

Disruption, Silence, and Creation: The Search for Dialogic Civility in the Age of Anxiety

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Abstract:

This article searches the contours of anxiety, asking whether anxiety can serve as a springboard to creative engagement in dialogue. Specifically, the article explores the university classroom as a possible site where anxiety might be transformed into the spark of creation. Three opportune moments are examined—disruption, silence, and creation—for the possibilities they present for creating new spaces of energy and new engagement with the call of alterity that erupts in human encounter. The encounter with an “Other” who calls to us from across a chasm of difference—a call that demands a response—is the opening to the possibility of creative engagement that can lead to new levels of transcendence in the classroom and beyond.

Keywords: anxiety; civility; creativity; dialogue; silence

Article:

SEPTEMBER 11, 2002: ONE YEAR LATER

I wake with a small shiver. What was that dream?

There is a fine trace of mist in the Carolina air as I rise and begin my ritual preparations for another day. I walk out into the half-dark morning to retrieve my newspaper as the coffee brews. I turn as a cottontail bolts across my lawn.

Back inside, I open the paper. It fairly shouts: OUT OF THE DARKNESS... headline accompanied by a photo of crews searching for bodies at Ground Zero.

One year later . . .

We find ourselves gripped by memory.

One year later . . .

Our media revive the ordeal for us. *CNN* and *NPR* and the *News & Record* all do their part to remind us of our shattering, shivering ordeal.

One year later . . .

Yesterday it was photos of Osama and Mohammed; the day before it was the first plane going into the first tower. The photos are large, taking up almost half of the front page.

One year later . . .

Driving to work, I see the sun fading to orange behind the prodigious humidity of late summer in the south. Still, I notice that there is a hint of relief in the air. It's a few degrees cooler today. I sense a small twinge of autumn on the way. The leaves are starting to . . .

My reverie is interrupted by a small act of kindness from a stranger who lets me into the stream of heavy traffic.

An ordinary day . . .

One year later . . .

And yet . . .

As I walk into my office on this "ordinary" day, I can't shake this feeling. What was I dreaming? What am I feeling? I cannot make sense of it, so I do what I do at these moments. I sit down to write. I do not know why I am writing this, I just know that I *must*.

I write to make sense.

Sometimes I write to make sense of the senseless.

What *is* it? What is this feeling? There is something in the pit of my stomach . . .

And what is that song in my head? I cast about, trying to remember. Then it hits me. I am not hearing Mozart or Brahms or Beethoven or even Irving Berlin or Katharine Lee Bates on this anniversary.

What runs through my head is one of the *NPR* theme songs. National Public Radio has been my companion for many years, but never so much as in the past year. I think I turned to *NPR* because, at a certain point, I could no longer bear to watch the images on *CNN*. Such images have power. And besides, the plane hitting the tower, people running, dust and smoke and ash—all are indelibly written on my memory. I sometimes wish I could shake them out of my head and my heart.

So, for the past year, I have listened and read and wrote and taught, all the while searching for meaning, for sense.

And yet, today, on this ordinary day, I turned off my radio.

Enough! I am *saturated* by 9/11!

Later today, we will gather at our university fountain to commemorate that tragic day one year ago. I do not know how I feel about that. But I do know that I will go. I *must* go.

That feeling? What is that feeling?

Anxiety.

CODE ORANGE ANXIETY.

An ordinary day?

A year ago I wrote:

“On September 11, 2001, something died. It wasn’t just people. On September 11, 2001, *ordinariness* died” (Poulos, 2002, p. 288).

The death of *ordinariness* haunts me.

The death of *ordinariness* invigorates me.

Yesterday, on September 10, 2002, I gathered my students in a circle and asked them a simple question: “How has life changed since 9/11?” We had a broad-ranging, thoughtful conversation. Our many points of view came together toward the end of the hour. We rested on a single theme. Although the meanings and motives and solutions for such brutal acts of violence still elude us, we are all sharply aware of both our mortality *and* our hope.

Ordinariness may have been incinerated once and for all by that burst of flame, but at the same time, we find hope and possibility in the simple gift of *human connection*. Maybe we spend more time with our families; perhaps we are a little gentler with our neighbors. Occasionally, we let people into the stream of traffic.

At 8:46 a.m. today, my wife tells me, a whole street of traffic simply pulled over and stopped. For a brief moment, there was a breath ... of silence. And camaraderie. We seem to savor connection with others in a new way.

As the morning mist clears, I find myself wanting to tell all the people I love how much their mere presence means to me: My family, my friends, my colleagues, my students ... each in her or his own way brings something special into my life. They give me a great gift: The gift of connection, of belonging.

OCTOBER 9, 2002

It is now almost thirteen months since that fateful day. On any given day, I might be persuaded that the mist of *ordinariness* has returned to our lives. We go about our business, doing what we need to do to get by. Most of my energy, these days, goes toward “making it” in a world of “tenure-earning positions.” That experience, in itself, is a study in how *ordinariness* can intrude into a potentially transcendent set of pursuits.

As I walk to class, I wonder if this exam I am about to administer is really why we are here. As I watch my students go through the well-practiced motions of test taking, I certainly can conceive of this as a truly *ordinary* experience.

And yet, today we stand on the brink of war. The tongue of George W. Bush is dripping with words of WAR-ning. “Suh-dfimn!” is how he pronounces the name of the new “public enemy number one” of the world; or alternatively, “Sodom,” with all its biblical overlays and implications. (Osama has faded into the darkness of a shadowy Afghan cave.) And in suburban Washington, D.C., a sniper lurks, taking apparently random but well-aimed shots at our sense of “homeland security.”

So, today, anxiety floods back in as I consider what might happen to this world into which Sue and I have brought two precious children. What will their lives be like? This weekend, I will take my youngest son, Noah, on a trip to Disney World to celebrate his seventh birthday. That trip hovers before me both with threat and with promise. After September 11, flying is just not the same.

Ordinary? Hmmm. If so, it’s a new kind of ordinary.

JANUARY 20, 2003

Today is Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.

Today I wonder, as we plunge headlong toward war, about the call that issued from that great man's lips one hot August day nearly forty years ago. His call: To engage an open, free society, a society where our children, "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners ... sit down together at the table of brotherhood" and "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King, 1963, p. 3).

Can we live with our alterity?

Can we speak and listen across the chasm of difference without falling into the abyss of social death or the horror of war?

I think these are important questions.

I think we need to answer them.

As a starting place, I have begun to wonder, lately, how I might embark on a search for genuine dialogue in my teaching. I wonder if we can expect—maybe even achieve—"moments of meeting" (Cissna & Anderson, 2002) in the twenty-first-century university classroom. So I have begun to wonder, lately, how I might engage a kind of "dialogic civility" (Arnett & Arneson, 1999) in my teaching.

One of the problems we face in this quest is the problem of anxiety. I have noticed, over the years, that encounters with difference often engender anxiety. Conflict and controversy, especially among university students, are looked on as events to be avoided; they are considered unpleasant, anxiety-producing scenes rather than opportunities for dialogue and growth. Understanding and embracing the contours of anxiety, I want to suggest, is the key to developing a more viable approach to dialogue in the teaching and learning environment we call the classroom.

So, I have been thinking, as these days pass us by, about anxiety and its limits. I have been thinking about how we might conceive of and *use* anxiety to serve as a springboard to a new kind of consciousness. How might anxiety lead to a new kind of learning and to a new kind of communication—*courageous* communication?

If we can answer this question, we might be ready to *engage* with each other—deeply and directly, penetratingly, perhaps painfully, anxiously, creatively, bracingly. Can anxiety invigorate us and turn us toward new kinds of experiences as learners, as communicators, as teachers?

I raise these questions, though I do not know the answers.

I look for clues in the dark folds of my anxiety. *Our* anxiety. CODE ORANGE ANXIETY.

ANXIETY

One thing is, I think, certain. At least by our old definitions, we live in *extra*-ordinary times. In these days of hatred and retaliation, of vitriol and violence, as daily life overflows with the rhetoric of war, the call to dialogic civility, the need for honoring all humans, has never been more urgent. But there is something we must deal with first.

There is a profound energy in the air, an energy that could present both a plague and an opportunity. We live in the age of anxiety (Poulos, 2002). Hovering at the edge of consciousness is the knowledge that *they* are out there. The terrorists lurk in the dim shadowy caves of our collective unconscious.

As the anniversary of 9/11 rolled into view, I realized that although I had experienced some months of relative relief, I was, once again, anxious. I was not alone in this, I discovered, as I talked with students and friends and family and colleagues.

As the fateful anniversary dawned, I realized I was truly engulfed by anxiety—CODE ORANGE ANXIETY! At the same time, I was deeply aware that anxiety has its limits, as I was just barely able to force myself to follow my expected routine—get up, go to my office, write an article, attend a memorial event, teach a class. Anxiety can overwhelm me, turning me into a depressed, numb, fearful, frozen person.

Meanwhile, I began to notice a similar mood among many of my students. There are times—and not just on days like September 11—when I have walked away from class wondering about anxiety and its limits, about how anxiety might both enable and constrain classroom conversation. I walk back to my office, wondering ... And wrestling with anxiety ... Mine *and* theirs...

I have noticed, over the years, that many of my students are hesitant to speak, to “show themselves” publicly in the classroom. When they do, they often seek to define, to contain, to routinize, to categorize, and to “complete” learning. This urge to define, to contain, to routinize, to categorize, and to finish seems to rise up out of some sort of very compelling, almost intractable energy—*anxiety*? And then we teachers offer textbooks and lists and definitions and Power-Pointed bullet points and exams and grades—all to define, to contain, to routinize, to categorize, and to complete. To fend off anxiety?

And yet ... and yet we know that life itself is an open book, a story in the making—a story with many possible endings, anticipated and unanticipated, longed for and ... never really, truly realized. After any single character has departed from the story, the story continues. Even when the hero dies, the story continues.

THE CALL OF THE OTHER

We live in a world of difference. Each person we encounter in our social world represents infinite possibility. We simply do not know what will happen as any given encounter unfolds. But we can be sure that our alterity, or Otherness, will be ever present. Even as we seek commonality, we are ever aware of our difference. And even as we are aware of this difference, it calls out to be *addressed*.

And so, we find ourselves called on—called out, even—to respond to the Others in our presence. As the Other shows himself or herself to us, we are *invoked*. Response, then, becomes a primary social *responsibility*. I am *answerable* to you (Bakhtin, 1993; Buber, 1970; Levinas, 1998).

How, then, to live up to that responsibility? Anxiety intrudes. What should I *do*? *How* should I respond? Should I be “civil” in my response? It seems that to be a citizen of this world, one must learn to live civilly—(care)fully, courageously, responsibly—with Others. Otherwise, we are left to thrash about—violently, perhaps.

DISRUPTION

But consider this. Emmanuel Levinas (1998) wrote, “Communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run” (p. 120). Genuine communication, or dialogue, is a dangerous life!

Is *that* what we do in our classrooms?

Certainly, I have experienced dangerous and transcendent moments in the classroom. But in my experience, that has been the exception rather than the rule. What I want to suggest here is that maybe it is time that we purposely *get dangerous*.

On the simplest level, I practice the disruptive strategy of planned ambiguity. For example, on the first day of my undergraduate course in *Relational Communication*, I do not cover the syllabus or do any of the ordinary things that happen on first days of class around the country. I begin by asking my students to stand and look around the room at each other. I ask them to choose a COMPLETE STRANGER and strike up an ordinary conversation.

At that moment, the anxiety level in the room seems to skyrocket. But slowly they comply, in spite of themselves. They gather in pairs and, tentatively, begin conversing. At first these efforts are nervous and halting; gradually, as the process is repeated again and again, conversations seem to unfold more naturally, more easily, as students gain experience with the process and with each other.

We then form a dialogue circle and talk about that moment of disruption where students are asked, in a simple way, to go out on a limb, to take a risk. In this case, what erupted at the moment of disruption was, perhaps, a “small” case of anxiety for most. The situation was not life threatening. But it *was* an identity test, of sorts! (How to present myself?) So we talk about that moment of disruption as an analogue to other moments in life where we have experienced a disruption of expectation or routine that produced anxiety in some measure.

How did it feel?

Lisa: I was nervous . . . anxious.

Jeanne: I was excited . . . scared.

Jacob: I was pissed!

Really? Why?

Jacob: I was thinking, what a stupid exercise ... why should I talk to a complete *stranger*? I hate this! What’s this for? What’s the *point*?

Good. We’re going to find out—in fact, that’s what this course is about—but how about the rest of you? How did you approach this ambiguous “problem”?

Sally: We just chatted ... you know, about simple stuff. What’s your major? Where are you from? Do you belong to a sorority? Safe stuff.

Woody: Not us. I decided to go out on a limb, tell her something I wouldn’t ordinarily tell a stranger . . .

Jacob: What did you say to her?

Woody (grinning): I’d rather not say.

(Laughter.)

Did you feel any anxiety?

Woody: I was afraid she’d judge me . . . but I figured it was worth the risk.

Sarah: Why?

Woody: Well, it was —because then she told *me* something personal. I think we’re getting to know each other.

This year, as the anniversary of September 11 approached, I, like many of us who call ourselves educators, considered ways to incorporate the events of the day into my courses. I settled on a simple strategy for my *Persuasion in Western Culture* (history of rhetoric) course. We would talk about the rhetoric of commemoration.

Like September 11, 2001, the anniversary was a moment of disruption—an interruption. As an interruption, it stood to evoke a variety of responses: anxiety, despair, sadness, outrage, silence, talk, anger, pride, and so on. It also opened a door for us—perhaps to a new chapter in the story.

The anniversary offered an opportunity to question and to explore, to step beyond the ordinary bounds of our *course*. And we fell into lively, wide-ranging, thoughtful conversation. We spoke of how we, both individually and collectively, mark important anniversaries such as this one communicatively.

How did you mark this anniversary in your life?

Josh: I went to the campus ceremony. I thought it was powerful.

Sam: Yes! I agree!

Melanie: Yeah, I think it was the reading of the names ... that was important. I mean, real people died. They had *names*. They had families.

Sam: Yes, I think it just made it very *real*, and it made us *remember*. Anita: And we prayed together, which I thought was good . . .

Kenneth: And someone talked about a search for meaning—and community—in our troubled world. I thought that was good. It felt like we, this campus, are a community.

What do you mean?

Kenneth: I mean, we were all *connected*—we are all connected, every day. We come together for a purpose, to make our lives better, to learn. We shouldn't forget that.

Rhonda: The gospel choir was cool. A great ending . . .

Katharine: The *silence* struck me as most important. I mean, how often are we silent? Maybe silence makes more sense sometimes than talk.

(We pause, in silence . . . and contemplate that. Then . . .)

Evan: I just don't want to talk about this, or think about this, any more. I want closure. I want to move on. (Ah! Disruption! This interruption has *called us out!*)

Why closure?

Evan: I'm just tired. I've had enough. I just can't take any more. I'm *full*.

Luke: Wait! I think it's important not to stuff our feelings.

Evan: I guess I feel overwhelmed. I'm not trying to *stuff* it. I just need a break.

Kenneth: Yeah, you can only take so much.

Josh: I can relate to that.

(For some, memory—even *co*-memory—is just too much.)

Luke: Yes, but I am glad we can take *some*. I don't want to *forget*.

Anita: Sometimes I think we give up too soon. Maybe the people who died deserve more. Maybe their families deserve more.

Jill: Maybe we just all feel too afraid. Maybe we overdo the talk, and then, sometimes words fail us, and we feel like we should just distract ourselves from it. I think this happens when we feel anxious for too long.

(That brings us up short. We fall, for a few minutes, into reflective silence . . .)

SILENCE

Silence, in our culture, has many possible meanings. I want to probe the communicative capacities of silence.

Sometimes silence signifies an opportunity for spiritual reflection, as in the silence of a Society of Friends (Quaker) meeting or as in the planned moment of silence held at our university's September 11 memorial event.

Sometimes students feel "silenced" by responses from teachers or other students that are either intended or interpreted as a command to "shut up" or "shut down."

Sometimes silence is part of a "code of conduct" among students. Maybe if nobody speaks, we can get out of here, be finished, move on . . .

Sometimes, I believe—especially in difficult conversations about difficult matters (such as the meaning and effects of September 11)—silence comes at that moment when, as my student put it, "words fail us."

Sometimes, that is a good thing!

Sometimes, we are *called* to be silent . . .

Yet sometimes, in those moments of "heavy" silence, more anxiety can intrude. After a few minutes of silence in a classroom, people begin to shuffle and fidget nervously, clearing their throats, hoping someone (preferably the "teacher") will "break" the silence.

Dangerous silence! I hold myself back, deciding not to yield to the temptation to "break" it.

Eventually, of course, anxiety opens the door again.

A student blurts out, "Somebody *say* something."

"Go ahead," I say.

And we fall back into conversation . . .

CREATION: THE STORY OF OUR DIALOGUE

It is in stories that we humans create our worlds. Sharing our stories, we weave a life together. Together, from the threads of story, we construct meaning. Listening to a story, hearing the voice of the Other, we discover at least a *trace* of Self (Cottle, 2002). In our storied dialogue, we can begin to uncover—and perhaps even love—the *Others* in our life.

In their extensive and cogent work on the dialogic philosophies of Martin Buber and Carl Rogers, Ken Cissna and Rob Anderson (2002) theorized that dialogue often occurs as brief, focused "moments of meeting"—

wherein we find ourselves in the grip of “surprising and even epiphanous or sporadic insight” (p. 174). When our stories come together, we begin to *see*, to *understand*: epiphany.

But *how*—especially in this Age of Anxiety, confronted by gaps born out of alterity—might we discover these “moments of meeting?” I want to suggest that we begin by trying to craft a kind of “dialogic civility” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999) as a central way of enacting our story. In dialogic civility, we approach each other with respect, a sense of history, a passion for the present, and the hope for (future) change. In the caring praxis of dialogic civility, we will engage dialogically, respectfully, with care. But *how* can our storying dialogue become imbued with concern and respect and love rather than fear and disrespect and hate? Where will we find the *courage* to tame our anxiety, at least enough so that we can come together (meet, connect) if only for a moment? These are not merely rhetorical questions. How we respond to them *matters*. How we respond will be the next chapter in our story.

I search for clues in the classroom. In my honors seminar, we are discussing Aristotle’s *The Art of Rhetoric*. We are stumbling through Aristotle’s definitions of the syllogism and the enthymeme. We are reaching for an understanding of how logic plays into rhetoric.

Gene: I’ll give you an example. I just have to say this. You can’t argue with a woman.

Interruption! Disruption!

The tension in the room is palpable.

Although I know I could confront the student, I hold back for a moment, plumbing the silence, awaiting a response from the class.

It’s a tense moment. The room fairly vibrates with anger. And with anxiety.

Jennifer: Why do you *say* things like that?

Gene: Well, I . . .

Carlos: Wait. Give him a chance. Tell us more. Give us the story.

Jennifer: Yes. Do. You can’t just lay out a claim like that. Like Aristotle says, you gotta back it up. *Prove* it.

Gene: Well, here’s what I mean. I mean you try to use logic when talking with a woman, and she can never seem to get it.

Jennifer: What? You think we can’t understand logic? Are we just too stupid?

Gene: No. No. I just think you don’t use it.

Jennifer: I can’t believe you just said that. Give me an example.

Gene: OK. I always argued with my ex-wife. She just never saw the logic. She based everything on emotion. I think all women do that.

Jennifer: Oh, you just made a false enthymeme—you reversed the syllogism! My ex-wife is emotional, not logical. Therefore, all women are emotional, not logical. It doesn’t work.

At this point, several students chime in to agree. As the conversation unfolds, these students skillfully demonstrate Aristotle's main points about the enthymeme and the syllogism by focusing on the assumed premises behind the inflammatory remark that had opened/interrupted the nervous/ anxious conversation. And they identify the enthymematic reasoning behind our cultural tendency to generalize.

Later, as we debrief this disruptive, anxious learning moment, we draw some important lessons out of the tense, dangerous, risky encounter that we might otherwise not have learned.

We have learned, for example, that anger as an emotion does not have to translate into *angry reaction*.

We have learned that learning to speak *with care* means being careful with what we say and how we say it.

We have learned to be (care)full—that is, full of care for those others in our presence—both when we speak and when we listen.

We have learned that coming into conflict is not necessarily just a place of anxiety and anger.

We have learned that *with courage*, we can transform the ordinary conflict into an extraordinary moment of creative learning.

We have learned that conflict can call us to creation, to the crafting of a vibrant new chapter for our story.

We have learned that we must become more aware about how our words and our actions connect—or alienate—us as humans in a community.

We have learned that in coauthoring our story, if we want to engage true “moments of meeting,” we must craft the story consciously, creatively, civilly.

So in my classroom, I have been trying to teach—and to practice—a simple strategy—a way to begin authoring a new chapter in our story. I teach my students to engage in dialogue by *responding with care to invocation*. This process begins by listening in a *generative* way, by taking up an *inquiry* approach to encounter. When the Other speaks, alterity rises up between us. An inquiry approach to civil dialogue means asking for more, asking the Other to tell a fuller story.

This way of beginning to practice dialogic civility allows for both respect for the Other and concern for Self. It is grounded in a fundamental respect for diversity, Otherness, alterity. Dialogic civility, said Arnett and Arneson (1999), can “enhance the notion of respect for the other, even in disagreement ... a reminder that life is best lived with concern for self, other, and sensitive implementation” (pp. 303-304). Thus, by speaking and listening with deep concern and an attitude of open inquiry, we can move toward a fuller sense of our *being together*. For as Buber (1970) pointed out, “The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being.... All actual life is encounter” (p. 62).

And if we are to seek genuine dialogue, I think we must have faith in the infinite possibilities that may emerge both from harmony and from discord, from respect and from confrontation. I can't help but remember these words, spoken on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963):

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. (p. 2)

Thus, we embrace anxiety in a spirit of disruption, silence, and creation. And that embrace will give us the courage to move to newer, deeper levels of knowing in encounter. And so, we will be free, at last, to open ourselves to the anxiety and the possibility inherent in human encounter.... Free, at last, to seize and embrace that anxiety, and to put it to good use . . .

ANXIETY (REVISITED)

Perhaps we are called to live with—and then to leap forth creatively from—the energy that we call anxiety. Disruption, silence, creation—these are the springboards to infinite possibility.

Perhaps, together, in our learning dialogue, we must embrace the anxiety of co-Being. If we do this, civilly, dialogically, I believe we cannot help but bring about a measure of change in our collective orientation to our otherwise darkening age of anxiety.

Perhaps we must learn to live in this age of anxiety by going toward it, by leaping into the anxious universe of possibility—the infinity that stands beyond the ordinary, the everyday, the taken for granted.

Perhaps the classroom can serve as a great crucible for transforming the anxious energy of disruption, silence, and creation into genuine dialogue— and for transforming genuine dialogue into new forms of relating . . .

So: Let us face one another, courageously. As anxiety washes over us, let us seize that energy and move into cocreation, consciously, courageously, openly. Let us leap into disruption; let us slip into silence; let us embrace creation; let us fall into dialogue.

If we can do this, I think, our story will brighten . . .

JANUARY 23, 2003

The day dawns cold and dim, with a strong scent of impending rain. I shiver my way out of bed again, this time because it is cold. I walk toward the coffee pot with a vague sense that my anxiety is, at least for now, held at bay.

Another ordinary day?

As I shake off sleep, I fall into conversation with Sue, my constant companion these past twenty-one years.

We speak briefly of the fear of impending war—the headlines just won't let us off the hook, even for a day . . .

Our nation has taken up the cry of rage and retaliation:

Kill or be killed. If you're not with us, you're against us. United we stand. The terrorists must be eliminated. We will hunt them down . . .

I hear these sentiments around me, and I pause. I find myself thinking that this world, already brimming with Anxiety, doesn't need more rage. We don't need more vitriol and violence.

What we need is hope.

I find myself falling silent, thinking about this world we live in, about how it has become a world of cynicism and self-centeredness and rage, about all the energy that is being poured into vengeance, about how we seem to have lost sight of justice, about how we seem to be living out the credo: *Kill or be killed*.

I am thinking about how we are poised to invade Iraq and wondering if it's not all about oil and money and power. And I wonder: Can we do anything to change this world of cynicism and rage?

“What about hope?” Sue breaks into my train of thought, derails it.

Disruption.

Silence.

Creation?

A new story rising: The story of our hope.

“Hope?” I ask.

Long moments of silence, then: “You’re right. We need hope. I think *they* are our hope,” I say, gesturing toward our kids, who at this moment are still sleeping peacefully, wrapped in the magical-creative dreams of childhood. If only we could be more like children. Hopeful. Playful. Courageous. Full of heart and wonder and joy. Full of hope for a better world.

And so we fall into conversation ... speaking of the hope that they represent—and the hope that we must have for them—of a world that can be a better place. We craft a new story of hope. Our story is a story of hope for a new Age, an Age when the Age of Anxiety has morphed quietly into the Age of Creation. In our story, hope defeats rage by lighting the spark of creation, which penetrates, opens up, and transforms the dark folds of our anxiety. Cynicism falls away; despair is held at bay by the spark of creation. Thus, we hold out hope for the ever vibrant creative spirit of humanity and our capacity to conquer our destructive, murderous urges.

We hold out hope.

Hope must win.

It must conquer our anxiety.

And cynicism.

And rage.

And despair.

It *must*.

Because sometimes, hope is all that we have.

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