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VIEWPOINTS/ CONTROVERSIES

After this, nothing happened

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Abstract The presence of COVID-19 means that the world will not return to a prior normal, but we cannot yet know into what future we will head. The world will have considerably changed from the one in which our subjectivities were first formed. Though curriculum may be the story we tell our children, the presence of this plague has made a severe break in that story. But curriculum might serve as the source of a radical hope that will lead us to a future we cannot yet imagine. In curriculum, we can attend to the world that has now passed, after which nothing happened, and from the scattered fragments of culture begin to construct new subjectivities and provide the space for the rebirth of culture that we cannot yet know or yet even imagine.

Keywords Pandemic · Curriculum · Learning · Crisis

Let me see where we are in these present moments. I think this Sunday began week fourteen or fifteen of the shutdown: the sheltering-in-place and the imperative for social distancing, the wearing of facemasks and latex gloves out in the streets and the marketplaces. Though the restrictions are easing, the death toll is rising. I do not know for how much longer this will go on. The directive demands that we keep six feet between us: ironically, I consider, also the depth of a grave. The global economy has ground to a halt, and though I suspect that it will rebound, its decline reminds me how fragile are our financial securities. Today's news reports that upwards of thirty million people in the United States have applied for unemployment benefits so far, many of whom may never be called back to work. The restaurants, the bookstores, the shoe stores, the hair salons and barber shops; the coffee houses, the health clubs, the religious institutions; schools and universities—all, all have been shuttered. Many educational organizations have turned to online delivery systems, and I fear that what might be learned from these methodologies will only reveal how

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much money can now be saved by eliminating actual classrooms. I do not doubt who will ultimately benefit from these savings. School bookrooms will become obsolete, supplies of paper and writing utensils will disappear, online classes will be available only to those with the financial resources to maintain internet access, laboratory experiences will be lost, and conversations will be negotiated through heavily mediated programs that will compromise spontaneity and silence trial and error classroom talk.

The teaching profession in which I spent forty-six years will be decimated—and though all children will experience some deprivation, those with the greatest need will also suffer the greatest loss. If educationists once worried about losses in learning that would take place over summer holidays, then they will be downright alarmed by the losses that will result from an absence of six months or more. An editorial in *The New York Times* argues, "The learning setbacks that schoolchildren commonly experience over a summer vacation can easily wipe out one or two months of academic growth. The learning losses that are likely to result from more than 50 million children in the United States being shut out of school for weeks or months because of the coronavirus pandemic could well be catastrophic by comparison". To be alarmingly brief, a generation of children will be ill-educated; an entire history of teacher education will be erased and require reinvention. Curriculum will necessitate radical evaluation and change, and I despair who will be in charge of this reconsideration. New definitions of education will necessitate dramatic change. The losses are beyond quantification and sometimes beyond comprehension.

The streets around my city have become eerily empty: Ford Parkway, near where I live, a street that is usually traffic heavy has become almost empty of cars and trucks. I am cautioned not to touch the walk button at the crosswalks without gloves, or at least the prophylactic of a disinfectant wipe, but really there is no cause to wait for the light to change because no vehicle except mostly empty public buses traverse the road in either direction. Nevertheless, I use my elbow to alert the traffic light of my presence. Pedestrians are scarce, save a few children and adolescents on their bicycles or congregating in small groups and standing at what appears to me to be in too close proximity. But I think that is almost always the way with young people: they remain oblivious to worries concerning mortality. The retailers are closed, except for the pharmacy, the supermarkets, and the liquor stores (thank goodness!), and even the latter offers curbside pick-up. In my irregular and carefully choreographed trips to the supermarket—I shop during the first hour reserved for older folks—my fellow shoppers are exclusively adults. Few would carry their young children or grandchildren into such an environment, even during the more amenable daylight hours when the store welcomes the general public. At the beginning of the pandemic, a helpful woman wearing gloves was employed to wipe down our carts with disinfectant, but now the supermarket simply distributes latex gloves in small, medium, and large sizes to shoppers. We elder folk move cautiously about in the aisles wary of each other. Many of us are masked and our eyes flash about in suspicion. "Is she sick? Does he have it?", "Keep a safe distance of six feet!", and we pass each other with a sense of estrangement and isolation. Recently my friend and I viewed the 1978 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* That film mirrors our reality now: people may look normal, but they may not be so. And they may be dangerous. *I* may be dangerous. We have met the enemy and it is us.

And there is so much more: restaurants that cannot open now for seated patrons have offered take-out and curbside pick-up. And I have heard reports that even when the pandemic ends, many restaurants will close in-house dining permanently, whether because they cannot surpass a limit for 50% capacity or because their customers remain wary to enter a crowded public space. Many restaurants will disappear altogether: another workplace and social space will become extinct. Habitué-less bookstores also have begun to

offer curbside pick-up, eliminating the joyous experience of browsing the shelves, and discovering a new book or author will cease to offer pleasure and delight to the population. New and as yet unrecognized authors will remain invisible and even unread. Libraries have been shuttered and dust settles on the books. Theaters are closed; movie house screens are dark. Orchestras are silenced, though some musicians have begun offering in-house concerts streamed from their living rooms and private music studios. Public spaces are void of a public that struggles now to confront the plague that Rieux, the tireless and indefatigable doctor in Camus's *The Plague*, calls "a never-ending defect" (Camus 1948, p. 128). We all need our hair cut, our nails done, our teeth cleaned. Community has dissolved. Community now in solution will have to be reconstituted.

We have been torn today from our daily lives and living. Those of us who will be fortunate to survive will experience the world into which we reenter as fundamentally changed. *We* will have changed. Camus presciently describes one of the most serious effects of the current pandemic. The narrator of *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux, refers to the experience of forced isolation in the plague-infested city of Oran as *exile*—what we today call self-quarantine and sheltering in place. And from this situation, we, like the townspeople of Rieux's Oran, have come to know "the incorrigible sorrow of all prisoners in exile, which is to live in company with a memory that serves no purpose" (Camus 1948, p. 73). Because our pasts can now offer little instruction for our lives in the present, the presence of plague has irrevocably changed our lives. Our pasts will no longer serve as a viable influence on the future. Vague as *any* future might inevitably be, we nevertheless normally would expect that the future should remain continuous with some part of the past. But today this is no longer true. David Brooks writes in *The New York Times*, "Everywhere I hear the same refrain: We're standing at a portal to the future; we're not going back to how it used to be" (Brooks 2020). But no one can say where we might be going or how we might do so. We might teach the past, but not as a roadmap for the future. What Rieux says of separated lovers living in exile may be true as well for today's citizens: "Without memories, without hope, they lived for the moment only. Indeed, the here and now had come to mean everything to them" (Camus 1948, p. 182). Citizens today exist as if they live on an island. Perhaps the growing complaints concerning the shut-down, and eventually the increasingly desperate violent protests to reopen, reflect the delusional belief that a return to normal is possible. But such behavior reflects a basic misunderstanding of the present. This present will soon disappear into an unrecoverable past. As exiles we are condemned to a present that now (an ironic term itself) exists out of context. I think the situation is worse than it might have been for Tantalus: we cannot even be tempted…we feel hopeless.

There is no escape from the consequences of the presence of plague, particularly the long-term experience of despair. The plague, invisible and deadly, alters the way the citizens live in the world with themselves and with each other. Rieux notes that of the citizens of Oran, "it would be more correct to say that they were wasting away emotionally as well as physically" (Camus 1948, p. 180). Our gyms are closed and we see our therapists online. Citizens must learn a whole new way of responding to the world inspired by the awareness of plague. They become desperate and despondent. And then, grown accustomed to the presence of plague, the people adapt but do not cease their "sense of sadness and suffering". Rieux notes that "the habit of despair is worse than despair itself" (Camus 1948, p. 181) because the "habit" of despair continues the hopelessness as the plague continues and becomes the new normal. The depression that inhered to the plague's original presence remains, and the townspeople suffer that depression as a way of life. I suspect that such might describe our populations that are subject to the present plague, and one thing curriculum might address is the atmosphere of depression our children breathe in daily.

Perhaps curriculum at least might offer to our children hope. In fact, I believe that curriculum might offer insight and strategy to deal with what we do not yet know will be. I am thinking of Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation.* Lear writes that Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow Nation (in what is now the United States) has told his story to Frank Linderman, a sympathetic white man. But in his narration Plenty Coups would not speak to Linderman of his life after the Crow had been moved to a reservation. Linderman considers that it is as if Plenty Coups' life had with this event been broken. At the conclusion of his narrative Plenty Coups says, "I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened". Lear puzzled about what Plenty Coups might have meant when he reported that after the loss of the buffalo nothing happened, and he speculates that with the genocide of Native Americans, the usurpation of their land, and the massacre of the buffalo, the basic values of Crow existence had ended. Lear offers the possibility that the disappearance of the buffalo represented the symbolic end to the traditional Crow nomadic life, and that every concept upon which the Crow subjectivity had been based had become meaningless: the entire narrative of Crow being had been erased. Nothing happened after the buffalo had gone because everything that had defined the Crow subjectivity had ceased to exist. The question that Chief Plenty Coups confronted as the leader of the Crow Nation was how *to be* when all of the means *to be* had disappeared. After the buffalo had gone, then, nothing happened. And if subjectivity had collapsed, then the psychological states associated with that subjectivity had disappeared as well. Depression and desperation resulted.

Lear imagined a line of thought in which Plenty Coups might have engaged in those drastic circumstances of cultural devastation. One option Plenty Coups might have considered under the circumstances of the complete loss of Crow identity would be to resist the loss and pretend that the old values were still viable. Lear speculates that in this direction Plenty Coups might have thought: "If everything I care about, if everything I understand as valuable, if everything I understand about myself as valuable, and making life worth living—if all that is going to evaporate, I would prefer to go down in a blaze of glory. I would prefer to be a martyr to that way of life" (Lear 2006, p. 93). Such seemed to have been the choice of Sitting Bull, whose effort to maintain an attachment to the past had led to the successful engagement with Custer's troops at Little Big Horn. But Sitting Bull's escape to Canada resulted from this attack; and then on his return to the United States, Sitting Bull initiated the re-enactment of the historically embedded Ghost Dance. This practice so worried the white man that agents were deployed to stop the Dance and to arrest Sitting Bull who was murdered by the police during the attempt. Sitting Bull had meant to encourage a return to the practices of the Sioux Nation before the buffalo were gone, one that included the ceremonial celebration of the Ghost Dance, but that past was forever gone. To continue to practice curriculum as it had existed before the pandemic would be akin to Sitting Bull's attempt to return the Sioux Nation to a set of values and practices that were no longer viable.

But to the experience of cultural devastation Plenty Coups chose a different response than had Sitting Bull. Plenty Coups refused to dwell in the vanished past. Lear speculates that Plenty Coups might have thought somewhat like this: "I am thus committed to the idea that while we Crow must abandon the goods associated with our way of life—and thus we must abandon the conception of the good life that our tribe has worked out over centuries. *We shall get the good back,* though at the moment we can have no more than a glimmer of what that might mean" (Lear 2006, p. 94, italics in original). Plenty Coups possessed what Lear refers to as a "radical hope". Radical hope believes that there might be a future even

though the nature of that future remains unknown. Lear writes, “Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it” (Lear 2006, p. 103). Radical hope means that we will not only survive but flourish, though we cannot know how we will do so or who and what we will be in an unknown future. In the face of cultural devastation, this “hope is what survives the general ruin” (Eagleton 2015, p. 115). From this radical hope, Plenty Coups saved the Crow Nation by anticipating new subjectivities without knowledge of what those subjectivities might be.

This kind of cultural devastation experienced by the Crow Nation had occurred before: after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., the Rabbis too maintained a radical hope. Without the Temple, the foundation and practices of Judaism had disappeared. The Rabbis wondered what could have led to the destruction of Jerusalem, to the consequent exile and their experience of cultural devastation. After the Temple was gone, nothing happened. Their world had vanished and they would assume responsibility. They speculated: Rabbi Abaye said that Jerusalem was destroyed only because the Sabbath was desecrated. Rabbi Abbahu, not content with that explanation, replied that Jerusalem was destroyed only because the reading of the Shema, the declaration of faith to be made in the morning and the evening, had been neglected. Both Rabbis attribute the destruction to human neglect of ritual practices. And I think that might be one attempt at an answer. But Rabbi Hamnuna looked to another cause. He announced, “Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected the education of school children”, and Rabbi Judah added, “Jerusalem was destroyed only because scholars were despised therein” (Epstein 1987, p. 119). More than the observance of the Sabbath, more than the declaration of faith, these Rabbis suggest that failing to educate children and show respect for scholars had led to the exile and cultural devastation that had eliminated the past and left the future hopeless. Of course, it was as clear to the Rabbis who and what had destroyed the culture—it had been the work of the Romans—even as it had been obvious to the Crow that the white man was responsible for the devastation. But in Rabbi Hamnuna’s and Rabbi Judah’s attribution of cause, we might detect the appearance of radical hope. If Judaism was to survive, it would have to be reinvented. Though the Rabbis could not know what Judaism would look like after the experience of cultural devastation, they had hope. And that hope resided in the centrality of education for the children who would carry forward the now reinterpreted scholarship of the scholars and teachers. For the Rabbis, curriculum existed at the center of radical hope. So might it be for us.

Perhaps what we are experiencing during this current pandemic will not be the experience of complete cultural devastation, though the collapse of the global economies might suggest otherwise. But it is apparent that the concepts by which we have defined our selves and our lives in the past will no longer serve in the present; the definitions and states of our subjectivities will experience disjuncture. Our former way of life will experience dramatic change. For one, we must acknowledge the presence and possibility of plague that is more than a bacillus but a state that rests at the center of being. Tarrou says, “each of us has the plague within him; no one on earth is free from it . . . it’s a wearying business, being plague-stricken. But it’s still more wearying to refuse it” (Camus 1948, p. 253). Curriculum could first begin to address this human condition.

We might prepare for an ever-present plague. Dr. Rieux says, “The plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good”, and that inevitably when it was ready “it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city” (Camus 1948, p. 308). Our hope rests in our preparation: though now we do not know what subjectivities will arise out of these experiences of devastation, we have hope that something will arise. Plague has neither purpose nor intrinsic meaning: it will teach us nothing. For some, the appearance of plague

might be interpreted as God's retribution. Certainly, Father Paneloux's first sermon suggests this: "For plague is the flail of God and the world His threshing-floor, and implacably He will thresh out His harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff" (Camus 1948, p. 95). For Paneloux, suffering such as that brought by the plague had meaning and purpose. I might suggest that our days of prayer speak to this philosophy. One year, five years, and even ten years hence and in regular increments of days, we will memorialize certain moments of the plague experience and engage in nostalgia and illusory triumph. But to my mind, these observances are meaningless exercises comprised mostly of shallow veneer; they are performed as ceremony and are mostly about posture and show, not unlike the daily pledge of allegiance that schoolchildren are required to declare every morning despite the fact that not a single word of it is comprehensible to them.

No, I do not believe that the suffering incurred by the experience of COVID-19 will prove valuable. And I do not believe that our days of prayer will ever offer much relief or hope. Neither did some of the Rabbis ascribe any value to suffering. In one account, Rabbi Johanan went to visit Rabbi Hiyya who had fallen ill. Rabbi Johanan sat by Hiyya's bedside and asked him, "Are your sufferings precious to you?". And Rabbi Hiyya answered, "Neither they nor their reward". And then Rabbi Johanan fell ill and Rabbi Hanina visited his bedside. He asked him, "Are your sufferings precious to you?". And Rabbi Johanan answered, "Neither they nor their reward". And then Rabbi Eleasar fell ill and Rabbi Johanan came to visit him. He asked, "Are your sufferings precious to you?", and Eleazar replied, "Neither they nor their reward" (Epstein 1987, 5b). For these Rabbis there was no meaning to the suffering. It is this fact with which Father Paneloux must wrestle when he witnesses the Othon child die from plague. Regardless of his struggle with and dedication to his faith, Paneloux rejects the passive acceptance of God's will that he had espoused in his earlier sermon. Instead, he recounts the story of a single monk who during the Black Death in Marseilles experienced the deaths of seventy-seven of his companions and the flight for their safety of three others from the monastery. In a ringing voice, Father Paneloux exhorts his congregation that in the face of the plague they must act like that single monk who refused to leave. "My brothers", Paneloux says, "each one of us must be the one who stays" (Camus 1948, p. 227). Teachers are those who would stay.

The call for papers for this issue asks how curricula can respond to fast-changing, unpredictable, and often disruptive events. In a recent edition of the *New York Review of Books*, Ruth Margalit asks, "What do you tell a boy who is beginning to grasp that his life is dictated by colossal failures outside of his control?" (Margalit 2020, p. 4). I must admit I do not know. I have never known a time in my life when events were not fast-changing, unpredictable, and disruptive. I think of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, when this sixteen-year-old wondered if he would ever reach seventeen as the world waited breathlessly and fearfully for the start of nuclear war. After that moment, everything I had known about the world changed. After this nothing happened. I think about the Holocaust, and about the murders of Emmet Till, Medgar Evers, President Kennedy, the murders of Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. I think about the Vietnam War and the destruction of the World Trade Towers. How long must I make this list? How long can it go on? After each of these, nothing happened! The townspeople of Oran had lived oblivious to the inevitability of plague: they had not been prepared for the disruption and devastation to life and time that its appearance would bring to their existences. Rieux writes, "How should [the townsfolk] have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, [and] silences the exchange of views" (Camus 1948, p. 37). The citizens had kept themselves willfully ignorant.

Today even as the death toll rises, citizens have renounced caution and have taken to gathering in crowds; to demanding the reopening of schools, sports arenas, hair salons, animal grooming parlors (!), and gyms. Even as the plague arrived in Oran, the townspeople of Oran expected that everything soon would return to normal. But the plague persisted for a year and cancelled this expectation. It is not true for us that this pandemic will not end, but it is also true that what we have known as normal will never return. After this nothing happened. Ah, there will always be pestilences of one sort or another. The present incidence of plague should remind us that life could and almost certainly will be suddenly uprooted and set adrift; though this fact does not seem to figure in the consciousness of too large a segment of today's population, we will not return to normal, ever. Rieux says, "no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences" (Camus 1948, p. 37). We are not as free as once we believed.

We suffer today from the pandemic caused by COVID-19. I think there will be other such occurrences in the lifetimes of our children. In the 20th century we have already suffered the AIDS epidemic, the Spanish flu, polio, cholera, SARS, and Ebola! Rieux's old asthmatic patient says, "But what does that mean—'plague'? Just life, no more than that" (Camus 1948, p. 307). It will happen again. I do not think there is much curriculum can do to *prevent* any of these outbreaks from recurring. But I also know that a curriculum founded on subjectivities no longer viable would be not only meaningless but harmful. Lear suggests that Plenty Coups' statement that after the buffalo disappeared, nothing happened also announces that a new subjectivity could be created from a new poet, one who would "take up the Crow past and"—rather than use it for nostalgia or ersatz mimesis—"project it into vibrant new ways for the Crow to live and to be" (Lear 2006, p. 51). Curriculum might serve as that poem, such that taking up our personal and communal pasts might make space for going on.

The call for papers also wonders how curriculum can offer children the opportunity to understand the appearances and consequences of the disruptions that periodically affect the social order. The call for papers asks how curriculum might offer educators the necessary resources that would allow them to "address the specificities of their students' situations" while also reminding those students of their relationships to the world to which they belong. For the survival of Judaism, as for the survival of the Crow Nation, something had to be done. Lear suggests that Plenty Coups chose a different strategy than that chosen by Sitting Bull, or by the despair of those who by the waters of Babylon sat down and wept,[1] or those who call too regularly for days of prayer. Plenty Coups and the Rabbis seem to acknowledge that they must speak and write of present experience in light of the past but without continuity with it. Their means to do so require the presence of the word—Plenty Coups' narrative of Crow life before the buffalo disappeared; the codification by the Rabbis of the Jewish law (*Mishnah)* and then their written commentary on that law (*Talmud*); and Rieux's manuscript of the Plague year in Oran.

Plenty Coups understood that after the buffalo disappeared, after the occurrence of events that had led to cultural devastation, that if the Crow Nation was to survive, then it would first have need of the record of its loss. One must first admit that the substance of life has changed before that life can be recreated. Lear writes, "Plenty Coups seems to understand that as memory will survive only briefly that the necessity to tell the story to the white man who would then write it down, is critical" (Lear 2006, p. 51). He maintains

[1] I am reminded of Shakespeare's Richard II, who laments, "For God's sake, let us sit on the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings".

that living memory of a dead culture, in the absence of a written record, will only last a few years: "The entire culture is in the process of being forgotten; the only hope is to write it down in the hope that future generations may bring 'it' back to life" (p. 52). "It" refers not to a past way of life but to a contemporary subjectivity for which one can only hope. Lear suggests that Plenty Coups' narrative, given freely to Frank Linderman, is made in the hopes that a Crow subjectivity can be again created, even if the older Crow subjectivity is gone. That subjectivity, of course, will be radically different, but it will ensure the perpetuation of the Crow Nation. I believe that our curriculum should be founded on the basis of such radical hope and should be created on what survives the devastation: language, the word, and even when that word defines devastation. Plenty Coups means to reinvent Crow subjectivity by first describing its death. Lear writes, "[Plenty Coups] is witnessing the death of the Crow subject, to be sure—but he does so in order to clear the ground for a rebirth. For if the death is not acknowledged there will most likely be all sorts of empty ways of going on 'as a Crow'" (p. 51). Plenty Coups narrated his story and declared that after the buffalo disappeared nothing happened.

Language then becomes a means of remembering out of which a new identity can be formed. "The most important artifact the white man could offer the Indian—much better than guns—was writing and printing" (Lear 2006, p. 52). Only by narrating and writing down the demise of culture could a culture in the future be recreated. Without the written narratives everything would be lost, given the fragility of memory. Language survives the devastation, and hope resides in that language. Eagleton says, "As long as there is language…hope remains possible…The true calamity would involve the extinction of the word. Hope is obliterated when language is obliterated" (2015, p. 124). Death means the end of narrativity. "Language [cannot] repair one's condition simply by lending a name to it, but it is true that one cannot repair [one's condition] without [first] doing so" (Eagleton 2015, p. 124). Plenty Coups' ability to talk about the devastation meant that something has survived it "even if it is no more than a distraught messenger or a scrap of paper" (Eagleton 2015, p. 123). Lear suspects that Plenty Coups' motive to tell his story was to ensure its maintenance, "in the hope of a future in which things—Crow things—might start to happen again" (Lear 2006, p. 52). Curriculum, the story *we* tell *our* children, should offer those words that speak of what is gone and hold fast to the hope that life will rise again.

Study, an engagement with language, might serve as a basis of radical hope. Education becomes our means not to rebuild Jerusalem or to attempt to recover a now meaningless way of life, but to find our way to a future we do not yet know and cannot yet imagine. Study embodies radical hope and will save us. In a minor Tractate called *Mesechet Kallah Rabati* that did not make it into the canonical Talmud, an opinion offered concerns not the destruction of Jerusalem but that of the entire world. This is not irrelevant to our current situation. The tractate reads, "Every day an angel goes out from the presence of the Holy One to destroy the world and turn it back to what it used to be. But once the Holy One observes young children in their schools and disciples of the wise in their houses of study, His anger immediately turns into mercy" (Agnon and Ravnitzky 1992, p. 420). The present pandemic threatens the entire world, but what the Rabbis seem to believe here is that the world would be kept safe by the education of the children and the continuance of study by scholars, the teachers of those children. Education can be redemptive. Dr. Rieux declares something similar: "The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding…the most incorrigible vice being that of an ignorance that fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill" (Camus 1948, p. 131). When Tarrou is asked why he has chosen to join the fight against the plague, he answers, "My code of morals". When

asked to what code he refers, Tarrou responds, "Comprehension". It is Tarrou's engagement in study and learning that enlists him in the struggle against plague and organizes his existence in Oran, until his death by the plague. Acknowledging that there is no victory over plague, Rieux asserts that knowledge of plague, of friendship, of affection is all for which one could hope: "So all a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories" (Camus 1948, p. 291). That knowledge and those memories are contained in words.

Our present situation portends that the future will have been severed from the past. We do not know what will happen now that the buffalo have disappeared. Once we have experienced plague, there is no escaping the fear of its inevitable recurrence; our daily lives must reflect that realization or again we shall suffer a plague in ignorance and helplessness. As the plague in Oran declined in intensity and the city began to return to some sense of normalcy, Dr. Rieux paid a call on a patient of his, an older man. That patient complains that too many of the townspeople will attribute their hardships to the plague and that with its dissipation all will be well again. "All those folks are saying: 'It was plague'. We've had the plague here. You'd almost think they expected to be given medals for it. But what does that mean—'plague'? Just life, no more than that" (Camus 1948, p. 307). Or as Roseanne Roseannadanna remarked, "Well, if it's not one thing, it's another". That understanding can be paralyzing or it can be instructive. Tarrou says, "I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And today I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not to be the mortal enemy of anyone. I only know that one must do what one can to ease being plague-stricken, and that's the only way in which we can hope for some peace, failing that, a decent death" (Camus 1948, p. 252). For Tarrou there is nothing to be learned from plague except that each of us already possesses plague—and that it can and must be resisted. This reflects the Rabbis' understanding of the value of suffering: neither it nor its rewards need be prized. But from the plague one can learn a stance in the world: not to remain innocent but to be responsible. "The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention" (Camus 1948, p. 253). This might engage a curriculum that attends to such questions as "What is happening now that affects me, my family, my friends, my community? When did this event begin? Why did it occur? Has this happened before? When? Why? Are there differences between then and now? Are there similarities between what occurred then and what is occurring now? How can we account for the similarities and differences? Where might I go to search for responses to these queries? Where and what are my resources? What can I do to help or at least not to hurt?". I believe that this is the direction in which curriculum might move, now that the buffalo have disappeared. Such might be a pedagogy of attention.

For the children, the world that once they inhabited has irrevocably changed. It may look the same, but it is not so. Attention must be paid. Years earlier, William James adjured teachers, "We must teach our children to pay attention, by which we hold fast to an idea which but for that effort of attention would be driven out of the mind by the other psychological tendencies that are there. To think, in short, is the secret of the will, just as it is the secret of memory" (James 1962, p. 91). Curriculum must inspire thought, and to do so it must focus the will. To follow an idea demands attention to will. Tarrou says, "What's natural is the microbe. All the rest—health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter" (Camus 1948, p. 253). I think that curriculum might address that will. When we say to our students that they must "pay attention", it need not be only to the teacher or only to the subject matters, but also to the conditions in which any event and idea has arisen. Curriculum might be the site of radical hope: we can attend to the world that has now passed, after which nothing happened, and from

the scattered fragments begin to construct new subjectivities as Adrienne Rich (1971) suggested in *Diving into the Wreck*,

> I came to explore the wreck.
> The words are purposes.
> The words are maps.
> I came to see the damage that was done
> and the treasures that prevail.

Or we might urge with Tennyson's Ulysses, "Come, my friends, Tis not too late to seek newer worlds" (Tennyson 1954, p. 86, ll. 56–57). Curriculum might provide the resources to engage in pursuit. Come, Watson, the game's afoot!

Our present experience with the COVID-19 virus will certainly result in a world considerably changed from the one in which our subjectivities were first formed. It is not that this present pandemic will not end, but neither will it ever end. The life we once lived will not—should not—return to a prior normal. There will remain a great deal of uncertainty and fear lurking about. And yet perhaps there exists an irony at the heart of this pandemic. In the chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For", Thoreau writes, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (Thoreau 2006, p. 87). Once after a study of Thoreau's *Walden*, I composed a writing assignment that listed an assortment of contemporary objects: television sets, computers, orchestra tickets, dishwashers, and the collected works of Shakespeare. I asked students to argue for ownership of each thing that they could not afford to let alone. My list was necessarily limited, but our lists today are interminable. During this time of shuttered doors and social distancing, if we have been paying attention, we have been learning what may be essential for our lives and what is no longer so for our lives. Thoreau measured that, "The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run" (Thoreau 2006, p. 32). We might have been learning during the pandemic what we really do need and of what can we let go. For the sake of our lives in these times we have forgone many things, decided that our lives should not be exchanged for them, and again, perhaps, have begun to live a different life—though as of yet we cannot know of what that life might ultimately consist. Curriculum should, however, be a source of radical hope: it is what is left after the buffalo disappeared and then nothing happened.

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