Beyond Neoliberal Common Sense: Cultural Politics and Public Pedagogy in Dark Times

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With the dawn of the new millennium, the Gilded Age and its updated neoliberal "dreamworlds' of consumption, property, and power" has returned with a vengeance (Davis and Monk ix). The new exorbitantly rich along with their conservative ideologues now publicly invoke and celebrate that period in nineteenth-century American history when corporations ruled political, economic, and social life and an allegedly rugged entrepreneurial spirit brought great wealth and prosperity to the rest of the country. Even the New York Times ran a story in the summer of 2007 providing not only a welcome endorsement of Gilded Age excess, but also barely contained praise for a growing class of outrageously rich chief executives, financiers, and entrepreneurs, described as "having a flair for business, successfully [breaking] through the stultifying constraints that flowed from the New Deal," and using "their successes and their philanthropy [to make] government less important than it once was" (Uchitelle, " Richest"). There is more at work here than a predatory narcissism, a zany hubris, and a neo-feudal world view in which the future can only be measured in immediate financial gains. Massive disparities in wealth and power along with the weakening of worker protections and the destruction of the social state are now legitimated through self-serving historical reinvention in which politics is measured by the degree to which it evades any sense of actual truth and moral responsibility. In this case, corporate sovereignty not only makes power invisible; it also excises a history of barbaric greed, unconscionable economic inequity, rapacious Robber Barons, scandal-plagued politics, resur-

jac 27.1-2 (2007)
gent monopolies, and an unapologetic racism (see Trachtenberg and Josephson).

A marauding market fundamentalism now rules most aspects of social life, if not the globe, and the mutually constitutive forces of terror and market values now become the regulative principles of everyday life. Global flows of capital now work in tandem with a deference for all things military while democracy either functions as a transparent legitimation for empire abroad or is invoked at home under the conceit of political expediency in the "war on terror" and staged as a performance that mimics the tawdriness and deceit of a rampant culture of corruption and secrecy at the highest levels of government. As finance capital reigns supreme over American society, bolstered by the "new and peculiar power of the information revolution in its electronic forms" (Appadurai 36–37), democratization along with the public spheres needed to sustain it becomes an unsettled and increasingly fragile if not dysfunctional project. This is not surprising as Bush's war on terror has produced a culture of fear and a battered citizenry increasingly powerless to defend the ideals of democracy and freedom that have been largely gutted in the name of security, privatization, deregulation, and what David Harvey calls the "accumulation of capital by dispossession" (160–64). As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued, war has become "the organizing principle of society, and politics merely one of its means or guises" (12). As the matrix for all relations of power, militarism has become the foundation for politics itself and marks a historical transition from the social state to the punishing state (see Giroux, University). Within this heightened geography of insecurity, crime, violence, terror, war, and greed, the primary political and economic forces shaping American life add up to what is unique about the current regime of neoliberalism: its hatred of democracy and dissent (Rancière; see also, Bacevich; Chalmers Johnson; Newfield; Schwarz and Hug; Giroux, University). The possibilities of democracy are now answered not with the rule of law, however illegitimate, but with the threat or actuality of violence (Hardt and Negri 341).

In this essay, I take up in explicit terms the challenge of addressing the politics and pedagogy of neoliberal common sense and the crucial role it has played in securing a new and powerful form of neoliberal hege-
mony. Such a task is far from simple and demands a concerted attempt not only to understand how neoliberalism has become the reigning ideology of the new millennium but also to analyze how the construction of neoliberal common sense gains explanatory force through its reliance on the educational force of the culture in securing widespread consent from the American people. Challenging neoliberal common sense also suggests rethinking both the meaning of cultural politics for the twenty-first century and the importance of expanding ongoing political and pedagogical engagements across a wide variety of public spheres that remain central to any viable notion of democratic politics.

In addressing these issues, and while running the risk of appearing at first overly descriptive, I would like to map a series of discrete yet interconnected cultural snapshots and moments that speak to the broader crisis not only of democratic politics but also of the kinds of existential conundrums that mark efforts to live as human beings in such debased times. Thus, I begin not with abstractions but with concrete examples that both embody the rationality and logic of neoliberal commonsense while largely operating beneath the radar of critical analysis. In this case, I commence with the everyday or small changes of neoliberal cultural politics and proceed to draw out their implications in theoretical, political, and pedagogical terms. Theory in this context becomes a resource and basis for a form of critical analysis that hopefully makes clear that the consequences of neoliberal common sense deserve the kind of careful consideration a thoughtful public might render, were it not for the imposition of such things as slick advertizing, entertainment news, and celebrity culture on the time/space coordinates of our everyday consciousness. One of the key arguments in this essay is that neoliberalism has not simply led to a redirection in the function of the state; rather, it has changed both the function and the idea of the state from one committed to social welfare to one narrowly committed to regulating the global movement of capital and expanding the policing, punishing, and militarizing forces of society. By extending the domain of economics into politics, market rationality now organizes, regulates, and defines the basic principles and workings of the state. Gone are the days when the state "assumed responsibility for a range of social needs"; instead, the state now pursues a wide range of "deregulations," privatizations, and
abdications of responsibility to the market and private philanthropy” (Steinmetz 337). What’s more, is that it has accomplished these shifts via a pedagogical practice that teaches society to understand the world via market mentalities and corporate paradigms. In what follows, I will call for attention to the neoliberal state and its complementary pedagogical practices in an effort to reclaim the political and discerning force of pedagogy as a critical tool necessary to the rebuilding of a socially committed state.

**Neoliberalism and the Politics of Inequality**

Under the regime of neoliberalism that has been put into play since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, big government is now considered the enemy of democracy; social provisions of the kind vouchsafed under the policies of The New Deal and The Great Society are dismissed as socialistic; politics is entirely subordinated to the imperatives of the rediscovered “free-market economy”; and those institutions that make a mockery of a substantive democracy are now the greatest beneficiary of government power. At the current moment, neoliberal power brokers offer no apologies for their efforts to target some parts of government for downsizing a little more energetically than others. Lacking even a hint of dishonor, they are most concerned with dismantling the parts of the public sector that serve the social and democratic needs of the non-affluent majority of the American populace. The parts that provide corporate subsidies, military contracts to corporations, and welfare to the opulent minority while doling out punishment to the poor are safeguarded from that great domestic war tool: the budgetary axe. The primary strategy of the neoliberal statecraft used since the Reagan administration has been to “starve-the-beast” by producing large budget deficits in order to force reductions in various social programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, education, food stamps, and community development block grants. For instance, in the Bush administration’s federal budget for 2007, “the hardest-hit government programs are those that provide food, child care, health care, and affordable housing to the neediest in our society” (“President”). Yet, these cuts are being implemented at a time when the
poverty rate has risen, with "over 37 million Americans living below the official poverty line" and millions more struggling to pay for basic necessities (Greenberg, Duta-Gupta, and Minoff 1). In spite of the fact that the number of poor Americans has grown by five million since 2001, the Bush administration diverts money from social programs in order to provide handsome tax cuts for the rich and to allocate $626 billion for a bloated 2007 military budget, increasingly tied to massive expenditures for conducting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bush’s neoliberal policies redistributed income upwards to the rich, especially those in "the top 1 percent of earnings, [who] had an average income of $1.25 million, [and] saw their effective individual tax rates drop to 19.6 percent in 2004 from 24.2 percent in 2000" (Andrews). Bush’s tax cuts have done more than benefit the rich; they have also resulted in the cutting of crucial social programs and the deepening of race and class inequalities. One need only recall the Bush administration’s utter indifference to the plight of poor blacks who were victimized first by Hurricane Katrina and then by the government’s initial, shocking indifference to the tragedy. In spite of the catastrophe wrought by "starving the beast," federal policy continued to reproduce, expand, and celebrate a market-driven society in which "top executives now make more in a day than the average worker makes in a year" (Mokhiber and Weissman).

The politics of neoliberal inequality is also evident in the salaries and bonuses now handed out to top executives. For example, James Simmons, a leading hedge fund manager, earned $1.7 billion in 2006 while the combined income of the top 25 hedge fund managers . . . earned $14 billion—enough to pay New York City’s 80,000 public school teachers for nearly three years" (Anderson and Cresswell 1). It gets worse. The Associated Press reports that compensation for half of America’s CEOs in the Standard & Poor’s top 500 firms averaged over $8.3 million in 2006 (Simon; see also, Council). In some cases, top executives got bonuses and huge salaries while their employees had to take cutbacks on their salaries, retirement packages, and health benefits while working longer hours. What is especially disconcerting ethically and politically is that some industries, such as the airline industry, are using post-bankruptcy initiatives to pay exorbitant salaries and bonuses to their top executives while
airline employees are asked to make excessive concessions. For example, Northwest Airlines will pay $26.6 million in equity to CEO Doug Steenland and divide over $40 million among four executive vice-presidents ("Northwest"), while the "new labor contracts lock workers into lower pay rates and more company-friendly work rules. ... Flight attendants, for instance, now see their pay top out at about $35,400 a year, down from $44,190 before Northwest filed for bankruptcy protection" (Freed). In some cases, workers are being asked to make a choice between putting food on the table and paying for crucial medical services. Such disparities in income, wealth, and opportunity in the richest country on earth should be viewed as an outrage.

The collapse of the social state, state-administered securities, and the ideal of collective insurance cannot be blamed entirely on neoliberalism, whose success constitutes a related but different narrative. The short list of some of the more general factors in the demise of the social state might include: the emergence of the military-industrial complex in the post-World War II period; the corporate tax revolt of the 1960s; the tax revolt, in turn, of the middle-class that began in California amidst growing economic crises in the 1970s; skyrocketing interest rates and recession in the 1970s; Reagan’s union busting policies; the rise of rapacious free trade agreements; and the general backlash against the social and cultural gains of the civil rights movement, particularly the liberal and radical ideals of the 1960s. Access to formal education, at all levels, which had been at the center of civil rights struggles, came under considerable attack from the 1970s to the present. But this is not to suggest that the Right was not interested in education per se. In some sense, it actually took Raymond Williams’ notion of the long revolution more seriously than the Left, which found itself stunned and disorganized in the face of such assault. Having thoroughly defunded or corporatized those institutions devoted to enhancing the intellectual capacities, cosmopolitanism, and thoughtfulness of its citizenry—the mass media, from news services to book publishing, as well as formal educational sites—the Right developed its own pedagogical spheres for engaging the public. The result of such efforts was the wildly successful rise and dominance of right-wing talk radio by the early 1990s, the rise of a powerful network of neoconservative think tanks and public intellectuals, the takeover of the
media by corporate interests (coupled with the Foxification of many of its outlets), the transformation of the public schools into testing centers or proto-types for the nation’s jails with its surveillance mechanisms and zero-tolerance policies, and the corporatization and militarization of higher education (see Giroux, University). All of these forces, played a role in undermining the social state and its governing apparatuses.

As the welfare state came apart, a market ideology and morality emerged that narrowed not only the meaning of freedom but also the very nature of the public good, public institutions, social security, safety nets—and with these transitions, so to the more abstract concepts of individual agency and citizenship. Economic discourse now trumped social justice, reinforced by the popularizing of a neoliberal discourse in which “all human activities and spaces can and should be absorbed into economic systems” (Grossberg 117), allegedly for the sake of enhancing consumer choice, market efficiency, and the kind of excellence procured only through rigorous competition (how any of this happens in an era of consolidated corporatism a theme for another paper). At stake here was an “argument against politics, or at least against a politics that attempts to govern society in social rather than economic terms” (Grossberg 117). Freedom was now decoupled from any vestige of the social and most welfare provisions were seen as benefitting those deemed immoral and lazy, if not utterly unworthy. At the same time, those who opposed the notion of welfare and social state provision now viewed themselves as being unduly taxed and victimized precisely because of their hard work, thrift, and good fortune (Bauman Work). Underlying this shrinking of the ethic of solidarity and equality was a wilting of not only politically active citizenship but (it cannot be repeated often enough) also the modes of critical education that provided the fundamental condition for its existence. And this ongoing assault on public and higher education as well as on those critical public spheres that are at the heart of the educating and informing the culture at large can be seen in the triumph of the construction of a notion of common sense that both provided the conditions for neoliberalism to take root and for citizenry willing to embrace the enormous risks as well as the comforts, for the lucky few, of consumer society rather than embrace the responsibilities and long-term commitments of a viable democratic state (Bauman, Work).
One of the most distinctive features of politics in the United States in the last thirty years is the inexorable move away from the social state and the promise of equality, human dignity, racial justice, and freedom—upon which its conception of democracy rests—to the narrow and stripped down assumption that equates democracy with market identities, values, and relations. Hollowed out under a regime of politics that celebrates the trinity of privatization, deregulation, and financialization, democracy has turned dystopian. Consumption has become the authentic mark of citizenship, while individual competition and personal responsibility are elevated to the new gospel of wealth and material salvation. Driven by the imperative to accumulate capital, neoliberal ideology determines definitions of value, rewarding those who participate in consumer society with the protections of citizenship while those who can't take part as consumers are seen as "failed" and "ever more disposable" (Comaroff and Comaroff 301). In this scenario, freedom is transformed into its opposite for the vast majority of the population as a small, privileged minority can purchase time, goods, services, and security while the vast majority increasingly are relegated to a life without protections, benefits, and support. For those populations considered expendable, redundant, and invisible by virtue of their race, class, and youth, life becomes increasingly precarious.

Mounting signs of increasing redundancy, dispensability, and social homelessness are evident in the depression-level jobless rates among black youth, ranging "at various times over the past few years . . . from 59 percent to a breathtaking 72 percent" (Herbert, "Danger"). Such statistics give new meaning to the slogan "Live free or die." The cost of this politics of war and expenditure (see Mbembe) becomes clear in heartbreaking stories about young people who literally die because they lack health insurance and live in extreme poverty. In one recent case, Deamonte Driver, a seventh grader in Prince George's County Maryland, died because his mother did not have the health insurance to cover an $80 tooth extraction. Because of a lack of insurance, his mother was unable to find an oral surgeon willing to treat her son. By the time he was admitted and diagnosed in a hospital emergency room, the bacteria from the abscessed tooth had spread to his brain and, in spite of the level of high-quality intensive treatment he finally received, he eventually died (Herbert,
"Young"). As Jean Comaroff points out in a different context, "the prevention of . . . pain and death . . . seems insufficient an incentive" to advocates of neoliberal market fundamentalism "in a world in which some ‘children are . . . consigned to the coffins of history’" (213). The United States is one of the few industrialized countries in the world that does not provide universal health care for its children, millions of whom are at risk of dying because of a health care system that doles out services and access on the basis of wealth and privilege rather than human need. Shamelessly, in spite of the growing number of horror stories about children dying in America for lack of health insurance, the Bush administration as part of its plan to balance its budget in the next five years "wants to narrow the scope of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program" and would put hundreds of thousands of children nationwide at risk (Reed; see also, Angel). Referring to the 2008 presidential campaign, Bob Herbert argues that "American children are dying because of a lack of access to health care, and we’re worried about Mitt Romney’s religion and asking candidates to raise their hands to show whether they believe in evolution. I am starting to believe in time travel because there’s no doubt this nation is moving backward" (Herbert, "Divide"). TV stock-picker James Cramer makes Herbert’s point all the more relevant, if not terrifying, by insisting that “the pursuit of wealth is our true national pastime.”

What Cramer and others ignore in this homage to market relations as the essence of our national spirit is the implication of bodies, despair, death, and disposability under a regime of neoliberal discourses and policies that support the irrational belief that the market can solve all problems. The collateral damage that reveals the lie of this allegedly unassailable form of common sense can be glimpsed not only in the fate of nine million children who lack health insurance but also in uncomfortable truths that emerge daily in narratives of despair and neglect that haunt those few public spheres that serve the needs of society’s most vulnerable.

Chip Ward, a thoughtful administrator at the Salt Lake City Public Library, writes about the growing plight of homelessness in the United States and the enormous strain it puts on libraries as the services once provided by the social state evaporate. He writes poignantly about a
homeless person named Ophelia who retreats to the library because like many of the homeless she has nowhere else to go to use the bathroom, secure temporary relief from bad weather, or simply be able to rest. Excluded from the American dream and treated as both expendable and a threat, Ophelia, in spite of her obvious mental illness, defines her existence in terms that offer a chilling metaphor that extends far beyond her plight. Ward describes Ophelia’s presence and actions in the following way:

Ophelia sits by the fireplace and mumbles softly, smiling and gesturing at no one in particular. She gazes out the large window through the two pairs of glasses she wears, one windshield-sized pair over a smaller set perched precariously on her small nose. Perhaps four lenses help her see the invisible other she is addressing. When her “nobody there” conversation disturbs the reader seated beside her, Ophelia turns, chuckles at the woman’s discomfort, and explains, “Don’t mind me, I’m dead. It’s okay. I’ve been dead for some time now.” She pauses, then adds reassuringly, “It’s not so bad. You get used to it.” Not at all reassured, the woman gathers her belongings and moves quickly away. Ophelia shrugs. Verbal communication is tricky. She prefers telepathy, but that’s hard to do since the rest of us, she informs me, “don’t know the rules.” (emphasis added)

Ophelia represents just one of the 200,000 chronically homeless who now use public libraries and any other accessible public space to find shelter. Many are often sick, disoriented, high on drugs, intoxicated, or mentally disabled and close to a nervous breakdown because of the stress, insecurity, and danger that they face every day. Increasingly, along with the 3.5 million human beings who experience homelessness each year in the United States, they are treated like criminals, as if punishment were the appropriate civic response to poverty, mental illness, and human suffering. In what has become standard practice, many cities now either fine the homeless for begging, or, as in Key West, Florida, enact punitive legislation in which “panhandlers can be sentenced to 60 days in jail and fined $500” (Tolme 6). Some jails have entire wings devoted to the mentally ill, the majority of whom are indigent and homeless. Of course, criminalizing and incarcerating the homeless is not only unethical but
also financially wasteful. Ward estimates that what it costs to jail a mentally ill person in Utah is the “yearly equivalent of tuition at an Ivy League college.” While human resources are being wasted in such scenarios what is really at stake is an abuse of politics, law, and power, the skewed rationalities of which promote social injustice and needless human suffering. And while Ophelia’s comments may be dismissed as the rambling of a crazy woman, they speak to something much deeper about the current state of American society and its abandonment of entire populations that are now considered the human waste of a neoliberal social order. Ward’s understanding of Ophelia’s plight as a public issue is instructive:

Ophelia is not so far off after all—in a sense she is dead and has been for some time. Hers is a kind of social death from shunning. She is neglected, avoided, ignored, denied, overlooked, feared, detested, pitied, and dismissed. She exists alone in a kind of social purgatory. She waits in the library, day after day, gazing at us through multiple lenses and mumbling to her invisible friends. She does not expect to be rescued or redeemed. She is, as she says, “used to it.” She is our shame. What do you think about a culture that abandons suffering people and expects them to fend for themselves on the street, then criminalizes them for expressing the symptoms of illnesses they cannot control? We pay lip service to this tragedy—then look away fast.

Social death becomes the fate of more and more people as the socially strangulating politics of competitive individualism, self-interest, and consumerism become the organizing principles of everyday life. Solutions for social problems are now framed in the depoliticizing vocabularies of the therapeutic and emotional, often enmeshed in the rigid political and moral certainties of bigotry, intolerance, racism, ideological purity, and religious fundamentalism. As the market becomes the template for solving all of society’s problems by simply cancelling them out, the discourse of self-help, personal responsibility, and self-reliance operate under the conceit of neutrality and efficiency, effectively erasing everything required to understand and address the major social issues of our time. As Jean and John Comaroff put it,
Gone is any official speak of egalitarian futures, work for all or the paternal government envisioned by the various freedom movements. These ideas have given way to a spirit of deregulation, with its taunting mix of emancipation and limitation. Individual citizens, a lot of them marooned by a rudderless ship of state, try to clamber about the good ship enterprise. (293)

Under current circumstances, the legacy of FDR’s social state and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society is largely dismantled and the relationship between politics and life takes on an ominous importance for those populations considered disposable. With its indifference to social justice and democracy, neoliberal rationality ushers in a stage of late modernity in which terror, death, and human suffering mutually inform each other (see Bauman, Liquid). It is no wonder that conservative Republicans wanted to replace FDR’s image on the dime with that of Ronald Reagan, that avatar of neoliberal fundamentalism (“Conservatives”).

**Militarizing the Neoliberal State**

Today as never before in their history Americans are enthralled with military power. The global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys—and is bent on perpetuating—has become central to our national identity. More than America’s matchless material abundance or even the effusions of its pop culture, the nation’s arsenal of high-tech weaponry and the soldiers who employ that arsenal have come to signify who we are and what we stand for.

—Andrew Bacevich

Rather than simply fading away in keeping with the shrinking and drowning fantasies of some, the state has actually increased its policing and militarizing functions (see Chalmers Johnson 275). As decades of social benefits are dismantled, the state refashions itself by rewriting the nature and meaning of its power by increasing what Zygmunt Bauman calls “its order-protective policing function” (Bauman 2005: 16). This is particularly true for the United States, which after the events of 9/11 accelerated its militarizing agenda, enacting what Hardt and Negri call
“the passage from a welfare state to a warfare state” (17). While militarization is a deeply historical and contingent process, taking many different forms over time and space, it became the mechanism of first choice under the administration of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. Their administration has been enthralled with military symbols and power, and it has worked tirelessly to further solidify “America’s marriage of a militaristic mission with utopian ends . . . as the distinguishing element of contemporary U.S. policy” (Bacevich 3). Similarly, Bush’s militaristic cast of mind was matched by policies that blurred the line between military and civilian functions, diverted funding from social programs for the poor to funds that support the “war on terror,” furthered the interests of the national security state, and increasingly relied upon military rather than political solutions to solve both domestic and foreign problems. Under such circumstances, militarized rhetoric, parlance, and practices have become so much a part of our lives that we hardly recognize “that the fields of politics and violence . . . are no longer separated,” even as the Bush government insisted that it acted in the interests of spreading democracy (Balibar 125). With the dawn of a more militarized millennium, violence becomes inaudible in its senseless repetition and unrecognizable in its ever-expanding spectacle. Militarized metaphors become more commonplace, being used to describe the multiple wars on drugs, urban crime, poverty, even obesity, and a number of other social problems (see Meeks).

A highly charged example of the ongoing militarization of American society is evident in the way in which military experience, knowledge, values, and discourses increasingly provide the template for organizing many public schools. Military-like discipline and zero-tolerance policies exemplify the structuring principles that are turning many schools, urban ones in particular, into prison-like institutions, largely controlled, regulated, and monitored by armed guards and increasingly characterized by lock-downs, invasive surveillance techniques, and the erosion of student rights. Numerous reports such as Derailed, Criminalizing the Classroom, and Education on Lockdown document the increasing over-policing of public schools, the incarceration of students for petty acts that would have been effectively handled with a stern admonishment from the principal in an earlier era, and the expulsion of students who are perceived as
troublemakers (largely youth of color) (see Judith Brown; *Education*; Kalladaryn). The increasing tendency to view children as trouble in American society rather than as a social investment for a democratic future means that more and more young people are being abandoned and brutalized by the schools, the police, and other social agencies. *Education on Lockdown* provides numerous examples of the detrimental impact on students as a consequence of the increasing militarization of public schools. The report cites one particular event in a Chicago public school in 2003 in which “a 7-year-old boy was cuffed, shackled, and forced to lie face down for more than an hour while being restrained by a security officer... Neither the principal nor the assistant principal came to the aid of the first grader, who was so traumatized by the event he was not able to return to school” (Advancement).

As the criminalization of social problems and the war on youth intensify under the neoliberal state, youth are subject to a growing number of indiscriminate, cruel, and potentially illegal practices by the criminal justice system (see Giroux, *Abandoned and America*; see also, Grossberg). *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert recently expressed his own concerns about the social justice of a system that is “criminalizing children and teenagers all over the country, arresting them and throwing them in jail for behavior that in years past would never have led to the intervention of law enforcement.” He insists that “this is an aspect of the justice system that is seldom seen. But the consequences of ushering young people into the bowels of police precincts and jail cells without a good reason for doing so are profound” (Herbert, “School”).. Youth seem especially vulnerable at a time when they face massive unemployment and inhabit public schools and other public spheres that are undergoing massive disinvestment, especially in the urban centers. Racialized violence and punitive measures are often the first recourse of the state in dealing with brown and black youth (see Robbins).

Instead of offering poor and disenfranchised youth decent schools and potential employment, the militarized state offers them the promise of incarceration; instead of providing the homeless with decent shelter and food, the state issues them fines that they cannot possibly pay, or simply imprisons them; instead of providing people with decent health care, the state passes legislation that makes it more difficult to file for
bankruptcy and easier to end up in a criminal court; instead of treating new immigrants with dignity, the government supports policies and practices advocated by right-wing militia groups and fortifies borders with walls, not unlike the infamous Berlin Wall that divided East and West Berlin for twenty-eight years or the wall that the Israeli government has built inside the Occupied Territories (Amnesty). In a post-9/11 world, neoliberalism has been weaponized and the high-intensity warfare it promotes abroad is replicated in low-intensity warfare at home. While both militarism and neoliberalism have a long history in the United States, the symbiotic relationship into which they have entered and the way in which it has become normalized constitutes a distinct historical moment. Moreover, the ever-expanding militarized neoliberal state marked by the interdependence of finance capital, authoritarian order, and a vast war machine now serves as a powerful pedagogical force that shapes our lives, memories, and daily experiences, while erasing everything we thought we knew about history, justice, and the meaning of democracy (see Laor).

Neoliberalism and the Politics of Disposability

Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective? War, after all, is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill. Imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?

—Achille Mbembe

Politics is never simply about elections. The distribution of material and cultural resources, producing willing subjects of the state, protecting state interests, or the regulation and disciplining of the body—maintaining loyal consuming subjects and punishing those who are not so loyal—all of these are state projects. More recently, another power has been added to the list of the prerogatives of state power: the ability to condemn
entire populations of its own citizens as disposable, and to make life and death the most crucial and relevant objects of political control. As states no longer rely on such domestic populations for many forms of labor, a new politics of disposability now governs American domestic and foreign policy. Within this discourse, those citizens and residents deemed as unproductive (the poor, weak, and racially marginalized) are regarded as useless and therefore expendable. This is a politics in which entire populations are considered disposable, an unnecessary burden on state coffers, and as such are consigned to fend for themselves (see Bauman *Wasted*; see also, Black; Giroux, *Stormy*; Uchitelle, *Disposable*; and Gilmore). The punishing state now produces Gitmos not only abroad but also at home as thousands of immigrants disappear and in some cases die “in a secretive detention system, a patchwork of federal centers, private prisons and local jails” (“Gitmos”). As Naomi Klein argues, the politics of disposability travels and is now a world-wide phenomenon.

Mass privatization and deregulation have bred armies of locked-out people, whose services are no longer needed, whose lifestyles are written off as “backward,” whose basic needs go unmet. These fences of social exclusion can discard an entire industry, and they can also write off an entire country, as has happened to Argentina. In the case of Africa, essentially an entire continent can find itself exiled to the global shadow world, off the map and off the news, appearing only during wartime when its citizens are looked on with suspicion as potential militia members, would-be terrorists or anti-American fanatics. (21)

Like the consumer goods that flood American society, immigrant, refugees, the unemployed, the homeless, the poor, young people, and the disabled are relegated to a frontier-zone of invisibility created by a combination of economic inequality, racism, the collapse of the welfare state, and the brutality of a militarized society, all of which “designates and constitutes a production line of human waste or wasted humans” (Bauman, *Wasted* 6).

The daily consequences of neoliberal rationality and negative globalization go beyond the often analyzed power of finance capital, the separation of nation-state-based politics from the power of global corporations, the deregulation of corporations, an emerging militarism, and
other economically driven registers of governmental and corporate power. Neoliberal policies also employ a shifting yet deadly cultural politics that normalizes its own values and decouples ethics and social responsibility from the consequences of ever-expanding market relations and ever-foreclosing human relations. Neoliberalism as a form of biocapital reaches into all aspects of the social order and “when deployed as a form of governmentality” attempts to regulate, shape, guide, construct, and affect the conduct of people (Wendy Brown 39). Under neoliberalism, economic and political power expand far beyond the production of goods and the legislating of laws. As neoliberalism becomes biopolitical, the boundaries of the cultural, economic, and political become porous and leak into each other, sharing the task, though in different ways, of producing identities, goods, knowledge, modes of communication, affective investments, and all other aspects of social life and the social order (Foucault, Society; Nikolas Rose). Neoliberalism produces a particular view of the world and mobilizes an array of pedagogical practices in a variety of sites in order to normalize its modes of governance, subject positions, forms of citizenship, and rationality (Ferguson and Turnbull 197–98). Moreover, as a mode of oppressive public pedagogy, neoliberalism extends and disseminates “market values to all institutions and social action” and “prescribes the citizen-subject of a neoliberal order” (42). Central to the construction of the neoliberal subject is the acceptance of what Lynda Cheshire and Geoffrey Lawrence call the “individualization of risk, whereby responsibility for managing the risks of contemporary life have been redistributed from the state and the economy to the individual. . . . [S]uch moves are synonymous with the emergence of an advanced liberal mode of rule that relies upon the construction of self-governing individuals who accept that the responsibility for improving the conditions of their existence lies in their own hands” (438).

The oppressive public pedagogy at work in neoliberal discourse is one that claims that all public difficulties are individually determined and all social problems can be reduced to biographical solutions. And as Bauman points out, “In our ‘society of individuals’ all the messes into which one can get are assumed to be self-made and all the hot water into which one can fall is proclaimed to have been boiled by the hapless
failures [of those] who have fallen into it. For the good and the bad that fill one's life a person has only himself or herself to thank or to blame. And the way the 'whole-life-story' is told raises this assumption to the rank of an axiom" (Individualized 9). Similarly, any notion of collective goals designed to deepen and expand the meaning of freedom and democracy as part of the vocabulary of the public good is entirely lost in neoliberal discourse. That is, "Collective goals such as redistribution, public health and the wider public good have no place in this landscape of individual preferences" (Needham 80). Instead, neoliberal theory and practice give rise to the replacement of the social contract with a market contract in which political rights are strictly limited, economic rights are deregulated and privatized, and social rights are replaced by individual duty and self-reliance. Within the impoverished vocabulary of privatization, getting ahead, and exaggerated materialism that promises to maximize choice and to minimize taxation, the new citizen-consumer bids a hasty retreat from those public spheres that view critique as a democratic value, collective responsibility as fundamental to the nurturing of a democracy, and the deepening and expanding of collective protections as a legitimate function of the state. Defined largely by "the exaggerated and quite irrational belief in the ability of markets to solve all problems," the public domain is emptied of the democratic ideals, discourses, and identities needed to address important considerations such as "universal health care, mass transit, affordable housing, trains across the nation, subsidized care for the young and elderly, and government efforts to reduce carbon emissions. The list, of course, is endless" (see Rosen). Underlying these elements of neoliberal rationality is a pedagogical practice parading as common sense—produced, located, and disseminated from many institutional and cultural sites ranging from the shrill noise of largely conservative talk radio to the halls of academia and the screen culture of popular media.

As a distinct form of governmentality, neoliberalism has not only vitiated democracy, gutted the social state, reinforced the conditions for the emergence of the punishing state, and undermined any viable notion of the common good, it has also produced a hardening of the culture (see Foucault, "Governmentality"; Lemke; Ong). Public and private policies of investing in the public good are dismissed as bad business, just as the
notion of protecting people from the dire misfortunes of poverty, sickness, or the random blows of fate is viewed as an act of bad faith. Long-term commitments are considered a trap and weakness is now a sin, punishable by social exclusion. The state’s message to unwanted populations: society neither wants, cares about, nor needs you. An unchecked form of social Darwinism rages throughout the culture, demonizing the most vulnerable, treating misfortune with scorn, and granting legitimacy to a fiercely competitive ethos that offers big prizes to society’s winners while reproducing a growing insensitivity to the plight and suffering of others, especially those now considered as redundant in a world in which market values determine one’s worth. Hollywood and Reality-TV, among other cultural sites, unapologetically provide in the name of entertainment the ideological undercurrents of a neoliberal politics of disposability (Kashani). Defined primarily through a discourse of “lack” in the face of the social imperatives of good character, personal responsibility, and hyper-individualism coupled with the drive toward cultural homogeneity, entire populations are expelled from the index of moral concerns. Defined neither as producers nor as consumers, they are reified as products without value and then disposed of like “leftovers in the most radical and effective way: we make them invisible by not looking and unthinkable by not thinking” (Bauman, Wasted 27).

Keeping disposable bodies and populations invisible is not always easy, especially when the registers of class and race become intertwined with matters of war, national honor, and patriotism. An obvious example is when young black and brown youth try to escape the politics of disposability by joining the military in the hope of attaining job skills and some measure of economic security. But such hopes are overridden by their status as cannon fodder smashed daily by the violence in the streets, roads, and battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan and the body bags, mangled bodies, and amputated limbs that offer all that is left of broken bodies and dreams—sights rarely seen in the narrow ocular vision of the dominant media. When it becomes impossible to relegate disposable populations to the space of the not-seen, neoliberal ideology offers up endless representations that dehumanize and reify their presence in society. A few examples will suffice. Long after the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and after the government incompetence that produced it was
exposed, the victims were rendered not only unworthy of state protection but also dangerous and disposable. What kind of politics are at work when, for instance, Anderson Cooper on his CNN 360 Degrees television program returns a year later to the scene of the crime named Katrina and rather than connecting the Bush administration’s contempt for social programs and the social state to the failed attempts to reconstruct New Orleans, focuses instead on the increasing crime and lawlessness that have emerged in the wake of the Katrina tragedy? What forces are at work in a culture when Juan Williams, a senior correspondent for National Public Radio, writes in a New York Times op-ed that the real lesson of Katrina is that the poor “cause problems for themselves” and that they should be condemned for not “confronting the poverty of spirit”? Williams invokes the ghost of personal responsibility and self-reliance to demonize those populations for whom the very economic, educational, political, and social conditions that make agency possible barely exist.

The hardening of the culture can also be seen in the 2007 film The Condemned, which gives new meaning to the marriage of casino capitalism and the redundancy of certain disposable groups. The plot is organized around the sinister machinations of a wealthy television mogul who purchases ten inmates from different countries and puts them on an island as part of a contest in which they have to plot to kill each other with the promise that the last person alive in thirty hours will be set free. The killings are broadcast live on the Internet, with the hope of drawing millions of viewers. Sally Kohn, commenting on the film and the current state of hyper-violence in the culture, claims that if this type of program were to take place in real life “streaming live internet deaths would probably bring in more viewers than American Idol on elimination night.”

In 2007, a Dutch television network traded on the receptive currency of casino capitalism when it said it would produce a Reality-TV program called The Big Donor Show. The show was to be organized around three patients competing for a kidney from a terminally ill woman who would make her choice after viewers sent in text messages to the program. In the end, the show turned out to be a hoax and the sponsors claimed it was orchestrated in order “to raise consciousness about the desperate shortage of organ donors” (Lewin 5). Many people thought the hoax was a good idea because it called attention to the plight of people needing organs.
Others thought it was not too far removed from the practice of people already trying to buy organs through personal appeals on the Internet. What was not addressed in the corporate media was how the program resonated with prevailing market values that foster a narrow sense of social responsibility, agency, and public values. Also neglected was how neoliberalism functioning as a form of biocapital has established the conditions in which serious medical decisions involving life and death are reduced to the logic and spectacle of a game show, the promise of high television ratings, and utterly privatized choices organized, in this case, around what individual recipient the kidney donor might find most appealing.

As public spaces disappear under the weight of commercial and narrowly privatized concerns, we lose those public spaces where individuals have access to a language for developing democratic identities and non-market values such as trust, fidelity, love, compassion, respect, decency, courage, and civility. As neoliberalism refigures the relationship between space and capital, it eliminates those public spheres where individuals can develop vocabularies for the political in a seemingly apolitical world of market and increasingly military relations. Moreover, as the boundaries between public culture and commercial interests collapse, commodified public and private spaces provide neither a context for moral considerations nor a language for defending vital social institutions as a collective good. One consequence is that neoliberalism as both an ideology and a practice represents the disturbing victory of military aspirations, structural power, and commercial values over those competing public spheres and value systems that are critical to a just and democratic society. Under the existing regime of neoliberalism, commercialized spheres appear to be the only places left where one can dream about winning a chance at living a decent life or mediate the difficult decisions that often make a difference between living and dying.

Commodified pleasures, hyper-competitiveness, greed, a growing divide between the rich and poor, and horrific suffering co-mingle in a society that has stopped questioning itself, allowing public issues to dissolve into a sea of talk shows, advertisements, and celebrity culture. Important issues about politics, power, war, life, and death get either trivialized or excluded from public discourse as a market-driven media
culture strives to please its corporate sponsors and attract the audiences it has rendered illiterate. While the corporate media either trivialize, misrepresent, or exclude important social issues, the American government continues to dismiss the critical role of dissent as either unpatriotic, un-American, or, even worse, a condition of treason (see Vidal; Chomsky; Zinn, *Power*).

The representations and byproducts of a neoliberal assault on a democratic imaginary are everywhere. As the punishing society increasingly fills its jails, prisons, and penitentiaries with over two million people, mostly poor people of color, the role of the punishing state and the public and private world of prison culture is largely addressed by the media through their habit of reporting news as entertainment, as when celebrity starlet Paris Hilton was ordered to jail for a short period of time in the summer of 2007 (see Davis; Manza and Uggen; Western). The hardening of the culture is also evident in the visual representations that are pervasive within the culture industry. I offer two telling examples. In Chicago, a lawyer puts up a billboard with photographs of a sexy and scantily clad young woman and a buff, bare-chested young man with a text between the photos proclaiming “Life’s short. Get a divorce.” Rather than discuss what such an ad says about the narratives that contemporary culture legitimates—in this case the devaluing of any notion of intimacy as well as long-term commitment to spouses and children—the corporate media focus largely on discussions the billboard ad promoted in “bars, shops and offices [over] whether it is okay to get divorced—just because you feel like it” (see Dirk Johnson). Indifferent to the national shame of over nine million children who lack health insurance and the millions more living in poverty, the dominant media report without critical comment on the boom in kiddie birthday parties, some single events costing as much as $50,000. Instead of addressing the state of impoverishment and deprivation experienced by millions of children in America, the corporate media focus on how “A spiraling level of competitiveness to keep up with the ‘baby Joneses’ is driving parents across the nation to pull out all the stops and their checkbooks to make sure that Junior’s birthday party becomes the talk of the town” (Gitlin).

In the 1987 movie, *Wall Street*, the central character, Gordon Gekko, offered a commentary on the unchecked greed that captured the reckless
and dehumanizing spirit of investment banking that permeated the 1980s. As Gekko puts it, "The point is, ladies and gentleman, that 'greed'—for lack of a better word—is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms—greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge—has marked the upward surge of mankind." The character of Gekko was meant to be shocking and provocative. He was portrayed as a power-hungry scoundrel and his speech provided a warning against a possible future dominated by corporate power and values. Unfortunately, Gekko's embrace of greed as the most fundamental human value appears to be in the new millennium not only a source of inspiration for many people, but central to a set of neoliberal commitments that are now utterly normalized. As the market runs rampant shaping every aspect of the social order, nothing escapes the reach of investment and commerce. Human lives and broad public values are largely ignored in favor of private financial gain, and market determinism as matters concerning the public good, art, and intellectual culture are entirely subordinated to private interests and market values. Every aspect of daily existence is mediated through the lens of commodification, and one's sense of purpose and agency is largely measured by the presupposition that in a market society one's highest calling is to make a profit. Stories abound in the press and media about the lifestyle of the rich and famous, and corporate executives are held up as models of business culture, their leadership skills largely indexed by the obscene bonuses they often receive. Power and greed under the Bush administration have gained a position in what can only be described as a public posture that is not only arrogant and unapologetic but also characteristic of a certain measure of contempt and vengeance for those excluded from the realm of power. Abdicating their responsibility to participate in the formation of a participating and informed citizenry, the dominant media no longer hold corporate and government power accountable. Instead, they function as an advertisement and powerful pedagogical force in both legitimizing the culture and values of neoliberalism and in producing the citizen-consumer. Eager to be rewarded by the wealthy and powerful, it is difficult to believe that the media have any other goal except to make money for shareholders. This is revealed in not only the kind of stories they tell about
politics and power but also how they define what counts as knowledge, art, and public culture.

One telling example of what sort of country the United States has become under the reign of neoliberal fundamentalism can be glimpsed by noticing the prominent and widespread coverage the corporate media gave to Damien Hirst’s new art work, “For the Love of God,” a life-size platinum skull covered in 8,601 high-quality diamonds,” with an estimated selling value of around $100 million. The New York Times covered the story, focusing largely on the fact that the diamond skull cost Hirst $23.6 million to make and that given the $100 million dollar asking price in a poor art market, Hirst might have a hard time finding a buyer (Riding). Treated largely as a market issue, any substantive criticism of Hirst was sidestepped in the article by reporting that all of the diamonds set in the skull were “ethically sourced,” as if this self-righteous public relations revelation either serves to cancel out the broader consequences and dynamics behind neoliberal global capital and its politics of disposability or lays to rest the necessity to address “For the Love of God” as an utterly depraved example of commodification and a grossly shallow representation of the meaning of art. The irony of how a fascist aesthetic and capitalist rationality merge in a narrative that connects the blood diamonds and a skull that symbolizes the disposable bodies of Africans, many of whom are children forced into a form of slavery, is almost entirely missed in commentaries that simply regale Hirst as “the world’s most extravagant artist” (Shaw). While the materialistic excess of Hirst’s work may be obvious to most of the corporate media and general public—a point of pride for him—what is completely ignored is the way in which both the art product and its surrounding representations become complicit with what Achille Mbembe calls a racist economy of neoliberal biopolitics whose function is not only to accumulate capital but also “to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state” (Mbembe).

Meanwhile, the social order becomes even more depoliticized, removed from the realm of power and producing a politics that is banal, registering little if no public outrage even when a sitting president lies to justify a war in Iraq, undermines civil liberties through the creation of a warrantless spying program, abolishes habeas corpus with the passing of
the Military Commissions Act of 2006, admits to abducting “enemies of the state” and holding them in secret prisons, and defies international law by holding “enemy combatants” in Guantanamo—the American Gulag that symbolizes both our hypocrisy in claiming to uphold human rights and the willingness of the U.S. government to abandon any pretense to human rights, the American constitution, and democracy itself (see Cole and David Rose).

As a form of oppressive public pedagogy, neoliberal ideology has, especially under the second Bush administration, transformed the meaning of freedom, agency, and the very nature of governmentality. An imperial presidency now extends market values and practices to all institutions and social relations, creating a form of politics in which insecurity, flexibility, deprivation, extreme poverty, ill-health, and hyper-commodification have become routine. The signs are written less in the history of economic theories extending from Adam Smith to Friedrich Hayek to Milton Friedman (though the influence of such ideas and the institutions that disseminate them should not be underestimated) than in the diverse details of daily life that embody a representation of politics in which the most important choices—structured within the unchecked dynamics of inequality, uncertainty, and insecurity—are often between life and death, between either getting by or retreating into gated communities. And, yet, behind the misrepresentations and social amnesia lies a range of global problems fueled by egregious corporate corruption and a deadly inequality of wealth and resources. According to Jeremy Rifkin,

Today, while corporate profits are soaring around the world, 89 countries find themselves worse off economically than they were in the early 1990s. Capitalism promised that globalization would narrow the gap between rich and poor. Instead the divide has widened. The 356 richest families on the planet enjoy a combined wealth that now exceeds the annual income of 40% of the human race. Two-thirds of the world’s population have never made a phone call and one-third have no access to electricity.

Ethical and political arguments against the vast inequalities that neoliberalism produces do not take on the urgency that they should in the United States. Economic, political, and social issues now merge in a
world in which subjectivities and identifications are produced largely through a cultural politics in which the public good and social justice are disparaged because they carry not just a financial burden but also the burden of intimacy, non-commodified values, and longstanding commitments. David Kotz is right to argue that neoliberalism as the dominant theory, practice, and politics of our time has within the last three decades “affected practically every dimension of social life, including the gap between the rich and the poor, the nature of work, the role of big money in politics, the quantity and quality of public services, and the character of family life” (15). What is important to recognize regarding what is new about neoliberalism is both its ability to normalize its set of core beliefs and its successful pedagogical efforts at grounding its theories and practices in a persuasive notion of common sense. In doing so, it manages to equate big government with monopoly, waste, and incompetency; portray individualism and freedom as strictly market concepts determined through choice; and make market relations and democracy synonymous. Corporate power now sets the terms for government regulation and allows the development of industry to be left to the wisdom of the market while the assault on “big government” becomes a rallying cry by neoliberals to liquidate all remnants of the social state. And as Bauman points out, “Ethical arguments for the public good do not cut much worth in a society in which competitiveness, cost-and-effect calculations, profitability and other free market commandments rule” (Individualized 79). Democracy has never appeared more fragile and endangered in the United States than at this time of civic and political crisis.

Against the commodification, deregulation, and privatization of everything, democratic public spheres disappear and with them any vestige of democratic values, discourse, and social relations. One example of the neoliberal rush to sell off public goods through privatization can be found in Mitch Daniels, who previously served in the Bush White House as budget director and is now the governor of Indiana. Daniels has been dubbed by his critics as “Governor Privatize,” and rightly so. He has already handed over to private companies “some welfare-applicant screening, running a prison, and most notably, operating the 157 mile Indiana Toll Road” and has also “called for new privately operated roads and for leasing the state’s lottery.” Daniels defends his mania for
privatization with the endlessly repeated argument by advocates of neoliberalism that “Government is the last Monopoly” and is not as efficient as the “benefits of competition” (Davey). This is truly an odd, if not incomprehensible, position when posing as an unproblematic truism, especially after the debacle, as I have noted, of a bungled federal response to the tragedy of Katrina, largely attributed to the neoliberal penchant for gutting valuable government aid programs (Stormy).

Rethinking the Political in the Age of Neoliberalism

I would argue that no account of biopolitics in the modern world... can neglect this imploding history of biocapital. It is integral to the ways in which the substance of human existence itself can be objectified, regulated, and struggled over.

—Jean Comaroff

As neoliberal rationality spreads throughout the United States, it undercuts the tension between democratic values and the needs of capital while instituting the foundation for a new form of authoritarianism, raising the fundamental question about where a democratic politics might take place and how neoliberalism might be resisted in pedagogical and political terms. In what follows, I want to briefly analyze the work of David Harvey and Wendy Brown, who provide different but important analyses of the nature, influence, and threat of neoliberalism to any substantive democratic politics. Their respective work is significant in both its attempt to understand neoliberalism as an ideology, politics, and mode of rationality and for what each suggests about theorizing a pedagogy about and against neoliberalism. Pedagogy in this instance takes on a dialectical character, grounded in different forms of knowledge, social relations, subject positions, and ethical values. In some instances, pedagogical projects and practices tied to the production of prevailing arrangements of power tend to be disabling politically and work in the interest of dominant interests, whereas critical pedagogy makes the operations of politics and power visible, recognizes that “knowledge has its very conditions of possibility in power relations,” critically addresses major social issues, and extends
and deepens the conditions necessary for democratic public life (Ferguson and Turnbull 173).

David Harvey argues that neoliberalism has become the new common sense, and if it is to be resisted we must understand not only its major theoretical assumptions but also its history. In taking on this task, he performs a major theoretical service by tracing neoliberalism’s roots in eighteenth-century liberal doctrines about freedom and individual liberties and their connection to the emergence of a vastly more ruthless model of economics that first appears in Chile, the United States, England, and China in the 1970s and 1980s. For Harvey, there is a direct line between the application of neoliberal principles in these countries—ruled by highly conservative, market-oriented politicians—and the restructuring of the World Bank and IMF in 1982 along neoliberal principles, the instituting of educational blueprints for sustaining mass consent for neoliberal policies, and the restoration of class power. With meticulous attention, Harvey addresses the historical transformations of wealth, power, and institutions in the service of neoliberal ideology. He provides a detailed analysis of how neoliberal principles were put to work in restructuring the debt in New York City in the 1970s; how Chile under Pinochet became a petri dish for Milton Friedman’s neoliberal ideas; how Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher attempted to dismantle the welfare state, disempower unions, let markets set prices, and liberalize trade and finance; and how the Bush administration represents the terminal point in neoliberal statecraft. Harvey is especially convincing about the merging of neoliberal policies and militarism, particularly when he points to the attempt by Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, who on September 19, 2003, issued a number of orders that provided the Bush administration’s model for the neoliberal state. According to Harvey, Bremer’s order included “the full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign forms of Iraqi business, full repatriation of foreign profits . . . the opening of Iraq’s banks to foreign control, national treatment for foreign companies . . . and the elimination of nearly all trade barriers” (6–7). Harvey makes a strong case that neoliberalism wages a war against democracy on a number of fronts that range from a battle for ideas to its ruthless attempts as a “political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to
restore the power of economic elites”—that is, the restoration of what he unequivocally calls class power (19; see also, Aronowitz, How).

Harvey gestures toward the importance of neoliberalism as a hegemonic mode of cultural politics when he argues that “It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). While he mentions the emergence of right-wing think tanks, the increasing corporatization of higher education, the rise of new information technologies, and the role of the media in making neoliberalism a mode of hegemonic discourse, Harvey never fully theorizes how pedagogy as a form of cultural politics actually constructs particular modes of address, modes of identification, affective investments, and social relations that produce consent and complicity in the ethos and practice of neoliberalism. Hence, Harvey never refutes seriously the notion that neoliberal hegemony can be explained simply through an economic optic and consequently gives the relationship of politics, culture, and class scant analysis. If neoliberalism as theory and practice is deeply indebted to furthering a market economy and its power structures, then it also recognizes the value of a cultural politics that has successfully mobilized a hegemonic discourse based on the assumption that the market is in a better position to decide matters than any genuine democracy. What is missing here is the notion of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality that couples “forms of knowledge, strategies of power and technologies of self” (Lemke) as part of its effort to transform politics, restructure power relations, and produce an array of narratives and disciplinary measures that normalizes its view of citizenship, the state, and the supremacy of market relations. Given its profound appeal in the last thirty years to the American public, the success of neoliberal ideology raises fundamental questions about how it is capable of enlisting in such a compelling way the consent of so many Americans, ordinarily dismissed by many leftists who argue “that working class people do not, under normal circumstances, care deeply about anything beyond the size of their paychecks” (Willis, “Escape” 9).

As Lawrence Grossberg has argued, the popular imaginary is far too important as part of a larger political and educational struggle not be taken seriously by progressives. He writes,
The struggle to win hegemony has to be anchored in people’s everyday consciousness and popular cultures. Those seeking power have to struggle with and within the contradictory realms of common sense and popular culture, with the languages and logics that people use to calculate what is right and what is wrong, what can be done and what cannot, what should be done and what has to be done. The popular is where social imagination is defined and changed, where people construct personal identities, identifications, priorities, and possibilities, where people form moral and political agendas for themselves and their societies, and where they decide whether and in what (or whom) to invest the power to speak for them. It is where people construct their hopes for the future in the light of their sense of the present. It is where they decide what matters, what is worth caring about, and what they are committed to. (220–21)

Unfortunately, we have no sense from Harvey about how the educational force of the culture actually works pedagogically to produce neoliberal ideology, values, and consent—how the popular imagination both deploys power and is influenced by power. This is particularly ironic since Harvey relies heavily on Antonio Gramsci’s interrelated notions of hegemony and common sense, but renders them devoid of their pedagogical dimensions. Gramsci famously claimed that “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship,” and in doing so he refused to separate culture from economic relations of power, or politics and pedagogy from the production of knowledge, identities, and social formations (350). While Harvey does not repeat the mistake made by many leftists of treating culture as merely superstructural, ornamental, or a burden on class-based politics, he undertheorizes the important relationship between the production of neoliberal consent, cultural politics, and pedagogy. In doing so, he fails to connect the primacy of the pedagogical as part of a broader politics that mediates the ever-shifting and dynamic modes of common sense that legitimate the institutional arrangements of capitalism, the changing politics of class formations, and the creation of the neoliberal state. Similarly, the primacy of material relations in this discourse cannot adequately register the changing consequences of neoliberal ideology as the nature of labor and production itself is radically transformed in late modernity. Hence, Harvey provides little
critical commentary on how the rationality of exchange and exploitation might not quite capture the fate of those populations—refugees, jobless youth, the poor elderly, immigrants, poor minorities of color—increasingly rendered disposable because they exist outside any productive notion of what it means to be a citizen-consumer, or how such groups might be mobilized to collectively resist the fact of their social, economic, and political exclusion as an alleged matter of destiny. In spite of the crucial connection between hegemony and pedagogy, we have no sense from either Harvey or for that matter many progressive social theorists, of what it might mean both to learn from young people about their appropriation of education, pedagogy, and culture as a tool of resistance to neoliberal ideology and to understand how we might employ the pedagogical as part of a broader effort to educate them to be critical and engaged agents in a world that increasingly views them as a problem or simply as a market for raking in lucrative profits.

Wendy Brown takes a different route analytically in trying to critically engage neoliberalism as a form of governmentality. She argues that while many theorists capture the "important effects of neoliberalism, they also reduce neoliberalism to a bundle of economic policies with inadvertent political and social consequences: they fail to address the political rationality that both organizes these policies and reaches beyond the market" (38). For Brown, neoliberalism is not merely a set of economic policies but "a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neoliberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player" (39–40). In developing this theoretical insight, Brown attempts to identify the basic elements that constitute such a rationality and how it shapes different realms of the social order. For example, she points to how, among other things, neoliberalism tends to cast all dimensions of human life in terms of economic relations; defines "the market as the organizing and regulative principle of the state"; attempts to develop institutions in accordance with neoliberal principles; "interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial subjects in every sphere of life"; and shifts the responsibilities
of the social state on to “free” and “responsible” individuals (41–45). Taking a somewhat different position from Harvey, Brown engages neoliberalism as a calculating and market-based rationality that reaches into every aspect of the social order, representing a powerful threat to both the very idea and practice of democracy in the United States. She expresses particular concern about the ways in which neoliberal governmentality cloaks itself in the language of freedom and democracy in order to further its own narrow economic interests. To her credit, Brown not only analyzes the workings of the neoliberal state and the elements of neoliberal rationality, she furthers our understanding of how neoliberal ideology undertakes in social, economic, and political terms an assault on civil liberties and democratic values. She argues that neoliberalism

is a formation that is developing a domestic imperium correlative with a global one, achieved through a secretive and remarkably agentic state; through corporatized media, schools, and prisons; and through a variety of technologies for intensified local administrative, regulatory, and police powers. It is a formation made possible by the production of citizens as individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives, by the reduction of civil society to a domain for exercising this entrepreneurship, and by the figuration of the state as a firm whose products are rational individual subjects, and expanding economy, national security, and global power. (56–57)

Ironically, it is precisely Brown’s notion of governmentality, defined exclusively by neoliberal rationality and policies, that prevents her from acknowledging various other and equally important anti-democratic forces—such as religious fundamentalism, militarism, and the assault on civil liberties—that suggest the emergence of a new form of authoritarianism in the United States. In addition, while calling for both resistance to neoliberalism as a form of governmentality and a radical restructuring of the neoliberal state, she fails to advance any critical understanding of the kind of pedagogical interventions and cultural politics that would be central to such a task. Neglected in such an analysis are central issues concerning how the intertwining of culture, politics, and meaning provide the social forms through which neoliberal rational-
ity is legitimated and lived. Moreover, she has nothing to say about what pedagogical apparatuses, locations, and spaces "provide the particular detailed methods through which competing or dissenting rationalities are disqualified and dismissed," or the methods through which hegemonic neoliberal pedagogies organize affective investments, desires, and identities into a web of common sense, social control, and consent (Ferguson and Turnbull 175). Any viable theory of governmentality must address not merely the diffuse operations of power throughout civil society but also what it would mean to engage those pedagogical sites producing and legitimating neoliberal rationality. In addition, it is crucial to examine what role public intellectuals, think tanks, the media, and universities actually play pedagogically in constructing and legitimating a neoliberal notion of common sense, and how the latter works pedagogically in producing neoliberal subjects and securing hegemonic consent. There is little sense in Brown's analysis of how neoliberal rationality is lived through diverse social, racial, and class formations, or what Jean Baudrillard has called "a sorcery of social relations" (15). Nor is there any acknowledgment of the fundamental importance of how neoliberal discourses, values, and ideas are taken up in ongoing struggles over culture, meaning, and identity as they bear down on people's daily lives (Kelley 108-9). And while her call for an alternative "vision in which justice would center not on maximizing individual wealth or rights but on developing and enhancing the capacity of citizens to share power and hence to collaboratively govern themselves" is important, she offers few insights as to how such a task would be engaged pedagogically, under what conditions, and in what public or private spheres (59). If pedagogy anchors governmentality in "domain of cognition" functioning largely as "a grid of insistent calculation, experimentation, and evaluation concerned with the conduct of conduct," it becomes crucial to understand the pedagogical challenges at work in such an ordering project (Dillon 330). For example, what pedagogical challenges would have to be addressed in overcoming the deeply felt view in American culture that criticism is destructive, or for that matter a deeply rooted anti-intellectualism reinforced daily through various forms of public pedagogy as in talk radio and the televisual info-tainment sectors (see Hoftstadter; Giroux, Teachers; Jacoby)? How might we engage pedagogical practices that open up
spaces of resistance to neoliberal governance and authority through a culture of questioning that enables people to resist and reject neoliberal assumptions that reduce citizenship to consumerism and a mode of calculating self-ambition and self-care and freedom to subjects who become exclusively responsible for their own desires and actions? What are the implications of theorizing pedagogy and the practice of learning as essential to social change and where might such interventions take place? How might the related matters of experience and learning, knowledge and authority, and history and cultural capital be theorized as part of a broader pedagogy of critique and possibility? What kind of pedagogical practice might be appropriate in providing the tools to unsettle hegemonic “domains of cognition” (Dillon 330) and break apart the continuity of consensus and common sense as part of a broader political and pedagogical attempt to provide people with a critical sense of social responsibility and agency? How might it be possible to theorize the pedagogical importance of the new media and the new modes of political literacy and cultural production they employ, or to analyze the circuits of power, translation, and distribution that make up neoliberalism’s vast apparatus or public pedagogy extending from talk radio and screen culture to the Internet and newspapers? At stake here is both recognizing the importance of the media as a site of public pedagogy and breaking the monopoly of information that is a central pillar of neoliberal common sense. As Hardt and Negri point out, challenging the information monopoly of the corporate media must include becoming “actively involved in the production and distribution of information” (305). Moreover such a project must be viewed a part of a larger effort to democratize the media “through equal access and active expression,” examples of which can be found on numerous websites where people not only have access to alternative discourses but can also upload their own stories, commentaries, and narratives (Hardt and Negri 305). These are only some of the questions that would be central to any viable recognition of what it would mean to theorize pedagogy as a condition that enables both critique, understood as more than the struggle against incomprehension, and social responsibility as the foundation for forms of intervention that are oppositional and empowering.
Cultural Politics and Public Pedagogy

The point is not to inculcate perfect ideas, it is to make people become self-critical, reflexive, critical of others—though not critical in an irritating sort of way—to open their eyes, especially about their own motives, and to encourage them to be autonomous. I think this is both the main aim of analysis and the prerequisite for social change. Cornelius Castoriadis

Both Harvey and Brown make important contributions to our understanding of neoliberalism, and we need to build on these contributions by theorizing more fully a notion of pedagogy that expands our understanding of how the educational force of the culture has become harnessed to neoliberalism as both a mode of common sense and a dangerous form of rationality. Such a recognition presents the challenge of what it means to address the pedagogical conditions at work in the reproduction of both neoliberalism and negative globalization. Engaging pedagogy as a form of cultural politics requires a concern with analyses of the production and representation of meaning and how these practices and the practices they provoke are implicated in the dynamics of social power. Pedagogy as a form of cultural politics raises the issue of how education might be understood as a moral and political practice that takes place in a variety of sites outside of schools. Pedagogy as defined here is fundamentally concerned with the relations between politics, subjectivities, and cultural and material production. As a form of cultural production, pedagogy is implicated in the construction and organization of knowledge, desires, emotional investments, values, and social practices. At stake here is developing a notion of public pedagogy, in particular, which is capable of contesting the various forms of symbolic production that secure individuals to the affective and ideological investments that produce the neoliberal subject. As Gramsci reminds us, hegemony as an educational practice is always necessarily part of a pedagogy of persuasion, one that makes a claim to "speak to vital human needs, interests, and desires, and therefore will be persuasive to many and ultimately most people" (Willis, Don't xiv).
Neoliberal hegemony is partly secured as a result of the crisis of agency that now characterizes much of American politics. As neoliberal ideology successfully normalizes and depoliticizes its basic assumptions and market-based view of the world, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to recognize that neoliberal rationality is a historical and political construction, and that there are alternatives to its conceptions of democracy as an extension of market principles and citizens as hyper-consumers or unthinking patriots. Challenging neoliberal hegemony means exposing its historical character and its flimsy claims to promoting freedom through choice while making visible how it operates in the service of class and corporate power. But the ideology and structures of neoliberal domination must be analyzed not merely within economic discourses but also as an oppressive form of public pedagogy, a practice of political persuasion, actively responsible for systematic forms of misrepresentation, distortion, and a mangling of public discourse by commercial interests (Bauman, "Critical" 162).

The institutions and sites that constitute the machinery of persuasion are at the heart of any system of culture and thus represent crucial sites of what I have called spheres of public pedagogy. Recognizing this means treating conflicts of culture, power, and politics, in part, as pedagogical issues and recognizing cultural education as a project related to democracy (Couldry 49). The concern that animates this essay is precisely to address how neoliberalism constitutes what Imre Szeman has called "a problem of and for pedagogy" (3–4). If neoliberalism requires a supporting political culture, it is crucial to recognize that culture is the place where deeply held meanings and values are produced, internalized, identified with, and fought over. Culture under the regulating hand of the market is not simply about texts, commodities, consumption, or the creation of the utterly privatized subject; it is also about how various people take up and invest in various symbolic representations in the ongoing and daily practices of comprehension and communication. Culture has become a form of capital for economic investment, but it has little to do with the power of self-definition or the capacities needed to expand the scope of justice and human freedom. And it is precisely the challenge of education to provide a liminal space where knowledge, values, and desires can become meaningful in order to be both critical and
transformation. If neoliberalism is to be challenged as a new mode of governmentality, it will have to be engaged as both a form of cultural politics and a pedagogical force, and not merely as a political and economic theory or mode of common sense or rationality.

As democratic institutions are downsized and public goods are offered up for corporate plunder, those of us who take seriously the related issues of equality, human rights, justice, and freedom face the crucial challenge of formulating a connection between the political and pedagogical that is suitable for addressing the urgent problems facing the twenty-first century—a politics that as Bauman argues "never stops criticizing the level of justice already achieved [while] seeking more justice and better justice" (Society 54). Part of the problem to be addressed is that neoliberal ideology and practice will have to be challenged as part of an ongoing effort to open up new national and global spaces of education employing a vast array of old and new media, including free radio stations, digital video, online magazines, the Internet, digital technologies, and cable television. This means not only making critical pedagogy central to any viable notion of politics but also struggling to expand the "spaces for public life, democratic debate and cultural expression" (Duggan xx). At its best, critical pedagogy should put into place those pedagogical conditions that enable a discourse of critique and possibility, one capable of making the operations of power visible in those theories, spaces, and social relations that are often complicitous with strategies of domination. Discursive ambivalence is an important element in a pedagogy designed to unsettle official discourses by revealing the historical and social conditions that bring them into being, interrogating them as embodiments of specific ideological interests and disclosing how they function to actively construct particular identifications and subject positions. If civic agency is to be taken seriously, educators need a new language to both challenge and work outside of the discourse of neoliberalism in order to expose how it deploys power within its own prison-house of language. For example, "corporate crime" is more telling than "white-collar crime"; the "corporatization" of schools, water, the public airways, and highways is far more critical and revealing than "privatization" when attempting to make clear the corporate appropriation of elements of the public sphere. Similarly, a term such as
“corporate welfare” reverses the script on government largesse and its most valued recipients and reveals how governance can be hijacked to serve business interests. Such a pedagogy has the potential to turn theory into a resource and reveal how power deploys culture and how culture produces power.

Moreover, critical pedagogy should not only “shift the way people think about the moment but [also] potentially energize them to do something differently in that moment” (Guinier and Smith 34–35). It should be deeply concerned with matters of specificity and context, and it should demand a certain ability to listen, witness, make connections, and be open to others and the conditions that give meaning to their lives. As Nick Couldry points out, pedagogy for democracy requires more than an obsession with abstractions, rhetoric, instrumentalization, and the jargon of specialization; it demands an “engagement with the claims of others, with questions of justice [and] justice requires always an engagement with the concrete other, not merely an abstract other. For justice and, therefore, for an adequate notion of citizenship, there must be a commitment to dialogue with concrete others” (68).

**Democracy and the Crisis of the Social State**

The conception of politics that we defend is far from the idea that “everything is possible.” In fact, it’s an immense task to try to propose a few possibilities, in the plural—a few possibilities other than what we are told is possible. It is a matter of showing how the space of the possible is larger than the one assigned—that something else is possible, but not that everything is possible. In any case, it is essential that politics renounce the category of totality, which is perhaps another change with respect to the previous period.

—Alain Badiou

We live at a time when the advocates of neoliberalism have no use for democracy except to view it as a rationale for expanding empires, opening trade barriers, and pursuing new markets. Democracy as both an ethical referent and a promise for a better future is much too important to cede
to a slick new mode of authoritarianism advanced by advocates of neoliberalism and other fundamentalists. Democracy as theory, practice, and promise for a better future must be critically engaged, struggled over, and reclaimed if it is to be used in the interest of social justice and the renewal of the labor movement as well as the building of national and international social movements, the struggle for the social state, and the necessity to confront hierarchy, inequality, and power as ruling principles in an era of rampant neoliberalism (Davis and Monk; see also, Touraine; Duggan; Saad-Filho and Johnston; Smith; Ong; Holmes). While many of the latter issues are central to most critiques of neoliberalism, the importance of the social state is often dismissed as either a throwback to the liberal dreams of the New Deal and a mainstay of state bureaucracy or simply dead on arrival—an indisputable byproduct of the separation of nation-based politics from the rise of mobile, global economic power. All of these positions are theoretically flawed and when taken too far provide ammunition for advocates of neoliberalism to define big government as wasteful, incompetent, and the cause of all of our problems (Lapham 8). Against the notion of the vanishing state, it is more accurate to say, as Stanley Aronowitz points out, that rather than disappearing the state’s “core functions have shifted from the legitimating institutions such as those of social welfare to, on the one hand providing the monetary and fiscal conditions for the internal, but spurious, expansion of capital ... and on the other to supplying a vastly expanded regime of coercion, that is, the growth of the police powers of government at home and abroad directed against the insurgencies that object to the growing phenomenon of an authoritarian form of democracy” (“Retreat” 32). Intellectuals, social movements, academics, and others concerned with nurturing a radical democracy must confront the coercive power of the punishing state under neoliberalism while simultaneously arguing for the renewal of a social state.

The dismantling of the social state through deregulation, privatization, and individualization transforms broader forms of community, solidarity, and equality into a theater of war legitimated by a new “order of egoism” and the ruthless and annihilating principles of an updated social Darwinism with its “devastating competitive ‘war of all against all’” (Bauman, “Has”). The reconfiguring of the social state into the corporate and
militarized state also promotes a massive exodus from politics and undermines the conditions that make political enlightenment and agency possible. As Bauman puts it, "Without collective insurance [there is] no stimulus for political engagement—and certainly not for participation in a democratic game of elections. No salvation is likely to arrive from a political state that is not, and refuses to be, a social state. Without social rights for all, a large and in all probability growing number of people would find their political rights useless and unworthy of their attention" ("Has"). The idea and importance of a radically democratic social state cannot be overstated. Not only does it "protect men and women from the plague of poverty, [it also] stands a chance of becoming a profuse source of solidarity able to recycle 'society' into a common, communal good, thanks to the defense it provides against the horror of misery, that is of the terror of being excluded, of falling or being pushed over the board of a fast accelerating vehicle of progress, of being condemned to 'social redundancy' and otherwise designated as 'human waste'" (Bauman, "Has"). At the same time, the social state is not the central foundation of governance, social justice, and freedom. On the contrary, the state becomes important less for its control of goods, services, and industries than for its regulatory power in ensuring the emergence of social provisions, non-commodified public spheres, and a larger commons that makes matters of critical agency and substantive democracy possible at both the local and global levels.

The struggle for the social state also foregrounds another important consideration for developing an emergent theory of democratic politics to address the current threat of neoliberal authoritarianism. The central issues of power and politics can lead to cynicism and despair if capitalism is not addressed as a system of social relations that diminishes—through its cultural politics, modes of commodification, and market pedagogies—the capacities and possibilities of individuals and groups to move beyond the vicissitudes of necessity and survival in order to fully participate in exercising some control over the myriad forces that shape their daily lives. The social state can provide a living wage, decent health care, public works, investment in schools, child care, housing for the poor, and a range of other crucial social provisions that can make a difference between living and dying. The rebuilding of the social state and the
renewal of the social contract should be a central goal of any broad-based radical social movement for democracy. I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting that rebuilding the social state be understood as simply a pragmatic adjustment of the institutions of liberal democracy. On the contrary, the emergence of the social state can only be comprehended as part of a radical break from liberalism and formalistic politics if there is to be any move toward a genuine democracy in which matters of equality, power, and justice are central to what Aronowitz calls the constitution of a radical democratic politics (*Left*). Such a task necessitates a politics and pedagogy that not only expand critical awareness and promote critical modes of inquiry but also sustain public connections. As Edward Said reminds us, if such a politics is to make any difference, it must be worldly; that is, it must incorporate a critical pedagogy and an understanding of cultural politics that not only contemplates social problems but also addresses the conditions for new forms of democratic political exchange and enables new forms of agency, power, and collective struggle. This is a pedagogy that embraces a global politics in its reach and vision, in its call for the democratic sharing of power, and in the elimination of those conditions that promote needless human suffering and imperil the biosystems of the earth itself.

Part of the task of developing a new understanding of the social and a new model of democratic politics rests with the demand to make the political more pedagogical while resisting at every turn the neoliberalization of public and higher education, creating new alliances between students and faculty, and rethinking the potential connections that might be deployed between those of us who work in education and the vast array of cultural workers outside of schools. As Stanley Aronowitz, Howard Zinn, Roger Simon, Susan Giroux, and others have stressed repeatedly, academics have a responsibility to view the academy as a contested site, a site where the spread of neoliberal ideas must be challenged (see Giroux and Myrsiades; see also, Aronowitz and Giroux; Said; Aronowitz, *Knowledge*; Zinn, *History*; Giroux and Giroux; Giroux, *University*; Pender). Contesting the neoliberalization of the university must be defended as important political work and viewed as a central element in theorizing the role of public intellectuals as part of a larger project in defining the meaning and purpose of the university as a
democratic public sphere. In connecting the work that is done in educational institutions with the larger society, educators and academics also face the important task of supporting, as Judith Butler argues, other public spheres "where thoughtful considerations can take place" (126). There is a long legacy among educators and academics to engage in forms of criticism that appear unconnected to the discourse of possibility and hope. This approach to critique and social criticism should be modified so that while we should continue to defend critique as a democratic value and "dissent as a basis for a politics that diminishes human suffering," we have a responsibility to go beyond criticism (104). Transcending this space requires combining a discourse of critique and possibility, one that enables others to recast themselves as agents who can forge new democratic visions against a fractured social, racial, and economic reality while speaking in the name of a desirable democratic future. Fortunately, while neoliberalism has achieved considerable dominance over political and economic discourse, there are a number of countervailing forces both at home and abroad that are challenging the politics and commonsense assumptions that drive its rationality and practices. From Seattle and Davos to Genoa and Rostok, people are engaging in various modes of popular struggle, collectively challenging the ethos, values, and relations of neoliberalism and resuscitating the meaning of politics, resistance, and the spaces where it becomes possible and takes place. Such signs are evident in grassroots and local movements to reclaim public education, the varied movements against neoliberal globalization, various struggles on behalf of populations that are HIV positive, workers' rights movements, and those diverse groups fighting for environmental justice and the public good, among other struggles. Under the reign of neoliberal globalization, it is crucial for intellectuals and others to develop better theoretical frameworks for understanding how power, politics, and pedagogy as a political and moral practice work in the service of neoliberalism to secure consent, to normalize authoritarian policies and practices, and to erase a history of struggle and injustice. The stakes are too high to ignore such a task. We live in dark times and the specter of neoliberalism and other modes of authoritarianism are gaining ground throughout the globe. We need to rethink the meaning of politics, take risks, and exercise the courage necessary to reclaim the pedagogical
conditions, visions, and economic projects that make the promise of a democracy and a different future worth fighting for.

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