices.

By prioritizing responsibility to our communities, Museus and Wang (2022) urge researchers to ask, "What is the impact you hope to see? With whom do you want to experience these outcomes? What are the implications of the research for your communities, the Indigenous land you inhabit, and the waterways that surround it?" (p. 25). These questions lead researchers away from the practices of doing research for the sake of self (i.e., publications and presentations that serve only the length of one's CV) and toward conducting research for the sake of the community. In this vein, essays written by Ngozi Williams, a university student, and Cluny Lavache, a high school coprincipal, bring necessary community perspectives to the text, helping to move toward the community it hopes to impact. In another essay, Roland Mitchell explores the ways his work as a scholar can *help fortify*, but not solely sustain, the levees that hold back the waters of racism.

Finally, Museus and Wang (2022) suggest researchers "consider how the research process … will (re)shape your relationship with those around you" (p. 25) and "construct the research process so that a central outcome is to deepen your relationships with those around you, the generations who came before and will come after you within your communities, and your environment" (p. 26). In taking a polyvocal curriculum approach, Wozolek considers the ways the *Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools* text as a whole reshapes our relationship with the curriculum of Black lives (not yet) mattering in schools. I now turn this review toward the individual essays, leaning on the ways the authors' works do and do not engage in a curriculum of refusal through reflexivity, responsibility, and relationships. I also consider how the text as a whole engages "in a

continuous struggle with academia's deeply embedded assumptions about what constitutes impact, … [refuses] taken for granted but unnecessary assumptions, … and [works] to understand how [Black] collective communities define desirable impact" (Museus & Wang, 2022, p. 25).

Weaving an Otherwise of Black Life Mattering

In the first essay, Sherick Hughes (2022) breaks down three often used arguments against the Black Lives Matter movement as quoted by an Amazon customer by the name of "Bobby" in their review of a White Lives Matter t-shirt that is no longer for sale on the site. Bobby claimed the White Lives Matter t-shirts would help "white people to look at the TRUE FACTS": (1) "more whites are killed by police than Blacks," (2) "blacks kill more police annually than police kill Blacks," and (3) that all lives matter (Hughes, 2022, p. 23). Using an equity literate fact-checking framework, Hughes takes on the responsibility to have a nuanced conversation about the evidence supporting the three claims. Hughes presents triangulated evidence showing that U.S. society and schools operate in ways that make clear that Black lives do not matter as much as white lives. The work is thorough, presenting 33 findings from 10 sources showing evidence to support and counter Bobby's claims. Hughes concludes with a discussion of curriculum as racialized text at historically and predominantly white institutions (HPWIs) helping readers understand how "true facts" like those presented by Bobby are allowed to permeate the curriculum unchecked when schools (a) don't call "into question how biased observers can easily misinterpret race-related data," (b) aren't transparent about "various forms of race-related data, including how misinterpretations of data can normalize texts of a hidden curriculum of racial inequity," and (c) don't revisit "how racial epistemologies are hidden within the HPWI curriculum at large" (Hughes, 2022, pp. 48–9). My biggest challenge with Hughes' essay is the number of unanswered questions remaining about the data, which Hughes acknowledges results from the disaggregated nature of the data sources. Specifically, I am left wondering how and whether gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status of both victims and those convicted of crimes matters and how stratifications of Blackness play out in the curricula of Black life not mattering as much as white lives.

Hughes writes the chapter to "the *chronic egalitarians* who have goals of monitoring their own reactions and behaviors in an effort to root out stereotypes and feelings that counter their espoused values" (p. 25). In naming this audience, Hughes attends to transformative reflexivity in the Museus and Wang (2022) framework. Hughes wants readers to consider the facts he presents and to develop four abilities in relation to bias, discrimination, and inequity, (1) recognize their forms, (2) respond thoughtfully, (3) redress the situation through studying how social change happens, and (4) cultivate and sustain communities (Hughes, 2022, pp. 25–26). Hughes proposes equity literate fact-checking to be used within a curriculum of refusal of neoliberal logics and acknowledges that refusal requires one to grapple with nuance and "facts" that don't always support one's cause. Hughes further urges educators to use the equity literate fact-checking framework in other fact-checking endeavors to help consider both the individual and collective responsibilities they have in addressing inequities.

The inclusion of Ngozi Williams's (2022) essay in the volume is an example of attending the relationships with those members of the community who are the subjects of research. Williams writes not as a scholar, but as a member of the community who has experienced a curriculum of anti-Blackness. Williams's words illustrate the tragic internalization among Black women of the insidious curriculum against Black lives that exists in the media and seeps into U.S. schools.

Williams reflects on her own "rejection of my Blackness" in her youth and opens to a critique of beauty standards as presented in the media that reinforce anti-Blackness. As an example, Williams highlights the persistent messaging through *Essence* magazine toward assimilationist beauty standards, while neglecting more pressing health challenges, like obesity, maternal mortality, and diabetes faced by members of the Black community at disproportionate rates. Even media meant to promote Black lives—to show Black lives mattering—operate in ways to reproduce white beauty standards, corroborating the curriculum against Black lives by adopting and reproducing the logic that Black life mattering has a positive correlation with white assimilation. Williams concludes, "Instead of focusing on necessary health care and attempting to right the structural wrong done to Black people by the health care industry, the focus is on aesthetic" (p. 64). Williams's essay demonstrates in vivid detail the ways a curriculum of Black life not mattering plays out in the lived experiences of Black people and specifically Black women and girls as self-inflicted violence of rejection and internalized racism.

By including Williams's chapter, Wozolek makes space for members of the community to theorize their own experience. The authors' detour from formal school curricula might indicate to readers the ways that people are attuned to polyvocal curricula outside of schools. As I concluded the chapter, I wondered why Williams focused on the curricula outside of schools rather than what she experienced inside of schools. Further, I wondered about the salience of school curricula in relation to outside of school curricula and how the two are in conversation with one another. This chapter reminds readers that researchers can change the relationship between research and participants to make "space for participants to share what they want from the research" (Museus & Wang, 2022, p. 23).

In his essay, Roland W. Mitchell (2022) invites readers to explore the ways resistance against racism is like a mud levee—perhaps simplistic in its construction, but effective in its purpose. The chapter's framework—rising water, contraflow, and levees—comes from Mitchell's personal history having moved to Louisiana in the summer of 2005, just months before Hurricane Katrina caused disaster in the region. The essay tacks back to 2005 and forth to 2016 when three events—the police killing of Alton Sterling, a 500-year flood, and the retaliatory murder of three East Baton Rouge Police Department (EBRPD) officers by Gavin Eugene Long—resulted in enrollment challenges at Louisiana State University. The focus of the essay, however, is the metaphorical levee constructed by the relationships across members of a community. Mitchell's commitment to building and growing community is inspired by deeply personal reasons, but the acts of engaging with—and being challenged by—the East Baton Rouge and LSU communities show how "the simplicity or substance for which the levee is composed" should not cause people "to overlook a levee's profound strength" (R. W. Mitchell, 2022, p. 78). While the levee represents a refusal against the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural genocide required by assimilation into white logics, the composition of the levee is the source of its strength—a realization Mitchell gets to only after being called to account by a well-intentioned member of the community in 2016. In this essay, Mitchell explores the tension between a predominantly and historically white institution and the majority Black community from which its lush grounds have been erected. The contrast is stark. If one were to travel the mere 9-minute ride north from the LSU campus to Capital Senior High School, they would certainly note the shift from a serene, green campus to a grey, dilapidated, and nearly treeless downtown. Mitchell's essay reminds readers that working in and on a community is not synonymous with working for and with a community, and that the latter is the only way to write new futures.

Considered against the Museus and Wang (2022) framework, Mitchell's essay is deeply reflective of his own work as a scholar and the ways his work has fallen short of respecting the communities his research was intended to serve. Mitchell tells the story of his own transformative reflexivity and, in sharing his experience, provides a model for readers to begin this work as well. Mitchell's chapter further shows readers that transformative reflexivity occurs in conjunction with critical reflection on one's responsibility to the communities they hope to serve and openness to authentic relationships where challenging questions are given space.

Kirsten T. Edwards's (2022) essay, "Black Theory Matters: AntiBlackness, White Logics, and the Limits of Diversity Research Paradigms," is perhaps the strongest call for transformative reflexivity in the volume. Edwards's call for readers and researchers to turn the critical lens on themselves and examine the ways research on Black lives has often still not been *for* Black lives embodies the calls for transformative reflexivity and responsibility in Museus and Wang (2022). On the heels of Mitchell's chapter, Edwards's questioning of the theories scholars lean upon and the questions they ask takes up responsibility to communities where Mitchell left off. Edwards asks,

> Why does higher education scholarship continue to encounter limits/limitations in its ability to positively alter the experiences of people of color on college campuses? Why has the preponderance of literature related to race and justice seemingly produced little to no impact on higher education's colonial project? How might expectations regarding standard research practice within the field inhibit productive lines of inquiry? (p. 95)

Edwards builds a sharp critique against "white theory in black face" (p. 95)—research predicated on white higher education holding validity and value for Black collegians that simultaneously is "ill-equipped to contend with the reverberations of oppression rooted in enslavement and antiBlackness that formed not only the nation, but also its institutions" (p. 97).

Edwards's essay questions the impact of research when said research is founded on theoretical frameworks that uphold white comfort at the expense of Black liberation. The author asks readers to question their responsibility to the communities they research and to take up radical Black thought that "recognizes the revolutionary as opposed to the assimilationist dispositions of Black students" (p. 102). Black theorizing, she claims, must guide the scholarly work in a world where Black lives truly matter.

In "Education as if Black Lives Mattered," Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz, Marcelle Haddix, and Cluny Lavache (2022) directly take on the curriculum against Black lives in K-12 schools. They say,

> An essential design of [the] educational experience is for [Black students] to believe they are without history, that their culture is barbaric and uncivilized, and that the success of Black people is often dependent on their ability to assimilate by accepting and/or adopting European perspectives. (p. 114)

Taking aim at the implicit curriculum of K-12 schools and the deficit beliefs held by educators who enact the curriculum, the authors demand educators take responsibility for why they entered the field of education if not to change patterns of mass incarceration and Black death. Perhaps the most practical suggestions for enacting a curriculum of Black life mattering come from this chapter. The authors suggest educators develop cultural competence, address deficit thinking, and

bring Black voices into literacy as three ways to shift to an enacted curriculum of Black life mattering. Such a curriculum, they explain, should be enacted by a diverse selection of educators. This chapter is important because it begins to operationalize a curriculum of Black life mattering, specifically in literacy, and the characteristics required of an educator to teach such a curriculum. Furthermore, this chapter is co-authored by a school principal who shares in the theorizing around a curriculum of Black life mattering, once again ensuring that the experiences and theories of members of the community are included in the volume in ways that challenge readers to consider their own relationship to the communities they research.

In "Getting Schooled," Walter Gershon (2022) calls up a vision of free and public education that "is essential to any nation or state project that might begin to claim a responsible citizenry, and informed economy, or knowledgeability for its own sake" (p. 133). Gershon argues that engaging this vision will require "deep reflexivity" to "address the inherent hatred of its foundation that continues to be normalized today" (p. 133). The reflexive turn in this chapter brings the everyday violence in the formal and enacted curriculum of U.S. schools into plain view. The curriculum of lying, which characterizes differences as deficits, leads to choking "the ontological and epistemological life out of students of color in school" where they learn "they can't be themselves and be successful in many iterations of schooling, that asking questions will often be considered impertinence, and that to survive one must hold onto multiple versions of self in which one's true self is suppressed" (p. 135).

Here again, the text takes reflexivity as transformative. Gershon explores the relationship between schools and those being schooled and shows how failing to think reflexively about how curricula and practices founded on a history of eugenics and Jim Crow has left Black students open to violence in schools and beyond. Gershon offers no tangible path toward a new future, leaving readers to sit in the discomfort of knowing that there may not be a path toward Black lives mattering in schools as they are constituted today.

David Omotoso Stovall's (2022) chapter takes Gershon's curriculum to Chicago to demonstrate other ways U.S. society teaches that Black lives matter less than other lives. Stovall writes "in the spirit of solidarity and humility" called for in research that fosters relationships in resistance to neoliberalism. Throughout the chapter, Stovall challenges the reader to look again at what they think they know about a city dubbed "Chi-raq." Stovall presents to readers alternative narratives—counter narratives—to help frame the city and its people as a place ripe with curricular opportunities to "study up" (p. 145). The author commits to Black humanity and the right to exist in peace and in place. Stovall closes the chapter with a strong statement of solidarity and hope:

> Our decision to resist the conditions that contain and marginalize us will come in-between and underneath conventional spaces. Let it be known that we are still tired. We are still sick of the unrelenting thirst the state exudes for Black death. After the fires subside we will still be part of loose and well-defined formations that work to claim our humanity and build a world where we are not perpetually in the crosshairs of the state. It is not linear nor will be connected to an explicit white, Western-European, male, cisgendered, heterosexual, Protestant Christian, able-bodied ethic. It is something different. It must be if we expect to get anywhere closer to the things that make us free. (p. 154)

Throughout Stovall's essay, readers are left wondering how someone can love a place and a people that have been so marred by violence the way he clearly does. Stovall's chapter provides a model for contesting deficit narratives about a community through a commitment to centering

relationships, breaking with the individualism of traditional research and neoliberal logics. Stovall also reminds readers that an important part of a movement is the education of the activists. Teachers and teacher educators must work to historicize the racist and patriarchal foundations of education for and with students and to use their cities as a curriculum for Black lives.

In "Letter to Rev. Dr. Pauli," Reagan P. Mitchell (2022) challenges readers to wrestle with the reverberations of absences of queer lives across the "chocolate spectrum." Mitchell intends to *ridicule* the reader—to bother their senses so that they "get in touch with the Black diaspora" (p. 157). Mitchell plays with epiphenomenal time and argues against "rigid verticality in narrative depictions" that make it impossible "to conceive points of simultaneity" (p. 165). Instead, Mitchell engages epiphenomenal praxis through a letter to the ancestor Pauli Murray, to resist "a linear approach to understanding the Black diaspora [that] can silence and leave out voices, perspectives, and experiences" (p. 158). Murray, the recipient of Mitchell's letter, represents a significant absence from the formal curriculum. The Black queer feminist legal scholar was a significant figure during the Civil Rights Era whose accomplishments reverberate into the present, but she has been erased from formal history curriculum in both K-12 and higher educational spaces. Readers will leave this essay feeling the weight of the absence. Indeed, Mitchell successfully ridicules readers to get in touch with the Black diaspora—or at least to become aware of how out of touch we are. When absences allow us to refrain from ridiculing our consciousness, from becoming "uncomfortable with the continued rationalized reformulations of Black lynching, nationally and nationwide" (p. 172), what futures are written and foreclosed in the absences?

The effect of Mitchell's chapter is discomfort with the absence and with the many other absences that readers are forced into knowing *of* and yet do not leave knowing. This chapter calls responsibility into question. Readers leave the chapter being made aware that voices in this community have been decentered, exploited, and erased because they did not play by the neoliberal regime's rules: "You can do equity work, as long as you do it according to the neoliberal regime's rules and help spread the same logics that have decimated and subjugated marginalized communities" (Museus & Wang, 2022, p. 20). Pauli Murray's erasure is evidence of this paradox projected through history and engages readers in questioning how erasure teaches boundaries, specifically for people with historically marginalized identities.

In the final chapter, Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2022) brings present-day context to the fore, answering for readers where exactly a persistent curriculum against Black lives has led us—to democracy in the break and "an ongoing accumulation of Black death" (p. 180). Baszile asks readers to be honest about the state of democracy, both in the U.S. and beyond and to imagine the consequences of either continuing to teach "democracy in the ideal" or "democracy in the break" (p. 181). The passion behind Baszile's words throughout the chapter will draw readers in—she is not impartial to the outcome. Baszile opens the argument asking readers to engage with the question of "who we have become vis-à-vis a curriculum of disremembering" (p. 185). Reading Baszile's engagement with the "technology of forgetting" with Mitchell in the previous chapter is to acknowledge the ways democracy is held hostage because its dream is limited by the subjugation of many. But re-membering is only the first engagement. Baszile then goads readers to engage the history of protest and a narrative of violence that has been one-sided as it casts the actions of Black protesters as violent and recasts the historical violence committed against Black people as though it occurred without actors.

Finally, the chapter closes with a call to

> reckon with … the fact that at any point in time in our histories and our present, when our interests as non-white peoples are addressed because of interest convergence, then we are, by virtue of that fact, working against some other group of people, who have been used in the no-win game of empire building. (p. 190)

In this, she calls readers to take community seriously with an understanding that power has been maintained by pitting the powerless against one another. On the other side of "democracy in the break, already broken, and breaking still," should we be so bold to achieve it, stands people united across time and space because of their shared interest in humanity.

Conclusion

In each of the 11 essays, readers are forced to explore and imagine a curriculum of Black life mattering in new, different, and sometimes uncomfortable ways. The text as a whole successfully engages reflexivity, responsibility, and relationships toward a curriculum of Black life mattering. The central question of the text—what would it mean if Black lives actually mattered in U.S. schools—is material. The authors do not ask readers to simply imagine this future, but to engage it and to go out and work toward it, knowing full well that the path is neither linear nor clear. The authors argue that this work requires scholars, educators, and even students to reflect on their relationship with the work, their responsibility to the communities, and the relationships with the people in those communities.

Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools disrupts the ways we read, re/produce, and live Black lives mattering, which as Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022) suggest, is the best possible outcome of qualitative research methods:

> Qualitative research methods produce, at their best, disruption and then a process of re-warping. They encourage unsettling un/realities through which we can question that which we (think we) have come to know. They remind us of the power of dreaming, of weaving the worlds we need, of demanding for that which the state codifies as excessive, as if excess was a pejorative mode of being. (p. 3)

The proverbial silver lining coming from this discussion are the wins—large and small—resulting from the increased attention to the Black Lives Matter movement and research that takes Black lives mattering seriously. In 2021, the American Federation of Teachers, the United States' largest teacher union, published a resolution, *Making "Black Lives Matter" in our Schools*. This resolution represents a powerful addition to the *policy ecology* (Weaver-Hightower, 2008) and makes way for future policies to incorporate more explicit language regarding the treatment of Black lives and Black bodies in curricula and schools.

Of course, Black lives matter in schools. There has always been a cadre of educators who believed so and worked to write a future where others would also believe so. These educators have likely felt the sting of isolation as they worked toward a future their colleagues actively claimed was already here. To that end, *Black Lives Matter in U.S. Schools* offers these educators a place where the tensions they've felt are acknowledged, affirmed, and, most importantly, regarded seriously.

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