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Giroux, Henry A.

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The Terror of Neoliberalism: Rethinking the Significance of Cultural Politics

Henry A. Giroux

If there is a class war in America, my side is winning. (Warren Buffet qtd. in Woodward 2004, para.47)

In 1945 or 1950, if you had seriously proposed any of the ideas and policies in today's standard neo-liberal toolkit, you would have been laughed off the stage or sent off to the insane asylum. . . . The idea that the market should be allowed to make major social and political decisions; the idea that the State should voluntarily reduce its role in the economy, or that corporations should be given total freedom, that trade unions should be curbed and citizens given much less rather than more social protection—such ideas were utterly foreign to the spirit of the time. Even if someone actually agreed with these ideas, he or she would have hesitated to take such a position in

*Henry A. Giroux holds the Global TV Network Chair in Communications at McMaster University in Canada. His most recent books are: **The Abandoned Generation** (2003); **Take Back Higher Education** (co-authored with Susan Searls Giroux; 2004) and **The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy** (2004).*

public and would have had a hard time finding an audience. (George 1999, para.2)

Just as the world has seen a more virulent and brutal form of market capitalism, generally referred to as neoliberalism, develop over the last thirty years, it has also seen “a new wave of political activism [which] has coalesced around the simple idea that capitalism has gone too far” (Harding 2001, para.28). Wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions, neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values. Under neoliberalism everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit. Public lands are looted by logging companies and corporate ranchers; politicians willingly hand the public’s airwaves over to powerful broadcasters and large corporate interests without a dime going into the public trust; Halliburton gives war profiteering a new meaning as it is granted corporate contracts without any competitive bidding and then bills the U.S. government for millions; the environment is polluted and despoiled in the name of profit-making just as the government passes legislation to make it easier for corporations to do so; public services are gutted in order to lower the taxes of major corporations; schools more closely resemble either malls or jails, and teachers, forced to get revenue for their school by adopting market values, increasingly function as circus barkers hawking everything from hamburgers to pizza parties—that is, when they are not reduced to prepping students to take standardized tests. As markets are touted as the driving force of everyday life, big government is disparaged as either incompetent or threatening to individual freedom, suggesting that power should reside in markets and corporations rather than in governments (except for their support for corporate interests and national security) and citizens. Citizenship has increasingly become a function of consumerism and politics has been restructured as “corporations have been increasingly freed from social control through deregulation, privatization, and other neoliberal measures” (Tabb 2003, 153).

Corporations more and more design not only the economic sphere but also shape legislation and policy affecting all levels of government, and with limited opposition. As corporate power lays siege to the political process, the benefits flow to the rich and the powerful. Included in such benefits are reform policies that shift the burden of taxes from the rich to the middle class, the working poor, and state governments as can be seen in the shift from taxes on wealth (capital gains, dividends, and estate taxes) to a tax on work, principally in the form of a regressive payroll tax (Collins, Hartman, Kraut, and Mota 2004). During the 2002–2004 fiscal years, tax cuts delivered \$197.3 billion in tax breaks to the wealthiest 1% of Americans (i.e., house-

holds making more than \$337,000 a year) while state governments increased taxes to fill a \$200 billion budget deficit (Gonsalves 2004). Equally alarming, a recent Congressional study revealed that 63% of all corporations in 2000 paid no taxes while “[s]ix in ten corporations reported no tax liability for the five years from 1996 through 2000, even though corporate profits were growing at record-breaking levels during that period” (Woodard 2004, para.11).

Fortunately, the corporate capitalist fairytale of neoliberalism has been challenged all over the globe by students, labor organizers, intellectuals, community activists, and a host of individuals and groups unwilling to allow democracy to be bought and sold by multinational corporations, corporate swindlers, international political institutions, and those government politicians who willingly align themselves with multinational, corporate interests and rapacious profits. From Seattle to Genoa, people engaged in popular resistance are collectively taking up the challenge of neoliberalism and reviving both the meaning of resistance and the sites where it takes place. Political culture is now global and resistance is amorphous, connecting students with workers, schoolteachers with parents, and intellectuals with artists. Groups protesting the attack on farmers in India whose land is being destroyed by the government in order to build dams now find themselves in alliance with young people resisting sweatshop labor in New York City. Environmental activists are joining up with key sections of organized labor as well as groups protesting Third World debt. The collapse of the neoliberal showcase, Argentina, along with numerous corporate bankruptcies and scandals (notably including Enron), reveals the cracks in neoliberal hegemony and domination. In addition, the multiple forms of resistance against neoliberal capitalism are not limited by a version of identity politics focused exclusively on particularized rights and interests. On the contrary, identity politics is affirmed within a broader crisis of political culture and democracy that connects the militarization of public life with the collapse of the welfare state and the attack on civil liberties. Central to these new movements is the notion that neoliberalism has to be understood within a larger crisis of vision, meaning, education, and political agency. Democracy in this view is not limited to the struggle over economic resources and power; indeed, it also includes the creation of public spheres where individuals can be educated as political agents equipped with the skills, capacities, and knowledge they need to perform as autonomous political agents. I want to expand the reaches of this debate by arguing that any struggle against neoliberalism must address the discourse of political agency, civic education, and cultural politics as part of a broader struggle over the relationship between democratization

(the ongoing struggle for a substantive and inclusive democracy) and the global public sphere.

We live at a time when the conflation of private interests, empire building, and evangelical fundamentalism brings into question the very nature, if not the existence, of the democratic process. Under the reign of neoliberalism, capital and wealth have been largely distributed upwards, while civic virtue has been undermined by a slavish celebration of the free market as the model for organizing all facets of everyday life (Henwood 2003). Political culture has been increasingly depoliticized as collective life is organized around the modalities of privatization, deregulation, and commercialization. When the alleged champions of neoliberalism invoke politics, they substitute “ideological certainty for reasonable doubt,” and deplete “the national reserves of political intelligence” just as they endorse “the illusion that the future can be bought instead of earned” (Lapham 2004a, 9, 11). Under attack is the social contract with its emphasis on enlarging the public good and expanding social provisions—such as access to adequate health care, housing, employment, public transportation, and education— which provided both a safety net and a set of conditions upon which democracy could be experienced and critical citizenship engaged. Politics has been further depoliticized by a policy of anti-terrorism practiced by the Bush administration that mimics the very terrorism it wishes to eliminate. Not only does a policy of all-embracing anti-terrorism exhausts itself in a discourse of moral absolutes and public acts of denunciation that remove politics from the realm of state power, it also strips community of democratic values by defining it almost exclusively through attempts to stamp out what Michael Leeden, a former counter-terror expert in the Reagan administration, calls “corrupt habits of mind that are still lingering around, somewhere”(qtd. in Valentine 2001, para.33). The appeal to moral absolutes and the constant mobilization of emergency time coded as a culture of fear configures politics in religious terms, hiding its entanglement with particular ideologies and diverse relations of power. Politics becomes empty as it is reduced to following orders, shaming those who make power accountable, and shutting down legitimate modes of dissent (Giroux 2004).

The militarizing of public space at home contributes to the narrowing of community, the increasing suppression of dissent, and as Anthony Lewis argues, a growing escalation of concentrated, unaccountable political power that threatens the very foundation of democracy in the United States (2002, A15). Authoritarianism marches forward just as political culture is being replaced with a notion of national security based on fear, surveillance, and control rather than a vibrant culture of shared responsibility and critical questioning. Militarization is no longer simply the driving force of foreign poli-

cy, it has become a defining principle for social changes at home. Catherine Lutz captures the multiple registers and complex processes of militarization that has extensively shaped social life during the 20th century. She is worth quoting at length:

By militarization, I mean . . . an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. Militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them. Militarization is intimately connected not only to the obvious increase in the size of armies and resurgence of militant nationalisms and militant fundamentalisms but also to the less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action. (Lutz 2002, 723)

Lutz's definition of militarization is inclusive, attentive to its discursive, ideological, and material relations of power in the service of war and violence. But militarization is also a powerful cultural politics that works its way through everyday life spawning particular notions of masculinity, sanctioning war as a spectacle, and fear as a central formative component in mobilizing an affective investment in militarization. In other words, the politics of militarization, with its emphasis on "social processes in which society organizes itself for the production of violence or the threat thereof" (Kraska 1999, 208), has produced a pervasive *culture* of militarization, which as Kevin Baker insists, "inject[s] a constant military presence in our lives" (2003, 40). As the culture of profit and militarization dominate or seek to eliminate democratic public spheres, self-reflection and collective empowerment are reduced to self-promotion and self-interest, legitimated by a new and ruthless social Darwinism played out nightly on network television as a metaphor for the "naturalness" of downsizing, the celebration of hyper-masculinity, and the promotion of a war of all against all over even the most limited notions of solidarity and collective struggle (Bourdieu 1998).

Under neoliberal domestic restructuring and the foreign policy initiatives of the Washington Consensus, which are motivated by an evangelical belief in free-market democracy at home and open markets abroad, the United States in the last thirty years has witnessed the increasing obliteration of those discourses, social forms, public institutions, and non-commercial values that are central to the language of public commitment, democratically charged politics, and the common good (Giroux 2003). Civic engagement now appears impotent as corporations privatize public space and disconnect

power from issues of equity, social justice, and civic responsibility. Financial investments, market identities, and commercial values take precedence over human needs, public responsibilities, and democratic relations (Martin 2002). Proceeding outside of democratic accountability, neoliberalism has allowed a handful of private interests to control as much of social life as possible in order to maximize their personal profit (Chomsky 1999).

Abroad, neoliberal global policies have been used to pursue rapacious free-trade agreements and expand Western financial and commercial interests through the heavy-handed policies of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to manage and transfer resources and wealth from the poor and less developed nations to the richest and most powerful nation-states and to the wealthy corporate defenders of capitalism. Third world and semi-peripheral states of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have become client states of the wealthy nations led by the United States. Loans made to the client states by banks and other financial institutions have produced severe dislocations in “social welfare programs such as health care, education, and laws establishing labor standards” (Aronowitz and Gautney 2003, xvi). For example, the restrictions that the IMF and World Bank impose on countries as a condition for granting loans—euphemistically referred to as a program of structural adjustment—not only subject them to capitalist values and dire economic restrictions, but also undermine the very possibility of an inclusive and substantive democracy. The results have been disastrous as evidenced by the economic collapse of countries such as Argentina and Nigeria as well as by the fact that “one third of the world’s labor force—more than a billion people—are unemployed or underemployed” (Aronowitz 2003, 30). Tracking twenty-six countries that received loans from the World Bank and the IMF, the *Multinational Monitor* spelled out the conditions that accompanied such loans:

[c]ivil service downsizing, privatization of government-owned enterprises with layoffs required in advance of privatization and frequently following privatization; [p]romotion of labor flexibility—regulatory changes to remove restrictions on the ability of government and private employers to fire or lay off workers; [m]andated wage reductions, minimum wage reductions of containment, and spreading the wage gap between government employees and managers; and [p]ension reforms, including privatization, that cut social security benefits for workers. (Gray 2001, 7-8)¹

In the United States, neoliberal policies have created a huge deficit projected at \$5 trillion over the next decade due in part to President George Bush’s exorbitant tax cuts for the wealthy (to the tune of an estimated \$3 trillion if they are made permanent). While the rich get tax cuts, 8.2 million

people are out of work and 2.3 million have lost their jobs since 2000; some have simply given up the unpromising task of looking for jobs. Massive subsidies for the rich, coupled with the corporate frenzy for short-term profits at the expense of any social considerations, translate into retrograde economic and social policies celebrated by the advocates of neoliberalism, just as they refuse to address an income gap between rich and poor that is not only the widest it has been since 1929, but also represents the most unequal among all developed nations (Woodard 2004, para.42).

Neoliberalism has been particularly hard on young people. The incarceration rates have soared for black and brown youth, who have become the targeted population in America's ongoing and intensified war on crime. By almost all measures ranging from health care to job opportunities to getting a decent education, youth of color fare considerably worse than white youth. But all youth, except those who are privileged by class and birth, are feeling the weight of an economic and political system that no longer sees them as a social investment for the future. For example, as Anya Kamenetz points out

Americans between the ages of 19 and 29 are now twice as likely to be uninsured as either children or older adults. The unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 24 was 16.1 percent as of February 2004, versus 6 percent for the general population. An estimated 900,000 people in this age group gave up and left the work force between 2000 and 2002, meaning a total of 6 million people in that range are dropouts, neither in school, working, nor in the military. By some accounts the age group's jobless rate is more than 80 percent. (Kamenetz 2004, para.11)

For those students who cannot find work or decide to go directly on to college, massive tuition increases over the past decade—over 47 percent at public four-year colleges—prevent many working and middle-class youth from attending higher education, and those that do are often saddled with enormous debt once they graduate. In addition, a spiraling national debt will place a terrible burden on this generation of young people, and this debt will leave little money for critical needs such as education, health care, the environment, and other crucial public provisions. Moreover, as part of an ongoing effort to destroy public entitlements, the Bush administration has reduced government services, income, and health care; implemented cuts in Medicare and veterans' benefits and trimmed back or eliminated funds for programs for children and for public housing. All of these policies have had and continue to have a crippling affect on youth, disabling any hopes not only for a better future, but also for a life that can rise above the hardships driven by the constant pressure to simply survive. Youth are now viewed as a national burden, more despised and feared than cherished and protected.

The destruction of the welfare state has gone hand-in-hand with the emergence of a prison-industrial complex and a new state that is largely used to regulate, control, contain, and punish those who are not privileged by the benefits of class, color, and gender (Cole 1999). How else to explain a national prison population that has grown from 200,000 in 1973 to slightly over two million in 2004, while “another 4.5 million are on probation and parole” (Calvi 2001, 40). More specifically, neoliberalism has become complicitous with this transformation of the democratic state into a national security state that repeatedly uses its military and political power to develop a daunting police state and military-prison-education-industrial complex to punish workers, stifle dissent, and undermine the political power of labor unions and progressive social movements (Lutz 2002).

With its debased belief that profit-making is the essence of democracy, and its definition of citizenship as an energized plunge into consumerism, neoliberalism eliminates government regulation of market forces, celebrates a ruthless competitive individualism, and places the commanding political, cultural, and economic institutions of society in the hands of powerful corporate interests, the privileged, and unrepentant religious bigots (Peters and Fitzsimons 2001). Neoliberal global policies also further the broader cultural project of privatizing social services through appeals to “personal responsibility as the proper functions of the state are narrowed, tax and wage costs in the economy are cut, and more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family” (Duggan 2003, 16). As I have mentioned, though it is worth repeating, the hard currency of human suffering permeates the social order as health-care costs rise, one out of five children fall beneath the poverty line, and 43 million Americans bear the burden of lacking any health insurance. As part of this larger cultural project fashioned under the sovereignty of neoliberalism, human misery is largely defined as a function of personal choices and human misfortune is viewed as the basis for criminalizing social problems. Misbehaving children are now put in handcuffs and taken to police stations for violating dress codes. Mothers who test positive for drugs in hospitals run the risk of having their children taken away by the police. Young, poor, black men who lack employment are targeted by the criminal justice system and, instead of being educated or trained for a job, often end up in jail. In fact, a report by United for a Fair Economy states that “One of out three Black males born in 2001 will be imprisoned at some point in their lifetime if current trends continue [and that] in 2000, there were at least 13 states in which there were more African-American men in prison than in college” (Muhammad, et. al. 2004, 20-21). Once released from prison, these young people are consigned to a civic purgatory in which they are “denied the right to vote, parental rights, drivers’ licenses, student loans, and residen-

cy in public housing—the only housing that marginal, jobless people can afford” (Staples 2004, 7). As stipulated in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, if convicted on a single drug felony, these youth when released are further punished by a lifetime ban on food stamps and welfare eligibility. Such policies are not only unjust and morally reprehensible, they are symptomatic of a society that has relegated matters of equality and racial justice to the back burner of social concerns. In a market society caught up in “the greed cycle” (Cassidy 2002), addressing persistent injustices gets in the way of accumulating capital and the neoliberal and neoconservative revolution aimed at transforming democracy into a one party, corporate state.

Within the discourse of neoliberalism, democracy becomes synonymous with free markets, while issues of equality, racial justice, and freedom are stripped of any substantive meaning and used to disparage those who suffer systemic deprivation and chronic punishment. Individual misfortune, like democracy itself, is now viewed as either excessive or in need of radical containment. The media, largely consolidated through corporate power, routinely provide a platform for high profile right-wing pundits and politicians to remind us either of how degenerate the poor have become or to reinforce the central neoliberal tenet that all problems are private rather than social in nature. Conservative columnist Ann Coulter captures the latter sentiment with her comment that “[i]nstead of poor people with hope and possibility, we now have a permanent underclass of aspiring criminals knifing one another between having illegitimate children and collecting welfare checks” (qtd. in Bean 2003, para.3). Radio talk show host Michael Savage, too, exemplifies the unabashed racism and fanaticism that emerge under a neoliberal regime in which ethics and justice appear beside the point. For instance, Savage routinely refers to non-white countries as “turd world nations,” homosexuality as a “perversion” and young children who are victims of gunfire as “ghetto slime” (qtd. in *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* 2003, para.2, 6, 5).

As Fredric Jameson has argued in *The Seeds of Time*, it has now become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (1994, xii). The breathless rhetoric of the global victory of free-market rationality spewed forth by the mass media, right-wing intellectuals, and governments alike has found its material expression both in an all-out attack on democratic values and in the growth of a range of social problems including: virulent and persistent poverty, joblessness, inadequate health care, apartheid in the inner cities, and increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor. Such problems appear to have been either removed from the inventory of public discourse and social policy or factored into talk-show spectacles in which the public becomes merely a staging area for venting private interests

and emotions. Within the discourse of neoliberalism that has taken hold of the public imagination, there is no way of talking about what is fundamental to civic life, critical citizenship, and a substantive democracy. Neoliberalism offers no critical vocabulary for speaking about political or social transformation as a democratic project. Nor is there a language for either the ideal of public commitment or the notion of a social agency capable of challenging the basic assumptions of corporate ideology as well as its social consequences. In its dubious appeals to universal laws, neutrality, and selective scientific research, neoliberalism “eliminates the very possibility of critical thinking, without which democratic debate becomes impossible” (Buck-Morss 2003, 65-66). This shift in rhetoric makes it possible for advocates of neoliberalism to implement the most ruthless economic and political policies without having to open up such actions to public debate and dialogue. Hence, neoliberal policies that promote the cutthroat downsizing of the workforce, the bleeding of social services, the reduction of state governments to police precincts, the ongoing liquidation of job security, the increasing elimination of a decent social wage, the creation of a society of low-skilled workers, and the emergence of a culture of permanent insecurity and fear hide behind appeals to common sense and allegedly immutable laws of nature.

When and where such nakedly ideological appeals strain both reason and imagination, religious faith is invoked to silence dissension. Society is no longer defended as a space in which to nurture the most fundamental values and relations necessary to a democracy but has been recast as an ideological and political sphere “where religious fundamentalism comes together with market fundamentalism to form the ideology of American supremacy” (Soros 2004, 10). Similarly, American imperial ambitions are now legitimated by public relations intellectuals as part of the responsibilities of empire-building, which in turn is celebrated as either a civilizing process for the rest of the globe or as simply a right bestowed upon the powerful. For instance, Ann Coulter speaks for many such intellectuals when she recently argued, while giving a speech at Penn State University, that she had no trouble with the idea that the United States invaded Iraq in order to seize its oil. As she put it, “Why not go to war just for oil? We need oil. Of course, we consume most of the world’s oil; we do most of the world’s production” (qtd. in Colella 2004, 1). In this world-view, power, money, and a debased appeal to pragmatism always trump social and economic justice. Hence, it is not surprising for neo-conservatives to have joined hands with neoliberals and religious fundamentalists in broadcasting to the world at large an American triumphalism in which the United States is arrogantly defined as “[t]he

greatest of all great powers in world history” (Frum and Pearle qtd. in Lapham 2004b, 8).²

But money, profits, and fear have become powerful ideological elements not only in arguing for opening up new markets, but also for closing down the possibility of dissent at home. In such a scenario, the police state is celebrated by religious evangelicals like John Ashcroft as a foundation of human freedom. This becomes clear not only in the passage of repressive laws such as the USA Patriot Act but also in the work of prominent neoconservatives such as David Frum and Richard Pearle who, without any irony intended, insist that “[a] free society is not an un-policed society. A free society is a self-policed society” (qtd. in Lapham 2004b, 8). In what could only be defined as an Adam Smith joins George Orwell in a religious cult in California scenario, markets have been elevated to the status of sacrosanct temples to be worshiped by eager consumers while citizens-turned soldiers of the-Army-of-God are urged to spy on each other and dissent is increasingly criminalized.³

Political culture, if not the nature of politics itself, has undergone revolutionary changes in the last two decades, reaching its most debased expression under the administration of President George W. Bush. Within this political culture, not only is democracy subordinated to the rule of the market, but corporate decisions are freed from territorial constraints and the demands of public obligations, just as economics is disconnected from its social consequences. Power is increasingly removed from the dictates and control of nation states and politics is largely relegated to the sphere of the local. Zygmunt Bauman captures brilliantly what is new about the relationship among power, politics, and the shredding of social obligations:

The mobility acquired by “people who invest”—those with capital, with money which the investment requires—means the new, indeed unprecedented . . . disconnection of power from obligations: duties towards employees, but also towards the younger and weaker, towards yet unborn generations and towards the self-reproduction of the living conditions of all; in short the freedom from the duty to contribute to daily life and the perpetuation of the community. . . . Shedding the responsibility for the consequences is the most coveted and cherished gain which the new mobility brings to free-floating, locally unbound capital. (Bauman 1998, 9-10)

Corporate power increasingly frees itself from any political limitations just as it uses its power through the educational force of the dominant culture to put into place an utterly privatized notion of agency in which it becomes difficult for young people and adults to imagine democracy as a public good, let alone the transformative power of collective action. Once again, democratic politics has become ineffective, if not banal, as civic language is improv-

erished and genuine spaces for democratic learning, debate, and dialogue such as schools, newspapers, popular culture, television networks, and other public spheres are either underfunded, eliminated, privatized, or subject to corporate ownership. Under the aggressive politics and culture of neoliberalism, society is increasingly mobilized for the production of violence against the poor, immigrants, dissenters, and others marginalized because of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, and color. At the center of neoliberalism is a new form of politics in the United States, a politics in which radical exclusion is the order of the day, and in which the primary questions no longer concern equality, justice, or freedom, but are now about the survival of the slickest in a culture marked by fear, surveillance, and economic deprivation. This is a politics that hides its own ideology by eliminating the traces of its power in a rhetoric of normalization, populism, and the staging of public spectacles. As Susan George points out, the question that currently seems to define neoliberal “democracy” is “Who has a right to live or does not” (1999, para.34).

Neoliberalism is not a neutral, technical, economic discourse that can be measured with the precision of a mathematical formula or defended through an appeal to the rules of a presumptively unassailable science that conveniently leaves its own history behind. Nor is it a paragon of economic rationality that offers the best “route to optimum efficiency, rapid economic growth and innovation, and rising prosperity for all who are willing to work hard and take advantage of available opportunities” (Kotz 2003, 16). On the contrary, neoliberalism is an ideology, a politics, and at times a fanaticism that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of a market-driven society. More important, it is an economic and implicitly cultural theory—a historical and socially constructed ideology that needs to be made visible, critically engaged, and shaken from the stranglehold of power it currently exercises over most of the commanding institutions of national and global life. As such, neoliberalism makes it difficult for many people either to imagine a notion of individual and social agency necessary for reclaiming a substantive democracy or to be able to theorize the economic, cultural, and political conditions necessary for a viable global public sphere in which public institutions, spaces, and goods become valued as part of a larger democratic struggle for a sustainable future and the downward distribution of wealth, resources, and power.

As a public pedagogy and political ideology, the neoliberalism of Friedrich Hayek (1994) and Milton Friedman (2002) is far more ruthless than the classic liberal economic theory developed by Adam Smith and David Ricardo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Neoliberalism has

become the current conservative revolution because it harkens back to a period in American history that supported the sovereignty of the market over the sovereignty of the democratic state and the common good. Reproducing the future in the image of the distant past, it represents a struggle designed to roll back, if not dismantle, all of the policies put into place over seventy years ago by the New Deal to curb corporate power and give substance to the liberal meaning of the social contract. The late Pierre Bourdieu captures what is new about neoliberalism in his comment that neoliberalism is

a new kind of conservative revolution [that] appeals to progress, reason and science (economics in this case) to justify the restoration and so tries to write off progressive thought and action as archaic. It sets up as the norm of all practices, and therefore as ideal rules, the real regularities of the economic world abandoned to its own logic, the so-called laws of the market. It reifies and glorifies the reign of what are called the financial markets, in other words the return to a kind of radical capitalism, with no other law than that of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism without any disguise, but rationalized, pushed to the limit of its economic efficacy by the introduction of modern forms of domination, such as ‘business administration’, and techniques of manipulation, such as market research and advertising. (Bourdieu 1998, 35)

Neoliberalism has indeed become a broad-based political and cultural movement designed to obliterate public concerns and liquidate the welfare state, and make politics everywhere an exclusively market-driven project (Leys 2001). But neoliberalism does more than make the market “the informing principle of politics” (Duggan 2003, 34), while allocating wealth and resources to those who are most privileged by virtue of their class, race, and power. Its supporting political culture and pedagogical practices also put into play a social universe and cultural landscape that sustain a particularly barbaric notion of authoritarianism, set in motion under the combined power of a religious and market fundamentalism and anti-terrorism laws that suspend civil liberties, incarcerate disposable populations, and provide the security forces necessary for capital to destroy those spaces where democracy can be nourished. All the while, the landscape and soundscape become increasingly homogenized through the spectacle of flags waving from every flower box, car, truck, and house, encouraged and supplemented by jingoistic bravado being broadcast by Fox Television News and Clear Channel radio stations. As a cultural politics and a form of economic domination, neoliberalism tells a very limited story, one that is antithetical to nurturing democratic identities, values, public spaces, and institutions and thereby enables fascism to grow because it has no ethical language for recognizing politics outside of the realm of the market, for controlling market excesses, or for challenging the

underlying tenets of a growing authoritarianism bolstered by the pretense of religious piety.

Neoliberal ideology, on the one hand, pushes for the privatization of all non-commodified public spheres and the upward distribution of wealth. On the other hand, it supports policies that increasingly militarize facets of public space in order to secure the privileges and benefits of the corporate elite and ultra-rich. Neoliberalism does not merely produce economic inequality, iniquitous power relations, and a corrupt political system; it also promotes rigid exclusions from national citizenship and civic participation. As Lisa Duggan points out, “Neoliberalism cannot be abstracted from race and gender relations, or other cultural aspects of the body politic. Its legitimating discourse, social relations, and ideology are saturated with race, with gender, with sex, with religion, with ethnicity, and nationality” (2003, xvi). Neoliberalism comfortably aligns itself with various strands of neoconservative and religious fundamentalisms waging imperial wars abroad as well as at home against those groups and movements that threaten its authoritarian misreading of the meaning of freedom, security, and productiveness.

Neoliberalism has to be understood and challenged as both an economic theory and a powerful public pedagogy and cultural politics. That is, it has to be named and critically understood before it can be critiqued. The commonsense assumptions that legitimate neoliberalism’s alleged historical inevitability have to be unsettled and then engaged for the social damage they cause at all levels of human existence. Such a recognition suggests identifying and critically examining the most salient and powerful ideologies that inform and frame neoliberalism. It also suggests a need on the part of progressives to make cultural politics and the notion of public pedagogy central to the struggle against neoliberalism, particularly since education and culture now play such a prominent political and economic role in both securing consent and producing capital (Peters 2002). In fact, this implies as Susan Buck-Morss has insisted that “[t]he recognition of cultural domination as just as important as, and perhaps even as the condition of possibility of, political and economic domination is a true ‘advance’ in our thinking” (2003, 103). Of course, this position is meant not to disavow economic and institutional struggles but to supplement them with a cultural politics that connects symbolic power and its pedagogical practices with material relations of power. Engaging the cultural politics and economics of neoliberalism also points to the need for progressives to analyze how neoliberal policies work at the level of everyday life through the language of privatization and the lived cultural forms of class, race, gender, youth, and ethnicity. Finally, such a project must employ a language of critique and possibility, engagement and hope as part

of a broader project of viewing democracy as a site of intense struggle over matters of representation, participation, and shared power.

Central to the critique of neoliberalism is the belief, as Alain Touraine argues, that neoliberal globalization has not “dissolved our capacity for political action” (2001, 2). Such action depends on the ability of various groups—the peace movement, the anti-corporate globalization movement, the human rights movement, the environmental justice movement—within and across national boundaries—to form alliances in which matters of community and solidarity provide a common symbolic space and multiple public spheres where norms are created, debated, and engaged as part of an attempt to develop a new political language, culture, and set of relations. Such efforts must be understood as part of a broader attempt not only to collectively struggle against domination, but also to defend all those social advances that strengthen democratic public spheres and services, demand new rights, establish modes of power sharing, and create notions of social justice adequate to imagining and sustaining democracy on a global level. Consider, for example, the anti-corporate globalization movement’s slogan “Another World is Possible!” which demands, as Alex Callinicos insightfully points out, a different kind of social logic, a powerful sense of unity and solidarity.

Another world—that is, a world based on different social logic, run according to different priorities from those that prevail today. It is easy enough to specify what the desiderata of such an alternative social logic would be—social justice, economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and democracy—but much harder to spell out how a reproducible social system embodying these requirements could be built. And then there is the question of how to achieve it. Both these questions—What is the alternative to capitalism? What strategy can get us there?—can be answered in different ways. One thing the anti-capitalist movement is going to have to learn is how to argue through the differences that exist and will probably develop around such issues without undermining the very powerful sense of unity that has been one of the movement’s most attractive qualities. (Callinicos 2003, 147)

Callinicos’s insight suggests that any viable struggle against neoliberal capitalism will have to rethink “the entire project of politics within the changed conditions of a global public sphere, and to do this democratically, as people who speak different political languages, but whose goals are nonetheless the same: global peace, economic justice, legal equality, democratic participation, individual freedom, mutual respect” (Buck-Morss 2003, 4-5). One of the most central tasks facing intellectuals, activists, educators, and others who believe in an inclusive and substantive democracy is the need to use theory to rethink the language and possibilities of politics as a way to imagine a future outside the powerful grip of neoliberalism and the impend-

ing authoritarianism that has a different story to tell about the future, one that reinvents the past in the image of the crude exercise of power and the unleashing of unimaginable human suffering. Critical reflection and social action in this discourse must acknowledge how the category of the global public sphere extends the space of politics beyond the boundaries of local resistance. Evidence of such actions can be found in the World Social Forums that took place in 2003 in Porto Alegre, Brazil and in Hyderabad, India in 2004. Successful forms of global dissent can also be observed in the international campaign to make AIDS drugs affordable for poor countries as well as in the international demonstrations against multinational corporations in cities from Melbourne and Seattle to Genoa and New York City. New alliances among intellectuals, students, labor unions, and environmentalists are taking place in the streets of Argentina, the West Bank, and in many other places fighting globalization from above. At the same time, a new language of agency and resistance is emerging among many activists and is being translated into new approaches to what it means to make the pedagogical more political as part of a global justice movement. Politics can no longer exclude matters of social and cultural learning and reproduction in the context of globalization or ignore the ways in which, as Imre Szeman asserts, globalization itself constitutes “a problem of and for pedagogy” (2002, 4). The slogan, “Another World is Possible!” reinforces the important political insight that one cannot act otherwise unless one can think otherwise, but acting otherwise demands a new politics in which it is recognized that global problems need global solutions along with global institutions, global modes of dissent, global intellectual collaboration, and global social movements.

Notes

1 *The Multinational Monitor* (2001, 7-8). See also Moberg, (2004, 20-21).

2 Here I am quoting David Frum and Richard Pearle cited in Lewis H. Lapham, (2004b, 8). This fascistically inspired triumphalism can be found in a number of recent books churned out to gratify the demands of a much celebrated jingoism. See Farah (2003); Malkin (2002); Bennett (2003).

3 For a rather vivid example of how dissent is criminalized, see Moyers (2004). The program documents how undercover agents from all levels of government are infiltrating and documenting peaceful protests in America.

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