

## Clickbait Curriculum Theory

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"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is the title of a sermon given in 1741 by the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards. Like Edwards' other works, the sermon combines vivid imagery of sinners' everlasting torment, a warning to listeners and readers of the damnation nonbelievers will suffer. That particular sermon still attracts attention (often read in undergraduate American literature survey courses) in part because its attention-getting strategy – self-righteous outrage, threats of damnation – has been repeated so often by so many, and not only by religious zealots, but by zealots of all stripes, even now in curriculum studies, where efforts to secure the attention – demanding the agreement of others - have led to endless number of titles and articles designed to attract attention, not to clarify concerns, certainly not to advance the field intellectually.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I critique the further degradation of an already corporatized university and one academic field it houses into subsets of clickbait culture, a conspicuously clear instance of which are the publications of João M. Paraskeva, the Jonathon Edwards-like preacher of epistemicide, a dramatized overstatement given that it wouldn't be the first time the broad (if splintered) field of education has suppressed ways of knowing: see Taubman (2011) for a superb scholarly account, one in sharp contrast to Paraskeva's mind-numbing sermonizing, the latter not the only example of "clickbait culture" - demanding attention at any cost – although an especially clear even conspicuous instance of it.<sup>2</sup> First, I revisit Paraskeva's allegations of "epistemicide," then locate his sensationalistic and often false claims in the broader phenomenon of clickbait capitalism, itself a concept with its own clickbait connotations, as I report from the collection *Clickbait Capitalism* (Samman and Gannon 2023).

## Epistemicide

In Paraskeva's most recent book publication, the "cide" one encounters first isn't "epistemicide" but "theorycide," an odd certainly counter-intuitive allegation in a field often critiqued, even dismissed, for being excessively theoretical. Never mind that fact: "Our field faces *theorycide*," João M. Paraskeva (2024, 11) proclaims, repeating the charge *sans* evidence or even argument. While that he provides no proof, one soon surmises soon that the culprit is curriculum theory's history in the "West" because – see Paraskeva 2024, 12 – because "such traditions never dared to go beyond their modern Western Eurocentric comfort zone." That's simply false, as chapters on curriculum studies in non-European countries dominate the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (Pinar 2014) and as book-length studies of curriculum studies in Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa also confirm. Moreover, the field is not historically Western at all; Paraskeva makes no acknowledgement of Chinese scholars' - Zhang Hua and Zhenyu Gao (2014, 118) - claim that the field originates in China.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the "West," Paraskeva is apparently unaware that "today," as Mac Sweeney (2023, 6) observes, "all serious historians and archeologists acknowledge that the cross-fertilization of 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures happened through human history, and that the modern West owes much of its cultural DNA to a wide range of non-European and non-white forbears." Undeterred by the facts, Paraskeva then alleges that the field has failed to "reach out" to non-modern, non-Western, non-Eurocentric epistemological perspectives to grasp the world's complex needs and challenges." Reach out to "grasp"? Isn't that a euphemism for conceptual imperialism, i.e. excavating resources for export, for utilization later, harnessing concepts and quoted passages from others, decontextualizing them, reducing them to authorizations for his

own assertions – obvious in Eagleton reference in 2024, 11) and in the Santos reference in 2024, 12), allegations made without argument documentation.<sup>4</sup> That is the colonizing structure of Paraskeva’s publications.

Demonstrating his actual reverence for the “modern Western Eurocentric epistemological platform,” Paraskeva invokes the important curriculum theorist of some seventy years ago – Dwayne E. Huebner – whose reliance upon legendary European thinkers is obvious on almost every page (Huebner 1999). Apparently seducing the once great scholar into pretending that his religion was Marxism not Christianity (see the “dialogue” with Huebner: Paraskeva 2011, 215-262), Paraskeva throws him under the bus, informing us that Huebner “met the same fate” as have many, namely falling to an “uncontrolled epistemicidal spiral” (2024, 12) – whatever that might be. Mixed metaphors are evidently involved, as the “spiral” amounts to, or results in a “theoretical shipwreck” to which, Paraskeva has “tried to look for ‘solutions’” (2024, 13), an odd choice of phrasing given the centrality of “problem-solving” (and thus finding “solutions”) to capitalist corporate work culture. Perhaps unsurprisingly – given that his preoccupation is murder (as in “epistemicide”) – his so-called “solutions” have to do with homicide, as “I have repeatedly argue[d] that the way we have been producing our critical and post-critical theories needs to die” (2024, 13). What “way” was that? Actual scholarship?

Turns out Paraskeva is just getting started, writing next that “it is important to work from *“neustros locales,”* a sense of ownership of place Paraskeva invokes in Spanish not English or French or German but in Spanish, yes a language under siege by English but also the language of those who first invaded, then slaughtered the indigenous peoples of the Americas. If Paraskeva actually knew the field he claims to represent one might suspect he means to inspire a social psychoanalytic curriculum theory of place<sup>5</sup> or its and its autobiographical demand<sup>6</sup>, but probably

not, as social psychoanalysis – that “way” of working and knowing - is attributable to Europeans, specifically to Germans working at the Frankfurt School, then, after fleeing Hitler’s Germany, in the United States. Not only is the identity politics of “*neustros locales*,” all wrong – reducing theory to the ethnicity or nationality or geographical location of those who composed it - Paraskeva endorses no-place at all, not even a Spanish “*neustros locales*” but instead “non-spaces” (2024, 13), presumably what place becomes when one converts it into an “itinerant curriculum theory,” a theory of “non-spaces” (Ibid.)

Since his most recent publication is a collection titled *Itinerant Curriculum Theory*, perhaps there this concept of “itinerant” will be clarified and distinguished from its unsavory history.<sup>7</sup> Not in his introduction, as we’re quickly confronted by the rant - endless accusations, assertions, no clarification or explanation in sight. Among the assertions are self-advertisements: we’re informed that ICT (of course there’s an acronym) is “subversively transgressive,” although of what (and how and why) Paraskeva keeps to himself. What is crucial about ICT, Paraskeva emphasizes, is that it’s a passport to “permanent exile,” a stateless status millions of political refugees might not be so quick to welcome. It’s not obvious why Paraskeva would welcome indeed endorse such status, as the term depicts someone who travels from place to place – a tourist? a snake-oil salesman<sup>8</sup>? – one who is, being an “itinerant,” precluded from in-depth knowledge of any one place or people, but then that’s perhaps the point of his the subtitle - *A Declaration of Epistemological Independence* - declaring he’s wedded to no one knowledge or (any) way of knowing, a masculinist rejection of relationality as well as an indirect appeal to the “post-truth” era in which we’re embedded.<sup>9</sup> Nothing “new” here, as such a condition characterized Nazi Germany, about which one survivor commented: “What really makes it possible for a totalitarian or any other kind of dictatorship to rule is that the people are not

informed,” Hannah Arendt explained in a 1973 interview, adding: “If everyone always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but that no one believes anything at all anymore,” robbing people of their capacity to act and of their “capacity to think and to judge,” and allowing governments to rescind the sacred right of citizenship.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly Paraskeva feels so entitled, feeling privileged to say anything that comes to mind. Is that “epistemological independence”? Why would one employed as a scholar - an ancient and privileged profession with its timeless obligations to truth-telling – declare the right to say anything, to declare independence from scholarly traditions and responsibilities? One explanation is that his pronouncements are less a matter of “itinerant curriculum theory” than of clickbait curriculum theory, i.e. attention-grabbing statements whose point is exactly and only that – grabbing and keeping colleagues’ attention.

The term “attention economy” was coined by psychologist, economist, and Nobel Laureate Herbert A. Simon, who considered attention to be the “bottleneck of human thought” in that it confines what we can perceive and what we can do.<sup>11</sup> Simon also suggested that “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention”.<sup>12</sup> Certainly one feels intellectually impoverished after being subjected to Paraskeva’s endless diatribes. In 1997, theoretical physicist Michael Goldhaber argued that the global economy is shifting from a materials-based economy to an attention-based economy; fewer people work in manufacturing as more work with information. Goldhaber insisted that information is not scarce, attention is.<sup>13</sup> As the university became increasingly, suffocatingly, corporatized,<sup>14</sup> productivity (not “quality”) became paramount, and so scholarship and/or research<sup>15</sup> are often assessed by their “visibility” - how often it is cited. Administrators (who are often not scholars or researchers, often anti-intellectual authoritarians) tend to consider citations (ah, ResearchGate) to confirm quality. Now, as the staff of the *Berkeley*

*Economic Review* points out, “As our economy becomes more dependent on attention, the medium of exchange flows from the holders of the old to the holders of the new.”<sup>16</sup> Descriptors like “new” or “cutting-edge” can become severed from any sense of quality; they become attached instead to attention-getting. And, of course, what was once “new” quickly becomes old, even retrograde or reactionary or, in Paraskeva’s case, simply false. Devising new buzzwords and acronyms, new clickbait, manufactures a sense of urgency, in Paraskeva’s political economy, the “new” allegation, regardless its veracity or generativity as a concept. Paraskeva represents no rogue, no “breakthrough”<sup>17</sup> theorist, only a scrambling would-be survivor of the next stage of advanced academic capitalism and its not so “creative destruction” of the university, victims all of what Amin Samman and Earl Gammon characterize as *Clickbait Capitalism*.<sup>18</sup>

### Clickbait Capitalism

In his preface to their 2023 collection, Samman defines “clickbait” as depicting the “intersection of money, technology, and desire,” often a misrepresentation – even outright falsehood - to garner attention of one kind or another (outrage, voyeurism, fear of missing out, *Scadenfreude*), the latter term defined as “pleasure, joy, or self-satisfaction” experienced when witnessing the “humiliation” of another, in the present instance many others, the North Atlantic fields of curriculum studies. *Scadenfreude* is borrowed from German; the English word for it is epicaricacy, which originated in the 18th century. *Schadenfreude* has been detected in children as young as 24 months and may be an important social emotion.”<sup>19</sup> In convicting (against the evidence) curriculum studies as guilty of “epistemicide,” Paraskeva self-righteously commits epicaricacy.

Paraskeva is hardly alone in profiting from the attentional economy, itself producing what Komporozos-Athanasiou and Haiven (2023, 209) consider “new” tendencies within society and subjecthood” emerging among what they dignify as capitalism’s “anxious subjects,” including students at Anglophone North Atlantic universities.<sup>20</sup> Among the anxious students they’ve observed, they see something akin to those youth in China who are said to be “lying flat,”<sup>21</sup> what Komporozos-Athanasiou and Haiven inflate as “sabotage,” not the self-sabotage it would also seem to be, but instead a form of “resistance” to “financialized cognitive capitalism” (2023, 211) now having completely appropriated universities which they allege “transfer” all “risk and responsibility to students” (2023, 212). Surely that’s an exaggeration; faculty are also at “risk,” forced to please paying customers (there remain actual “students” here and there) but also often authoritarian administrators who demand productivity and high citation counts. But Komporozos-Athanasiou and Haiven are interested only in students, whose submersion in “technologies” that not only “trigger high levels of student anxiety but also, increasingly, a *respite from such anxiety*” (2023, 215). Increasingly? Evidence? Thus, they continue, the technologization of Gen Zers “cannot be reduced to doom-scrolling escapism,” as “their political potential” – ah, workers-of-the-world unite - is their “puncturing” of the the fantasy of the ‘romantic entrepreneur’” (2023, 216). Komporozos-Athanasiou and Haiven (2023, 216) then wonder what a “screen present” – with its never-ending “immersive distraction” – can contribute to a sense of “togetherness” within financialized universities; they suggest such sites can create “*anxious solidarities*,” producing struggles “unseen and often ‘unseeable’” in Instagram posts and Facebook comment feeds, where “students’ anxiety” shows “irony, playfulness, and routine expressions of mutual care” (2023, 217). Apparently, these “anxious solidarities” aren’t entirely “unseeable.”

Alas, such anxious - false? – solidarities can occur in curriculum studies not, however, through “irony, playfulness, and routine expressions of mutual care” but through demonization of others, in Paraskeva’s case the condemnation of his colleagues and our predecessors<sup>22</sup> of apparently any idea that isn’t from the Global South, certainly one site of victimization. As Elshtain (2002, 201) importantly points out, however, victimhood confers no moral superiority, no political acuity, as Latin America’s history of military dictatorships, racism, economic inequality, make plain.

For Paraskeva, victimization turns out to be not a topic of research but only another conceptual “resource,” as he appropriates the Global’s South’s suffering to fuel his own evangelical entrepreneurialism. He seems another one of those “bad entrepreneurs,” from WeWork founders Adam and Rebekah Neumann in Apple TV’s *We Crashed*, to Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes in Hulu’s *The Dropout*, to wannabe socialite Anne Delvey in the Netflix series *Inventing Anna*, concluding that “renegade scammers and gullible audiences are fast becoming hallmarks of the era” (Samman 2023, 231), as evidently “We want to be fooled, robbed, swindled – either that or we want to watch it happen to somebody else, which usually amounts to the same thing.... Maybe this is the meaning of ‘clickbait capitalism’.” If the ball is in our court, why haven’t we played another game, turned our attention elsewhere? Has our capacity to judge, to act, been completely compromised?

Komporozos-Athanasίου and Haiven (2023, 224) would seem to say so, asserting that (all?) students have been “traumatized” by the “near domination” of their “subjecthood” – not that of the faculty?<sup>23</sup> - rendering the prospects of “mass revolt” unlikely, so that “therapy and ‘support,’” for Komporozos-Athanasίου and Haiven a “therapeutic turn also manifests a politics of inchoate rebellion.”<sup>24</sup> Really? Will it lead somewhere when widespread psychotherapy has

not? Or does such resistance lead to nowhere, no “place” (Kincheloe and Pinar 1991, Casemore 2007, Whitlock 2007) – a concept which requires knowledge of history, of specificity, details - only empty “space”? For Samman (2023, 9), a “new clickbait configuration” of “economy” forefronts “freedom” and “flux” as the “new” signatures of capitalist life. Can such “pulsional possibilities,” pretenses to “psychic revolution” actually “remake society?” (Gammon 2023, 9) Or even oneself? Critique becomes likewise diffused, absent argument or evidence or specificity, depicting the status quo “as devoid of all hope and possibility,” such unfocused condemnation in service to “the idea of an unknown and radically open future” (Gammon 2023, 10).

Like Trump, Paraskeva seems to see condemnation<sup>25</sup> as somehow revolutionary. Also like Trump, in Paraskeva there is also an implication of conspiracy,<sup>26</sup> as if all his predecessors in curriculum studies conspired to silencing the Global South – in which case “-cide” constitutes first-degree murder - the citation of which apparently paves the avenue to an “open and satisfying future,” but Gammon (2023, 25) cautions that such a future is obtainable only by “setting in motion the constitution of the ego as a defensive psychical formation.” Narcissism is likely if not inevitable, the self now withering in withdrawal from actual embodied engagement, obsessively condemning perceived threats to its splintering subjective coherence, during infancy and early childhood by inventing what Heinz Kohut – the great Austrian-born American psychoanalyst - called “selfobjects,” these “confirming” the child’s sense of “vigor, greatness and perfection” and with which the self can imagine “calmness, infallibility, and omnipotence” (Gammon 2023, 27). When “political economy viewed through a Kohutian lens,” Gammon continues, “*Homo economicus* is replaced with *Homo narcissus*, a subject beset by illusions of narcissistic *wholeness*, and who libidinally invests in selfobjects to shore up their self-integrity” (2023, 31).<sup>27</sup> But, Gammon (2023, 33) adds, “lacking an empathic environment, and

beset by selfobject failures, the reaction can be one what Kohut termed “narcissistic rage,” an “unleashing of destructive aggression.” Narcissistic rage is an effort at revenge, righting a wrong, for “undoing a hurt *by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of all these aims*” (quoted in Gammon 2023, 33, emphasis added). Gammon (2023, 33-34) explains that “narcissistic rage is not just aggression employed to satisfying a limited objective,” as “it arises from a narcissistically injured individual who “cannot rest until [they have] blotted out a vaguely experienced offender who dared to oppose a[them], to disagree with [them], or to outshine [them.]” As we have seen in Trump, such narcissistic rage can manifest in acute outbursts, or in an ongoing chronic manner, taking the form of a “grudge,” expressed as passive aggression which works to annihilate the “offending object” (Gammon 2023, 34). In our time, Gammon (2023, 34) asserts, “neoliberal selfhood” represents a “failed selfobject, which by promoting disempathy and discompassion creates conditions conducive to chronic narcissistic rage,” which is defined by “defensive intransigence and chronic rage,” both constituting “severe impediments to empathy” (Gammon 2023, 36). Markelj (2023, 81) points out that “antagonistic affectivity of this kind within the political sphere is itself nothing new, but the complex set of specifics introduced into it by networked technologies have yet to be fully grasped” (Markelj 2023, 81).

Markelj (2023, 81-82) examines antagonistic affective tendencies in relation to “socio-cultural fragmentation” and the “disappearance of a common frame of reference – a development which has been associated with the emergence of a ‘post-truth’ universe,” and, Markelj adds, “such cultural fragmentation incites ... affective tendencies that Deleuze and Guattari understood as paranoid. “Paranoia,” Markelj (2023, 84) explains, is an “unconscious tendency that arises, as

Foucault puts it, ‘enamoured with power’ that exploits us, is, then invested in a “particular order of things, enforces the borders that define it, and guards it against change and interruption.”

In another chapter in *Clickbait Capitalism* – a collection I recommend, despite its own admission of clickbaiting<sup>28</sup> - Emily Rosamond analyzes a TED talk that (at the time of her writing) has been viewed (talk about grabbing attention) over eleven million times (2023, 99) – given by by psychotherapist Meg Jay, a talk on what Jay terms “identity capital,” by which she means actions “that adds value to who you are” (2023, 98). While I’ve complained about TED talks’ formulaic formatting,<sup>29</sup> Rosamond (2023, 99) critiques TED talks’ “sensationalised conception of research impact – its reinforcement of the assumption that research must be inspiring, uplifting, entertaining, and linked to a narrative of personal growth in order to count.” For one’s “identity capital” to yield dividends, one must make “investments in what one would like to become next,” investments in contacts, a specifically instrumentalized conception of the social, now “relationality,”<sup>30</sup> both terms categories of significance in curriculum studies.<sup>31</sup> Jay’s talk, Rosamond (2023, 101) point out, highlights the capitalization of even “weak social ties,” even passing acquaintances or friends of friends, folks at the edges of social networks, who, perhaps inadvertently, might still bring to one useful information and opportunity. Rosamond (2023, 101) notes that Jay’s talk extends Mark Granovetter’s 1973 article “The Strength of Weak Ties,” research Granovetter did not intend to be instrumentalized (Rosamond 2023, 101), but nonetheless Jay recasts the idea as “turbo-charging” one career (2023, 103), constructing a “new opportunistic subject, one who understands freedom as ‘practical power,’” reorienting the “‘autonomous’ subject’s desire to know itself, to the opportunist’s desire to find a place from which to take off” (2023, 107), in effect exploiting “coincidence” to get ahead (2023, 108), keeping in place a fantasy of one’s extremely successful life, which requires moving to the

“edges” of several “social networks,” human contacts now financialized as “hedged portfolios” of personal and career “potential” (2023, 109).

There are other examples of the digitalization of almost everything, including a chapter on currency, e.g. “*cryptoassets*,” at the time of Rella’s writing with a current total of 24,194 cryptoassets and a total market size of \$1.1 trillion (2023, 117), a figure set to increase with Trump’s enthusiasm for digital currency. There is also a chapter critiquing the “individualistic” and “decontextualized subject” developmentally ordained to “overcome dependency by separating from an original embeddedness in relationality” (Layton 2023, 136), a well-worn critique – repeated endlessly in contemporary curriculum studies articles – that always contradicts itself, in this chapter when Layton (2023, 137) acknowledges: “Part of one’s singularity, perhaps most of one’s singularity, emerges from how one mediates among those relationships that demand conformity and those that do not, how one handles conflict.” Ah, so there *is* an “singularity” – an actual individual person – with at least relative agency, enabling the individual to mediate among relationships. She does make the interesting if exaggerated point that because neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party was representing their [e.g. working-class] economic interest; the neoliberal consensus left only cultural matters like abortion rights to be fought over” (Layton 2023, 141), political expressions of “social narcissism” (2023, 142).

Over-zealous critique of well-intended efforts – bringing Paraskeva to mind yet again, his clickbait succeeding in keeping my attention, although only for the duration of this chapter I agreed to contribute - occurs in Wilson’s (2023, 155) somewhat sensationalistic and surely surly condemnation of “compassionate consumerism,” an evil that “does not merely conceal relations of global inequality beneath a veneer of ethical concern or justify them on the basis of the

charitable giving of the privileged,” it also presumably seduces the affluent consumer of the Global North to “*enjoy* the relations of inequality that it simultaneously stages and disavows” (2023, 156), that last allegation not utterly implausible but asserted – as was the first allegation - without evidence or argument. One target of Wilson’s ire is Table for Two International, an organization that aspires to address “obesity in the ‘developed’ world” while fighting “malnutrition in the ‘developing’ world” by serving “low-calories meals in its participating restaurants and sending the calories it has ‘saved’ to food-insecure regions, not perishable food but cash to be spent on free school meals for hungry children” (Wilson 2023, 158). In Wilson’s anything but charitable analysis – Table for Two International serves its local diner an “ethical discourse” of “equality” and “generosity” which they presumably smugly satisfying, not necessarily because the low-calorie food they’re consuming is especially delicious or the business’ donation of food to the starving is somehow comforting but because in doing so they “enjoy” that they’re depriving themselves of calories in order to provide starving human beings calories they would not otherwise consume (2023, 159). Again, this allegation is not entirely implausible, but where’s the evidence that this is the case? Nastiness not data seems to be the source here, also in circulation in Wilson’s unappetizing take-down of Toilet Twinning, a UK-based charity that offers the affluent in Europe and North America the opportunity to “twin” their toilet with a latrine in south-east Asia or sub-Saharan Africa. This mix of charity and capitalism leaves Wilson (2023, 160) pissed off as he dismisses Toilet Twinning’s charity to (no “theorycide” here) “framing the anal drive with a disavowed fantasy of inequality, which promises to make the donor’s bowel movement enjoyable” (ibid). Really? How exactly would Wilson know that? Finally, the self-righteous Wilson (2023, 163) remains focused mid-body, this time getting off over a company called Sir Richard’s Condoms, a California-based social

enterprise that “specialises in ‘ethical condoms,’” donating (for every condom it sells) a condom to a “developing country” in order to prevent “unwanted pregnancies” and “sexually transmitted diseases.” Wilson complains that Sir Richard’s Condoms adopts an “irreverent” advertising strategy: “A pleasure pack with a purpose”; “Give back while getting it on”; “Doing good never felt better”; and so on” (quoted passages in Wilson 2023, 163), amusing if admittedly obnoxious efforts to increase business, but hardly sophisticated or evil enough to be guilty of “depoliticising development by promising an easy solution to highly complex socio-economic problems, based on the selective provision of a single material input, underpinned by the sensual enjoyment of a specific bodily act” (2023, 164). Wilson (2023, 165) then reminds us he has “argued” – there is no argument, only damning assertion after assertion (ah, Paraskeva) – that “compassionate consumerism operates ideologically through the production of specific fantasies,” meaning that its charitable business helps the less fortunate by stimulating in the affluent “disavowed enjoyment” of economic and maybe even moral “inequality.” He then warns us that “Representations of the Third World as ‘Hell on Earth’ function to replace critical thought with an urgent ‘ethical’ gesture” (Wilson 2023, 165), the “enjoyment” of which is “dependent upon the imagined gaze of the grateful beneficiary” (Wilson 2023, 167). His cynicism is complete.

Skepticism is central to critical questioning but cynicism – a refusal to accept that human beings are ever, in any circumstance, capable of doing good - eclipses both. Without evidence or argument, fantasy – especially in the form of shocking (attention-grabbing) allegations (as in Democrats are pedophiles<sup>32</sup> or that curriculum studies scholars are willful murderers of others’ ways of knowing, that latter charge Bernadette Baker’s [2009, 2010] scholarship – among that of many others<sup>33</sup> - refutes) - reigns. When fantasy – cynicism - prevails over empirical reality, overstatement (even simple sensationalism) is inevitable. I suppose Samman and Sgambati

(2023, 193) are right to underline the insecurity of our lives – not only students but faculty seem submerged in clickbait capitalism - but their declaration that the leveraging of debt “install(s) eschatology at the heart of daily life” seems a stretch. They attribute to “financialization” the sense of the apocalypse shared by many – a sense exploited by Paraskeva’s Jonathan Edwards-like sermonizing - be saved and or be damned, easily attributable to religious fundamentalism (but not to theology generally), a distinction Samman and Sgambati ignore when they assert that “contemporary narratives of financialization carry with them strong theology undertones” (2023, 194). In capitalism, however, it is not faith or the presence of God that constitutes the “means of connecting present and future,” it is “money” (ibid). and “money” is precisely what accrues from success in the attentional economy, hence their conception of clickbait capitalism. “Because money can be converted into anything,” Samman and Sgambati (2023, 194) suggest, “it is an index of our freedom and imagination.” It can also be converted into nothing, as life lived for money only renders those lives “valueless” (Samman and Sgambati 2023, 204). Certainly it renders scholarship stimulated by the attentional economy – clickbait curriculum theory – valueless.

## Conclusion

“The conditions affecting contemporary life,” David Simpson (2002, 196) pointed out, “are or have been made to seem so confusing and manifold as to be open to infinite analysis; they are embedded in patterns of cause and effect that are reflexive, recursive, and beyond confident representation,” adding:

Some of this is surely tinfoil working to jam the radar systems of cultural critique, so that we must constantly suspect ourselves (and indeed this is the burden of reflexivity and

recursivity) of mystification in the very description of life in these terms; we must be constantly anxious that we might be missing something, that we are reproducing what we most wish to dispute.

And Simpson isn't even speaking specifically of "epistemicide" – a concept which itself re-enacts what it projects only others – but he could have been. His point about jamming the "radar systems of cultural critique" is profound. We are jammed alright, ready (eager?) to believe the worst, reduced to cynics liable to almost three-century old fundamentalist nonsense, now – as then – sensationalized, but now functioning as "clickbait" to secure your attention – and keep it. Truth be damned.

In its misrepresentations, sensationalism, outright falsehoods, so-called epistemicide and its born-again salvation-"solution" to that "problem" - ICT - turns out to be itself the murderers of knowing, of knowledge itself, homicide haunted by the crimes to which it projects onto others, e.g. a crime cover-up, as we readers become witnesses to homicide – in the published texts, murder made in "public" (as Trump so proudly commits his crimes) – presented as avenging injustice, "reproducing what we most wish to dispute" (in Simpson's terms). Paraskeva, too, promises vengeance and salvation, but -alas – he is no detective but actually the murderer himself, pretending to investigate a crime so as to cover it up. Then he leaves town, proudly proclaiming his innocence as an "itinerant," a tourist, seeing the sights, no student of any situation, clueless about the content of time and place, of his ethical obligations – as a scholar – to tell the truth, not simply attract attention. Such is Paraskeva's *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory*, a sober-sounding title but turns out to be a pseudo-history citing gossip instead of evidence or argument. But then such scholarly malpractice is irrelevant as all the author seeks is "likes" and "subscribe," demanding skeptics to become cynics, suspecting hegemonic epistemologies of

crimes against humanity (certainly against the Global South). That the scale of Paraskeva's cynicism would seem to include science, as the planet overheats, dries out, burns then over-saturates – “fake news” Trump termed it. No matter, our fearless itinerant has a secure income and a place to stay at night; he even has followers (named in Paraskeva 2018), those who have “liked” and “subscribed.”

Like one of “Hitchcock's menacing attack birds” (Ronell, 84), Paraskeva, by pretending to provide a history of the field is attempting to insinuate himself in the field, even as the recipient of that history, those past pointless “conflicts” authorizing him in the here-and-now to excoriate the sinners and mobilize the righteous to triumph over everything evil, but he is – by his own concept of “itinerant” – member of no community (however loosely that term aligns with an academic field) but always on his way to somewhere else, shouting slogans along the way to attract attention. But not only: by condemning phantoms, Paraskeva self-pardons, acts of self-exoneration that occur by condemning others (even when “others” are abstractions without empirical referents, like his references to eugenics, an outrageously racist concept and practice Paraskeva disinters from its burial ground in history to wave wildly at us, as if contemporary racists were advocating sterilization (except metaphorically, by sealing the borders). Misrepresentation, sensationalism, sermonizing – it's all just clickbait screaming for our attention.

There is something prophetic about Paraskeva's texts, I admit, something about the delirium they express that seems to be playing out on the terrain of world history, albeit in unexpected ways, evident in the deranged accusatory politics of Donald J. Trump, everyone evil except himself and those in agreement with him, agreement less conceptual than affective,

“anxious solidarities” achieved by alleging victimhood, enacting rage and revenge. Like and subscribe.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pinar 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Born in Mozambique, Paraskeva chose to study and work in the Global North, first in the USA and now in Scotland, choices that betray his pretense of allegiance to the Global South.

Paraskeva's self-contradictoriness – or is it simple hypocrisy? - reminds one of another American-style preacher - Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández – who railed against “privilege” while leveraging his own privilege to attend Harvard, publishing his book condemning privilege at the Harvard University Press, then accepting a position at the prestigious University of Toronto. So much for detesting “privilege.” Like and subscribe.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Hua and Zhenyu Gao (2014, 118) point out that the “Chinese term for curriculum is *ke-cheng*,” a term that first appeared in Confucian classics during the Tang dynasty (in power from 618 to 907, with an interregnum between 690 and 705).

<sup>4</sup> “Curriculum theory as we know it,” Paraskeva (2011, xxxvii) proclaims, “has been incapable of smashing such yoke of coloniality,” a phrasing that leaves the door open to curriculum theory as we do not know it, namely Paraskeva's very own ICT which re-enacts coloniality, traveling here and there, always on the road, wherever the itinerant decides to set up shop to sell his conceptual wares, to extract conceptual resources for conceptual manufacture, all the while promoting his own career as a self-righteous defender – of (it turns out) falsehoods.

<sup>5</sup> Kincheloe and Pinar 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Casemore 2007.

<sup>7</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/51640/chapter-abstract/422294896?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false#:~:text=Traveling%20preachers%20might%20extend%20the%20faith%20to%20new,conflicted%20with%20the%20message%20of%20the%20original%20preacher> See also: <https://petticoatsandpistols.com/2010/03/19/circuit-preachers-saving-souls-with-a-bible-in-one-hand-and-a-gun-in-the-other/> and <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/itinerant-christians>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/08/26/215761377/a-history-of-snake-oil-salesmen>

<sup>9</sup> For an exemplary sober and scholarly analysis of such “masculinism,” see Burns 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted passages from <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/13/books/jerome-kohn-dead.html>

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in <https://econreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/paying-attention-the-attention-economy/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <https://econreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/paying-attention-the-attention-economy/>

<sup>14</sup> While corporatization of the university has meant many more administrators, fewer faculty – and their proletarianization - Komporozos-Athanasίου and Haiven (2023, 212) point out that “financialised universities preside over a systematic and wholesale transfer of risk and responsibility to students. Yet their function as debt-fuelled ‘promise machines’ is all but lost.”

<sup>15</sup> Scholarship is often associated with the humanities and the arts, research with the sciences, including the social sciences. For me scholarship bears the signature – the voice, the individuality of the author and the specificity of the topic – of s/he who produced it while research can appear almost anonymously, often with several authors. Whether scholarship or research, prestige in the university as financialized is conferred upon whatever attracts attention, specifically the number of citations for example, something quantified and certainly emphasized

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on websites such as Academia.edu (which boasts that “Papers uploaded to Academia get 69% more citations” and ResearchGate.net (which reports almost daily the appearance “new” research publications as well as when one’s work has been cited).

<sup>16</sup> <https://econreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/paying-attention-the-attention-economy/>

<sup>17</sup> See Axelrod 1979 for portraits of actual “breakthrough” theorists.

<sup>18</sup> Samman and Gammon 2023.

<sup>19</sup> 2023, ix.

<sup>20</sup> Komporozos-Athanasίου and Haiven (2023, 220) see that on both sides of the North Atlantic, a “highly paid managerial class actively seek to sabotage what remains of the public university system built in the postwar system, with its now anachronistic beliefs in equality of access, affordability, a complement of permanent, non-precarious teaching staff, and its commitment to education in the public interest.” That’s “old news,” having already happened in North America, especially in the U.S.A.

<sup>21</sup> Positioning work second: see <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-60353916> Komporozos-Athanasίου and Haiven (2023, 223) characterize North Atlantic students’ disinclination to work as “rebellion” as well, to my mind not nearly as brave as their Chinese counterparts who face an authoritarian political system and, historically at least, an unsustainable work tradition:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-58381538>

<sup>22</sup> Paraskeva (2011, xxxix) proclaims that “curriculum theory – in its dominant and counter-dominant forms – has revealed glaringly incapability to reverse such reality,” namely the reality of injustice and oppression. Has ICT succeeded where past curriculum theory has failed? Can any academic field eliminate injustice?

<sup>23</sup> For one analysis, see Berg and Seeber 2016.

<sup>24</sup> While not therapy, the method of *currere* is one effort to engage the student – and teacher – in work on him/herself that can have if not therapeutic at least agentic effects: Pinar 1975.

<sup>25</sup> The examples are endless, but consider Paraskeva’s (2024, 11) declaration that that the “modern Western Eurocentric epistemological platform ... is irreversibly exhausted,” but apparently not too tired for him, as he then quotes (for the second time on the page, the first at the top as epigram) the venerable English literary scholar Terry Eagleton to back-up his assertion, one of many pronouncements Paraskeva makes, decontextualized and thereby exploited references.

<sup>26</sup> Seymour (2024, 51-52) points out that “conspiracism explains the problem in a way that may require bloody revenge, may even entail a radical revision of the fabric of reality, but it still averts the need for radical social change.” Paraskeva wants “conceptual change” but politics – *realpolitik* – seems in his work epiphenomenal at best.

<sup>27</sup> To grasp historically its political consequences in America – Trump and right-wing social narcissism – Christopher Lasch’s analysis is canonical (Lasch 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Here seems an appropriate place as any to admit that I’ve hardly escaped unscathed clickbait capitalism. Not that you haven’t noticed already.

<sup>29</sup> Pinar 2023, 3.

<sup>30</sup> “Created in image of God,” Elshtain (2005, 249) asserts, “human relationality defines us.” Really? Even Judith Butler (2021, 10) points out, “relationality is not by itself a good thing, a sign of connectedness, an ethical norm to be posited over and against destruction: rather, relationality is a vexed and ambivalent field in which the question of ethical obligation has to be worked out in light of a persistent and constitutive destructive potential.”

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Wexler 1987. While not using the term “relationality,” even Franklin Bobbitt (1918, 10) was thinking of it when he wrote that “everything in the community is related to everything else in subtle, intangible, and usually unknown ways.” Bobbitt’s point was less appreciation for the power of “the social” in a person’s life than the social efficiency of the school, specifically the school curriculum.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/marjorie-taylor-greene-defends-calling-democrats-pedophiles-rcna77869>

<sup>33</sup>See Pinar 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014, 2015. Curriculum studies in the Global South are also represented in the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (Pinar 2014) as well as in long-standing book series such as “Curriculum Studies Worldwide”:

<https://link.springer.com/series/14948>

Non-Western references are rife: see, for example, the work of Hongyu Wang (2021, 2024) and Wanying Wang (2021).