

INTRACTABLE IMPASSE:

DECONSTRUCTING SCHOOL SHOOTINGS BY PHILOSOPHIZING CURRERE

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Abstract:

School shootings seem an intractable impasse. This essay attempts to deconstruct school shootings by philosophizing *currere*. Moving *currere* in a different direction—through philosophy, film and literature—I hope to raise questions, not solve problems. The unthinkable must be thought through although it might not be worked through. This essay attempts to break with traditional academic forms to raise different kinds of questions. Attempting to approach school shootings demands a multidisciplinary detour. Vulgar empiricism in the face of such violence gets us nowhere.

HAMLET: AND THE REST IS SILENCE.

Is it? Will we sit in silence at the horrors that have wrecked our schools? To be blunt the horrors are: Dead children, dead teachers. Orwell: We are the Dead. The impasse that is at hand-- an intractable impasse. School shootings, repetition compulsion, a broken record. No end in sight. How do we approach such a terrible issue? Not head on, but through a detour. Paul Celan's notion of "detour-maps"-- Pierre Joris (2014) explains-- "[point]toward movements the temporal and spatial coordinates. . .could not follow any straight two—or even three—dimensional map" (p. LVIX). To get at an impasse (of horrific violence) demands a detour that does not follow any straight path. No road map will do. There are no maps for this. This is uncharted territory without solutions and yet we must think about and think through this intractable impasse. Approaching violence empirically or literally gets us nowhere. A "detour-map" is such that the very mapping of the map falls to pieces. No mapping, no topology is at hand. The detour that needs to be taken to get at the impasse of school shootings demands a certain distance--a time for thinking through; a space for working through what cannot be worked through or thought through. And yet we must think the unthinkable. The detour taken here is multifaceted and works to disturb silence on such a subject. The subject at-hand is subject to horror. Film is one way to take the detour into horror.

This essay is not about turning a school shooting into a filmic encounter, however. The film--as-signifier points to a certain distance, a detachment and depersonalization necessary; a bypass toward an impossible impasse. Philosophizing *currere* engages a filmic bypass. Vulgar empiricism has gotten us nowhere. Philosophizing *currere* through the lens of film means being estranged, becoming a stranger in and through language. This is not the stranger of Camus—or even Maxine Green's (1973) *Teacher as Stranger*-- this is something stranger—still. *The Center will not hold: Yeats*

SCENE ONE: CAMERA BEGINS TO ROLL

To tell some (one) some (thing) is rather strange. Is it not? A Derridean question: What does it mean to tell some (one) anything

for that matter? The very act of *telling* is a strange institution. Is it a confession? For in the telling words come on their own; what is said is never certain. Derrida (1978) re-marks: “Henceforth, what is called the speaking subject is no longer the person himself, or the person alone, who speaks. The speaking subject discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin that is always already eluded” (p. 178). To whom does one address? And why?

SCENE TWO: THE INSTANT MESSAGE

Instant messaging. What is an instant message? What is the message given in an instant? The *what is*. Quiddity. What is the *what is* of an instant message? An instant message was sent to curriculum theorist Richard Pipan: the confession was at hand. The call: “Richard, I am working on a PhD in philosophy.” Richard’s response: “Don’t get lost in the weeds.” But getting lost is the point after all, is it not? Especially in the weeds. Philosophy lends itself to reason’s Other—to the undoing of everything: self, other, world, reality. Avital Ronell (1991; 2002;2005;2018) has taught me what *periagōgē* means because that is the heart of her work. There are very few philosophers who can do this. In Plato’s *Republic*—Book VII—the phrase turning around appears several times. To be turned around is a kind of psychic movement, or *periagōgē*. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (2012) remark that for Seth Benardete, *periagōgē* “or turn-around. . . [is] the sign of all philosophical thinking” (p. x). Wittgenstein suggests that once one is turned around, one must stay turned around. How?

SCENE THREE: INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE NOT-SO-STRANGE

But living in the not-so-strange institution that is the university, turns what is strange into what is familiar. Uber-jargon kills thought. Vulgar empiricism—especially in the discipline of education—is little more than sloganizing, what Socrates called sophistry. The stultification of thought, the inability to get turned around or stay turned around, makes it impossible to think through anything let alone school shootings. Rather, we need to find a way to turn the conversation around and ask why we continue to witness the cascade of catastrophes that have been happening ever since Columbine. But if we cannot think and cannot get turned around, we can’t even ask

questions. Julie Weber's (2019) *Beyond Columbine: School Violence and the Virtual* suggests that lack of sustained thought is part of the problem.

Curriculum theory—in its Reconceptualized form— is a field that deconstructs the very foundation of institutions that keep scholars in what Max Weber called iron cages. Because the disciplines are so split off-- psychologically and philosophically—we can't see beyond our own iron cage. The discipline of education has been considered the step-sister of the academy, a garbage dump for idiocy. That stereotype is perhaps well-founded: stuck in technical rationality—what Kant (1992) critiqued in *The Conflict of the Faculties*-- knowledge forecloses upon itself. The antagonistic and anti-intellectual attitude toward humanities—within colleges of education-- is quite shocking. That curriculum theorizing is a humanities-based social science goes without saying. And it is this continual antipathy towards us, not only from within colleges of education but also from the university writ large, that makes our work that much more difficult—and yet it gives us things to write about. If we weren't so busy fighting these fights, perhaps we could get to the issues at hand, one being the intractable impasse of school shootings.

Becoming derailed, falling off the rails demands risk-taking, falling into the abyss. Schools have become death-traps; universities are now shooting ranges. Violence beyond the thinkable-- children and teachers are being slaughtered. What is at stake? Everything. To confess that school children and teachers are being slaughtered is speaking truth to power in a world that does not listen. Like the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah—no one listened. The boiling pot from the north was a warning of horrors-to-come. Here and now, however the boiling pot (or the boiling over of gun violence) is not only from the North, but it is also coming from the South, the East and the West. There is No Balm in Gilead, as long as children and teachers are being slaughtered. Artaud's (1988) *Fragments of a Diary from Hell*: Hell is other people (Sartre), the institution(s) of the madhouse, the school and the prison are hell (Foucault). Baudelaire's (1982) *Flowers of Evil*, a poetic rendering of hell. Thomas Mann's (1992) *Doctor Faustus* lives a hellish life, making a deal with the devil. Artaud's (1988) *Theater*

of Cruelty. School shootings—like theaters of war—are today’s hell. Children who are shot end up (sometimes) dying in operating theaters, or they are dead on arrival. These are unthinkable thoughts. I have witnessed bullet-ridden bodies enter the trauma bay. I have seen too much, but there are no words to describe these scenes, the exhaustion of the medical team.

Hell is also losing footing in one’s mind. A school shooting cannot be integrated psychically. It is beyond representation. The feet weep. Rilke (2017)—writing about Rodin—says “when he [Rodin] read about the weeping feet of Nicholas the Third, he realized that these were such feet, that there was a weeping which was everywhere” (pp. 26-27). Blinded by tears of-con-fusion, sliding into and out of, and putting to the test, the very thing that holds psyche together - one dead child is one too many. Every day, more kids are brought into the trauma bay—it has become so commonplace, it happens on the streets, not just in schools, every day. And the medical team sighs. What do perpetrators think before mowing down elementary school kids? The mind of a murderer is something that has never been understood, or fully thought, because the unthinkable cannot be thought. How could anyone pull a trigger in cold blood? And what is worse, children are killing children—in cold blood, on the streets and in schools. More technical rationality, more STEM, think less, get rid of the arts and humanities, cut the language programs. What are we teaching the public? Technical rationality. Where does this get us? Kant knew “businessmen” of the academy “dupe” the masses into thinking that they are thinking.

Wittgenstein once remarked that the philosopher’s job is to “shew” the fly out of the bottle. Is this possible? The impasse is more than a fly or a bottle—the fly in the bottle means getting out of an impasse. But perhaps this is not even possible, for there is no finding a way out of this impasse. We can only approach the impasse. Plato suggested that ten thousand hindrances (see *The Philebus*) mark the soul and the point is not to get around impasses but to work through them. But there is no working through school shootings. The horror is just too hideous. No getting around, no working through.

SCENE FIVE: THE INTRUDER

Avital Ronell (2005) remarks: “The narrator can be seen as spinning out an allegory of textual submission, about what it means to write, to be written off, to serve without destination or transcendental approval. One day, nonetheless, there is someone sitting in your place—the place of your unconscious, the circuit into which you have been inscribed. . . . Whether the intruder comes from within or outside cannot be decided. The guest/ghost, the demon, the friend—not clear which—invites you to sit down” (p. 74). The intruder is the shooter; the intruder is the remainder of the ruins of psyche in the aftermath. The intruder invades psyche. Walter Benjamin (2019) remarks the 17th century Baroque mourning play leaves behind little more than ruin and rubble. We are living in a mourning play of sorts, but this is not a play, sadly it is reality. To split off the horrors of reality is the best we can do?

Psyche split off, dissociated, psychotic. Michael Eigen (1988) writes about what he calls *A Psychotic Core*. But isn't the psychotic *without a core*? And it is too simple to say true self, false self-- as did Winnicott. Linda Hopkins's (2022) *False Self—The Life of Masud Khan*—suggests what? That Kahn lived as a false self? But this is too simplistic. What is self? Psyche is hardly either/or—especially in the moment of a school shooting, in the moment of the mere threat of a school shooting, in the aftermath of a school shooting. A self-under-erasure. Becoming a character in a play or in a film calls for self-under-erasure. But what does under-erasure mean? Those who can't keep toxic introjects out of the seat of psyche are always under-erasure. Melanie Klein's (1993) bad breast obliterates. Unable to introject the good breast is the beginning of Artaud's (1988) *Theater of Cruelty*. The obliteration of the ego, the obliteration of all censors and barricades: a shattering of any sense of anything that (supposedly) holds self together. But what self? Psychosis comes in many forms, breaks. What prophets called visions are now medicalized as pathology. The very thought of psychosis is as-if dreaming. And yet Bion suggests that psychotics do not dream. *Do Androids Dream Electric of Sheep?* asks Philip K. Dick (1968). And yet psychosis is not as-if in a dream, or is it?

LIVING AS-IF IN A FILM.

Living-as-if in a film might be a form of psychosis, perhaps undertheorized or perhaps not explored much if at all. Con-fused worlds of film and reality, of watching a film and becoming a character in a film—in real time, mixing up film and reality is (perhaps) the work of introjection gone wrong. Or, think of the projector that is a camera—psyche gets stuck in the projector—what Melanie Klein (1993) would call projective identification. Rilke (2006) said, in a letter to Lou-Andreas Salomé, that he put himself inside of objects. But what if one gets stuck in objects? Houston, we’ve got a problem. Wherever it is—getting stuck in objects—is beyond the mind, is beyond Being. Going beyond precedes coming near, being near, becoming absent, being nowhere. Werner Hamacher (cited in Pierre Joris, 2014) reminds that for Paul Celan, the poet, “he himself stressed, we can only “understand” his texts “from a distance” (p. Iiii).

Reading Plato demands distance, for He is the poet of irony (Benardete, 2000) never meaning what he says. The *what is* of philosophy— Benardete points out—is a question that is never answered in any of Plato’s dialogues. That *what is?* of education— likewise—is a question that is never answered. To say, as did Dewey, that the point of education is more education does not answer the question *What is?* education? If you think you have an answer—you have forgotten the question.

FILMIC STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

One leaves the movie theater and feels as-if the film leaves residue, something uncanny gets left behind in psyche. It lingers. But what it is, is hard to say. A feeling? An impression? Something? Characters from film populate the mind for a while through introjection only to fade quickly into forgetting. Or perhaps not. But what happens if the film does not withdraw and the residue becomes something other than residue? What withdraws when psyche gets colonized by filmic introjects? Toxic interjects create what Christopher Bollas (2009) calls “affective turmoil” (p. 96). What happened to me after watching that film? His is a philosophical question of some importance. A question that philosophers tend not to ask. Living as-if a character in a film

is one thing. But when the as-if disappears? It is said that analysis is finished when the analyst is no longer *like* mother but *is* mother. Is this kind of transference not a form of psychosis? When film is no longer lived as-if but becomes the real of reality—what then?

Artaud (1988) says: “Pure cinema is an error” (p. 149)—pure anything is an error. There is nothing that is pure, there is nothing that is certain, there is nothing that is indubitable and clear. Just ask a theoretical physicist. The mind is not a pure something cleanly cut off from the world. Artaud remarks: “From a collision of objects and gestures are derived real psychic situations among which the cornered mind seeks some subtle means of escape. . . . naked emotion that slips in between the paved roads of images” (p. 149). Avital Ronell (2018) shares, collision of objects might be a kind of crashing or shattering (of) boundaries—and this means trouble. Ronell continues on the difficulties of “observ[ing] strict boundaries purportedly keeping apart inside and outside” (p. 200). Most ignore nuances of experience like this and do not even consider that the inside might be the outside and the outside might be the inside, what Bill Bruford might call a “sliding floor.” Formerly a drummer for the rock band YES, Bruford knows all too well from a musician’s point of view what that sliding floor feels like. In performance—very occasionally—it is as-if you aren’t there. Afterwards, you have no memory of performing. Or, you become dissociated while performing and have feelings of floating. Rilke experienced things like this. Poets and musicians, writers, and artists—for whatever reason, experience reason’s Other sometimes as a filmic stream of (un)consciousness. This can be a terrifying experience. Or not.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES CODE: TAKE REPORT A FILMIC ENCOUNTER

At approximately 1800 hours another code blue, another patient coded. Dispatched to the operating theater—which looked like a morgue— a dead body, blood. No literal description is necessary here. You get the picture. Behind a glass enclosure five members of a Greek Chorus stood as-if frozen in time, like deer caught in the death-trap of oncoming traffic, blinded by headlights. Trying to act tough, the Greek Chorus lost their tune, for the music just did not come. They carried on

as-if another routine day in the operating theater-Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*-- but this time routine-turned-failure. Dead character in search of an angel, or an Attic Greek Hero.

Who answers the call of wailing, gut-curdling screams, echolalia, while the doctor slips away? The angel of death had arrived. The Greek Chorus sings: we knew it was bad when the chaplain arrived. *Deus ex machina* speaks: This is a novel called *The Angel of Death*. A character called the chaplain, enter stage right. This is Greek tragedy. Exhausted, the narrator tells us. This was not routine. The character called the chaplain—the character in search of an angel-- is witness to yet another tragedy, or perhaps a film. I think you see where this is going. And if it is too much to bear, stop now. The operating theater, the theater of cruelty--the angel of death approaches multitudes of dead children, more than any Greek tragic hero can handle.

Film and reality disappeared. The character in the Greek tragedy—the character called the chaplain—aka the angel of death-- just finished watching *Crash* (2005) for the fiftieth-millionth time. The final scene in the film mirrored what happened in the operating theater—*deus ex machina* remarks--(no chaplains really enter operating theaters—an angel with his wings stuck backwards—as-if Benjamin (2006) speaks the work of Paul Klee. The chaplain hovering over the operating theater---became Dorri—(in the film *Crash*) who uncovers the dead body, the dead son. No, the fictionalized character—the chaplain--became Dorri. The revealing of the dead body, the mother. The chaplain lost a reference point: the angel of death lost his wings—the wings Walter Benjamin (2006) said-- were pointed backwards toward the piling up of disaster; the Jeremiah figure—one apostasy after another. The Jeremiah aka chaplain losing his wings pointing backwards, fell backwards losing his footing; Benjamin's angel of death got lost in the weeds, a con-fusion of worlds.

Turning toward the boiling pot of the north—as it is said in Jeremiah—the northern front of the Greek Chorus pointing toward the north--as-if to say something but nothing, no words came: The speechless Attic Greek Hero about which Franz (1970) Rosenzweig writes—floating above the operating theater--encountering gut-curdling screams shaking the glass—shards of glass obliterating

the earth. *Tikkun*—gone wrong, the inability to pick up the shards. Rosenzweig’s speechless Attic Greek hero Lost in shatteredness. Get on the phone, call someone important, look important, look clinical. The marble-statue (Rosenzweig, 1970) frozen in speechlessness: our Attic Greek Hero looks for a phone booth. But there are none to be found. Living in the wrong time zone, the wrong hour of history. In ancient Greece there are no phone booths.

In the film *Crash* (2005) the mother of the dead son collapses outside of a glass enclosed morgue, as she howls in the same gut-curdling howls the Hero of Greek Tragedy experienced--standing directly to the north—the boiling pot from the north, as it is said in Jeremiah-- the daughter of the dead mother. But this is not Antigone. The Greek Hero—whose wings had fallen off, as apostasy upon apostasy marked the history of the Derridean to-come, became utterly frozen as-if Benjamin’s (2019) Attic Greek Hero turned to marble (as Rosenzweig (1971) put it) speechless. Just be. Be there. A character in search of a film director—who was without direction became Dorri, in *Crash* (2005). White coat-- get on the phone, be clinical, look important-- hold everyone in a Winnicottian psychic container. It was as-if a Greek chorus was standing behind the glass, looking on—from the boiling pot out of the north, marble, frozen. Losing all frame of reference. One dead child is one too many.

In the opening scene of *Crash* (2005) detectives arrive. Crashing into a crime scene. Ria says: “Graham, I think we got rear ended. I think we spun around twice and somewhere in there, one of us lost our frame of reference and I’m gonna go look for it” (2005). The Greek Hero—out of an ancient Greek tragedy—lost that frame of reference but did not go looking for it—like Ria in *Crash*-- because he could not find it. Henceforth: speechlessness and turning to stone.

EMS Take report: no words come. William F. Pinar (2011) was perhaps the first curriculum theorist to point out the importance of the filmic imagination, the poetics of film, the power of film as public pedagogy. “For Pasolini, it was indirect discourse—the “contamination” of public aesthetic forms with private passion” (Pinar 2009.185 n.32)—that educated a public. Such aesthetic formulation of “contaminated” film making by a controversial film maker, or so

the Italian authorities thought, served as public pedagogue. Pasolini—the Italian film maker, whose films were banned in Italy—engaged “private passions” in the name of “public service,” Pinar tells us. The filmic imagination, a filmic--poetic speaks. In speaking something happens—something that cannot be marked, explained or even understood. Pasolini challenged the public to think differently about what film could teach. Moreover, Pasolini challenged Christendom and it was this and his homosexuality that got him in trouble with the authorities. Thomas Mann hid homosexual longings in his texts by blurring poetics with reality; Klaus never hid his sexuality and perhaps this irritated his father. Mann, according to Kurzke (2002), never made anything up and yet he wrote fiction. He fictionalized his life story, he coded it convincingly, he hid in his work. Derrida’s (1992) *Strange Institution Called Literature* becomes even more strange for Mann because he said he never made anything up. Is that literature? Or autobiography? Or literary autobiography? Whatever Mann’s work is, it transcends the literary and autobiographical, for his novels are also philosophical, theological, historical, political. And yet Mann’s autobiography is well hidden in a massive amount of words. Like Pasolini, Mann’s novels were banned (in Germany) albeit for very different reasons. Like Pasolini, Mann was a public pedagogue, for he let readers into a world that otherwise would be long forgotten, not without shame, guilt, confusion and horror. Golo Mann (1990) said of Thomas that during the Holocaust, his father became enraged at the dinner table projecting his anger onto his son Klaus. In Book IX of Plato’s *Republic*, love and rage bind together in eros incarnate, tyrannical eros. Love makes for madness, Plato says in the *Phaedrus*. Klaus Mann and Thomas Mann had the most strained relationship of all. It was only after Klaus died by suicide that Thomas Mann could say that Klaus’s (1985) autobiography called *Turning Point*-- was the best thing he had ever written. During his lifetime, Klaus felt he could never live up to his father’s expectations. Two writers almost competing with one another.

HEADLINES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Raymond Barfield—a pediatric oncologist and palliative care physician—gave a presentation to nurses about the art of care in

medicine. Startlingly real. I was glued to his presentation. Ray said that he woke up one morning to read an op-ed in the *New York Times* titled “Why do doctors commit suicide?” Camus said that suicide is the most important question the philosopher can ask. The questions that Ray asks are philosophical.

He began his talk by saying, *I know why doctors die by suicide*. A stunning admission. Ray said: Several of my friends have committed suicide. And then he got choked up and stopped. He hesitated to tell the nurses the reason why doctors die by suicide. But he went on. Ray said three things: “They are lonely, they are lost and they forgot why they got into medicine.” Did this utterance summon the Attic Greek Hero? Suicidal ideation is one thing, acting suicide out is something altogether different. Camus: the only question for the philosopher is suicide.

Later, Ray said “you are surrounded by tons of people, he said—in the hospital-- but nobody really has time to talk to anybody.” Detective Graham Waters in the opening scene of *Crash* (2005) says “In L. A. nobody touches you. You miss that sense of touch so much you crash into people just to feel something.” These are strange occurrences in not-so-strange institutions. Hospitals are not strange institutions; police departments or schools are not strange institutions, but working in them is. Being lonely, lost and forgetting the question: why am I doing this? becomes a life and death issue—in these not so strange institutions. “You think you know who you are? Stay on the force a little longer. And a little longer. You have no idea who you are.” Officer Ryan in *Crash* (2005) turned philosopher. Stay a little longer—in these not so strange institutions--see how long you can take it. EMS: take report: on such and such a day at such and such an hour, subject was found dead. Thought withdraws, the gods withdraw.

Reading texts is more than just reading texts. Reading is, in fact, a strange institution—reading isn’t just reading. Reader’s theater or the theater of reading is caught in the dragnet of psychic interference. Michel Serres (1995) would say that there is only noise in the reading, only interference on the line. *The Telephone Book*—Ronell’s (2001) allegorical code book—is also about interference, the disrupted call,

cybernetics—noise. Perhaps we should not try to block out the noise but summon it.

To summon up a different and perhaps rogue way of living—a way of living that doesn't abide by the regimes of cultural constructions drilled into us—means risking being called names: crazy, insane, off kilter, psychotic. But do these names really *name* what is going on? What does a name *really* mean, after all? Walter Benjamin (2019) comments that one of the biggest problems of the German *Trauerspiel* was that they named everything, everything had a name: over-naming calling things something, and then something else-- ironically worked to create an empty world.

“Summoning” the teachers— Avital Ronell (2018) points out—is something that many do not do. For who thinks about their teachers? Musicians know that the teacher—the figure of the teacher—is godlike. The teacher is your god. Now, that might sound crazy but it is part and parcel of becoming a musician. The musician has never been seen as a stable figure in history. The rhapsodes (see Plato's *Ion*) were thought to be crazy, crazed, out of their minds. The teachers—the wisdom figures—the owl(s) of Minerva must be summoned in order to approach the impasse of school shootings. Look to history, study the past. Summon our teachers of the past.

Hannah Arendt summoned philosophers to become aware of the horrors of Nazi Germany. Of course, one cannot compare Nazi Germany to school shootings. That is not my meaning here. But if we study violence in the past, we might educate ourselves about our present. None of these questions can be thought through, but only approached. Is hemlock the price teachers and students must pay now—today--? Was Thomas Hobbes right, after all? A War of all against all? A dog-eat-dog world where war is ongoing, an Orwellian one war after another, one gun after another, one death after another, over and over and over again to the tune of thousands of deaths. Unrelenting gun violence every year since Columbine seems an intractable problem. And it is. I offer no solutions. Only questions. How are we to live? Thomas Merton once asked. The *I don't know* terrifies.

William F. Pinar says that study is to be approached as-if a prayer, as-if a sacred call. Study keeps psyche steady in the midst of chaos and con-fused identity *deformation*—to borrow Pinar’s word. Study becomes more and more difficult with the sound of gunshots in many of our communities. Every day, another gunshot, everywhere, all over the country. Most of these shootings go unreported. We must summon our teachers and ask How are we to live? Nobody knows. Terrifying. What is to be done?

The strange institution that is the teacher. Teaching is a form of giving. Teaching is a disruption and interference. James Macdonald asked Richard Pipan—who has managed to stay out of the weeds-- what he *really* learned (Pipan, personal communication). This is a philosophical question, the *really* is the heart of the matter. What is the *really*? Are we really learning anything at all? Or is learning a word that cannot capture the magnitude of the horrors that are at hand—in the hazardous profession of teaching? To ask the question—at all— is philosophical. There are no answers at hand, no solutions to be found— empiricity will not get us anywhere. Impact factors: how many more have to die? This is not a game of numbers. This is not a game. Perhaps teachers need to go rogue.

What hope is left after the millionth school shooting? Of course, I have always had a problem with hope. It seems a stupid word, one that is utterly unthought and thrown around as if it actually means something, when in fact it does not. And yet. Giving in, losing heart— means the perpetrators win. When we search for reasons, the easiest one is to blame popular culture, video games, Instagram, snapchat, you name it. This argument does not hold. We know that popular culture is not at fault, really. Think how silly this sounds: Pac man—the most dangerous game. The 1950s comics codes of McCarthyism. The monsters on the covers of comic books: banned. Think about how stupid that is. But look at what is happening now. As if books are the problem. What is it the right is so afraid of? Books or guns? A loaded gun in your face is certainly more terrifying than Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*. When Mussolini threw Antonio Gramsci in a Fascist prison, he thought he could kill his ideas. Smuggled out of that prison thousands of pages of manuscript emerged, what later became

The Prison Notebooks. The Nazis wanted to assassinate Thomas Mann. Obviously, they did not read. They certainly did not read Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. Stanley Corngold (2022) points out that after Mann fled Germany, he became the most political of men, traveling all over America warning of the dangers of Nazism. Mann's radical shift from the right to the left is rather astounding. It was only when his family was in grave danger that Mann began to rethink things, but one can see how Mann struggled with his political views in *Doctor Faustus*, as he seemed tormented by his love for Germany and his hatred for what Germany had become. The books that republicans ban today are mostly fiction, literary creations. What they fear is the literary imagination more than anything.

Imprecise and impenetrable language is not the problem either. In fact, Avital Ronell insists that it is in the imprecise and impenetrable that language finds new breath, goes rogue cuts deeply into language that pretends to know. Life makes no sense so why try to make sense out of what does not by covering it over with the cult of the indubitable. Imprecise and impenetrable experiences of con-fused worlds belie description, or categories in the DSM. Life is messy. Jargon and uber-technicality cover-over the messiness of life. Simplicity too is a cover for laziness. Get to the point-- is also a cover for impatience and ignorance. When people ask: what are you doing? Or they say, I do not understand your work. Then I know I am doing the work. William Pinar once said that like theoretical physics, curriculum theory might never be understood. Perhaps understanding is not really even a question anymore. For who among us understands anything? But yes, curriculum theory lends itself to philosophical questions among other things. It is indeed, a complicated conversation, what Pinar calls a symbolic representation of what it is we want to pass down to the next generation, and generations to come.

Curriculum theory is still considered a rogue field. This baffles. There is nothing outlandish or outrageous about this field. It challenges old paradigms and I suppose that is enough—in the academy that is so slow to change-- to get labeled rogue. The question has arisen—many times—is curriculum theory is finished? Why this question. Why ask. Why now? Who keeps asking this question? They say things

like: curriculum theory is finished, curriculum theory is over. The movement has ceased. Nothing is left. Nobody does this anymore. But these things are not the case. Curriculum theory is not finished. In fact, curriculum theory is alive and well, the field is internationalized thanks to William Pinar, new kinds of work are appearing continuously. There is much life in this field. These questions of being finished, being over, being done with are inextricably tied to the very people who have no business asking the question. Neo-conservatives. For neo-conservatives would like nothing more than to see the disappearance of the curriculum theory. The more neo-cons wish us gone and dead--like the dead mother—the more alive we become. The more neo-cons want to destroy us, the more we emerge—without end, endless.

The film *The Endless* (2017) is about being stuck in a loop of Sci Fi cult horror. Escaping cults is nearly impossible. Endless cults. The university can become a cult of band wagons, a cult of impact factors. Digging one's way through endless battles and regimes of garbage, toxic waste sites, and *poisonous pedagogy*—as Alice Miller once put it—gets tiresome. The always judgmental, no mercy university—something that could have been an exciting experiment—is, for the most part, a disappointment. Kant (1992) was prescient in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. And we moderns have it exactly wrong. What was once considered the crowning disciplines of the university (philosophy and theology) have now sunk into the garbage pit. And this is a tragedy. How to survive the technical, neo-liberal university? The impact factor of Disneyfication of all things technical. Getting lost in AI or computer-generated images is not the problem, what is the problem is that thinking gets put under erasure when our worries concern all things technical. Technology is not the problem per se. It is what we choose to do with it that is. I can recall when Carnegie-Mellon began its robotic institute. As performance majors in a fine arts college, we were horrified. Have we become a Blade-Runner world? We can't tell who is real or who is Memorex. Why not just hire robots? Teacher-robots performing Turing Tests. Why not just hire *Electric Sheep who do not Dream?* Or androids. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 1996). Who dreams, the electric sheep or the androids? Can robot-teachers philosophize *currere* in order to

deconstruct school shootings? If not, hire the sheep. Perhaps the sheep can dream us out of this nightmare.

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Note:

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