

THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT MEETS THE SUICIDAL STATE

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THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT MEETS THE SUICIDAL STATE: NEOLIBERALISM AND THE PUNISHING OF DISSENT

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE PUNISHING OF YOUTHFUL PROTESTS

Young people are demonstrating all over the world against a variety of issues ranging from economic injustice and massive inequality to drastic cuts in education and public services.¹ In the fall of 2011, on the tenth anniversary of September 11th, as the United States revisited the tragic loss and celebrated the courage displayed on that torturous day another kind of commemoration took place. The Occupy movement shone out like a flame in the darkness—a beacon of the irrepressible spirit of democracy and a humane desire for justice. Unfortunately, the peacefully organized protests across America have been often met with derogatory commentaries in the mainstream media, and increasingly state sanctioned violence. Missing from both the dominant media and state and national politics is an attempt to critically engage the issues the protesters are raising, not to mention any attempt to dialogue with them over their strategies, tactics, and political concerns. Matters of justice, human dignity, and social responsibility have given way to a double gesture that seeks to undercut democratic public spheres through the criminalization of dissent while also resorting to crude and violent forms of punishment as the only mediating tools to use with young people who are attempting to open a new conversation about politics, inequality, and social justice.

It gets worse. Everywhere we look the power of the mega-corporations and financial elite operate to create what Michel Foucault refers to as a “suicidal state”² in which regulations meant to restrict their corrupting power are shredded. Shamelessly and without apology, corporations increasingly use their unchecked power to lay off millions of workers while simultaneously cutting benefits and rights in order to increase dramatically corporate

¹ Clearly, there are many reasons for the various youthful protests across the globe, ranging from the murder of young people and anger against financial corruption to the riots against cuts to social benefits and the rise of educational costs.

² Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 260.

profits. As social protections are dismantled, public servants denigrated, and public goods such as schools, bridges, health care services, and public transportation deteriorate, the current neoliberal social order embraces the ruthless and punishing values of economic Darwinism and a survival of the fittest ethic. In doing so, the major political parties now reward as its chief beneficiaries the mega banks, ultra large financial industries, the defense establishment, and big business. Regardless of the consequences to the public good, the obsessive quest for short-term profits by the apostles of neoliberalism is only matched by an aggressive effort on the part of the ruling financial and political elites to privatize public services, deregulate the financial industry, and depoliticize the public realm in order to replace a market economy with a market society.³ While there are many variants of neoliberalism, what links these diverse strands is a “fundamental preference for the market over the state as a means of resolving problems and achieving human ends.”⁴

Reinvigorated by the passing of tax cuts for the super-rich,⁵ the right-wing dominated House of Representatives along with a number of states have launched an ongoing war on youth, women’s rights, the welfare state, workers, students, immigrants, and anyone who has the temerity to speak out against such attacks. This war against the social state, women, and young people is abetted by both the conservative and liberal media. The corporate controlled media, especially Fox News and Clear Channel Communications emulate the former Soviet Union’s version of Pravda, its once laughable propaganda rag, functioning mostly as the propaganda arm of the more extremist element of the Republican Party. At the same time, the liberal media is more willing to compromise with right-wing ideology than search for the truth and hold power accountable.

The dominant cultural apparatuses represent a powerful form of public pedagogy that normalizes existing relations of power, infantilizes its viewers, substitutes entertainment and spectacle over critical investigative reporting, and invests in spectacles of violence as its primary mode of entertainment in order to attract advertising revenue. Neoliberalism has intensified its attack on the welfare state, state sovereignty, and youth, while imposing its values,

³ Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-death of Neoliberalism* (London: Polity, 2011).

⁴ Crouch, Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-death of Neoliberalism*, p. 7.

⁵ See, for instance, Bob McIntyre, “Big No-Tax Corps Just Keep on Dodging,” Citizens for Tax Justice,” (April 9, 2012). Online: <http://www.ctj.org/pdf/notax2012.pdf>

social relations, and forms of social death upon all aspects of civic life⁶. One consequence is that the United States has come to resemble a suicidal state, where governments work to destroy their own defenses against anti-democratic forces.⁷ As Jacques Derrida put it, such states offer no immunity against authoritarianism and in fact emulate “that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its ‘own’ immunit....”⁸

Since the 1970s, there has been an intensification of the anti-democratic pressures of neoliberal modes of governance, ideology, and policies. What is particularly new is the way in which young people are increasingly denied any place in an already weakened social contract and the degree to which they are no longer seen as central to how the United States defines its future. Youth are no longer the place where society reveals its dreams but increasingly hides its nightmares. Within neoliberal narratives, youth are either defined as a consumer market or stand for trouble.⁹ This shift in representations of how American society talks about young people betrays a great deal about what is increasingly new about the economic, social, cultural, and political constitution of American society and its growing disinvestment in young people, the social state, and democracy itself.¹⁰ The promises of modernity regarding progress, freedom, and hope have not been eliminated; they have been reconfigured, stripped of their emancipatory potential and relegated to the logic of a savage market instrumentality. Modernity has reneged on

⁶ Some useful sources on neoliberalism include: Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, eds. *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2005); Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Henry A. Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁷ Paul Virilio, “The Suicidal State,” in J. DerDerian, ed. *The Virilio Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 29-45.

⁸ Giovanna Borradori, ed, “Autoimmunity: real and symbolic suicides—a dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2004), p. 94.

⁹ These themes are taken up in Lawrence Grossberg, *Caught In the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America’s Future*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005); Henry A. Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰ See, for example, Jean and John Comaroff, “Reflections of Youth, from the Past to the Postcolony,” *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on The New Economy*, ed. Melissa S. Fisher and Greg Downey, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) pp. 267-281

its promise, however disingenuous or limited, to young people of mobility, stability, and collective security. Long term planning and the institutional structures that support them are now relegated to the imperatives of privatization, deregulation, flexibility, and short term investments. Social bonds have given way to under the collapse of social protections and the welfare state just as “the emphasis is now on individual solutions to socially produced problems.”¹¹ As Sharon Stevens points out, what we are now witnessing is not only the “wide-ranging restructurings of modernity” but also the effect “these changes have for the concept of childhood and the life conditions of children.”¹²

The severity of the consequences of this shift in modernity under neoliberalism among youth is evident in the fact that this is the first generation in which the “plight of the outcast may stretch to embrace a whole generation.”¹³ Zygmunt Bauman argues that today’s youth have been “cast in a condition of liminal drift, with no way of knowing whether it is transitory or permanent.”¹⁴ That is, the generation of youth in the early 21st century has no way of grasping if they will ever “be free from the gnawing sense of the transience, indefiniteness, and provisional nature of any settlement.”¹⁵ Neoliberal violence produced in part through a massive shift in wealth to the upper 1 percent, growing inequality, the reign of the financial services, the closing down of educational opportunities, and the stripping of benefits and resources from those marginalized by race and class has produced a generation without jobs, an independent life, and even the most minimal social benefits. Youth no longer occupy the hope of a privileged place that was offered to previous generations. They now inhabit a neoliberal notion of temporality marked by a loss of faith in progress along with the emergence of apocalyptic narratives in which the future appears indeterminate, bleak, and insecure. Heightened expectations and progressive visions pale and are smashed next to the normalization of market-driven government policies that wipe out pensions, eliminate quality health care, raise college tuition,

¹¹ Zygmung Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 14.

¹² Sharon Stephens, ed., *Children and The politics of Culture*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 19.

¹³ Zygmunt Bauman, “Downward mobility is now a reality,” *The Guardian* (May 31, 2012). OnlineL <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/31/downward-mobility-europe-young-people>; Bauman develops this theme in detail in both Zygmunt Bauman, *On Education*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012) and Zygmunt Bauman, *This Is Not A Diary*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives* (London: Polity, 2004), p. 76.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

and produce a harsh world of joblessness, while giving millions to banks and the military. Students, in particular, now find themselves in a world in which heightened expectations have been replaced by dashed hopes and a world of onerous debt.¹⁶ The promises of higher education and previously enviable credentials have turned into the swindle of fulfillment as “For the first time in living memory, the whole class of graduates faces a high probability, almost the certainty, of ad hoc, temporary, insecure and part-time jobs, unpaid ‘trainee’ pseudo-jobs deceitfully rebranded ‘practices’—all considerably below the skills they have acquired and eons below the level of their expectations.”¹⁷

What has changed about an entire generation of young people includes not only neoliberal society’s disinvestment in youth and the permanent fate of downward mobility, but also the fact that youth live in a commercially carpet bombed and commodified environment that is unlike anything experienced by those of previous generations. Nothing has prepared this generation for the inhospitable and savage new world of commodification, privatization, joblessness, frustrated hopes, and stillborn projects.¹⁸ The present generation has been born into a throwaway society of consumers in which both goods and young people are increasingly objectified and disposable. As Larry Grossberg points out, young people now inhabit a world in which there are few public spheres or social spaces autonomous from the reach of the market.

Kids see themselves presented in highly sexualized ways for advertising and entertainment purposes, even while their own sexual behavior is repressed and criminalized. ...kids hear themselves attacked for their consumerism, even while the media and corporate interests commercialize and commodify every dimension of their lives, every pleasure, every need. From the kids’ perspective, it looks as if we are selling, or perhaps we already have sold, our children to advertisers, to private business, to corporate capitalism....What can it say to them that as a society we are unwilling to pay for their education (as ours had been paid for) but we are willing to commercialize education (junk foods, field trips to chain stores, sponsored lesson materials and textbooks, advertising in hallways).¹⁹

¹⁶ See Steve Fraser, “The Politics of Debt in America: From Debtor’s Prison to Debtor Nation,” TomDispatch.com (January 29, 2013). Online: <http://www.tomdispatch.com/dialogs/print/?id=175643>. On the history of debt, see David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2012).

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *On Education* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Bauman, *On Education*, p. 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Grossberg, *Caught In the Crossfire* pp. 38-39.

The structures of neoliberal modernity do more than disinvest in young people and commodify them, it also transforms the protected space of childhood into a zone of disciplinary exclusion and cruelty, especially for those young people further marginalized by race and class who now inhabit a social landscape in which they are increasingly disparaged as flawed consumers. With no adequate role to play as consumers, many youth are now considered disposable, forced to inhabit “zones of social abandonment” extending from bad schools to bulging detention centers and prisons.²⁰ In the midst of the rise of the punishing state, the circuits of state repression, surveillance, and disposability increasingly “link the fate of “blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, poor whites, and Asian Americans” who are now caught in a governing through crime youth complex, which now serves as default solutions to major social problems.²¹

This radical neoliberal shift in modernity becomes evident as economic power succeeds in detaching itself from government regulations, social costs, and ethical considerations, a new global financial class reasserts the prerogatives of capital and systemically destroys those public spheres—including public and higher education—that traditionally advocated for social equality and an educated youth as the fundamental conditions for a viable democracy. Power is now global and politics is local, inhabited by eviscerated state governments and a weakened nation state. Stripped of their power, state governments have few resources to devote to the genuine causes of people’s hardships, suffering, and socially produced problems. Increasingly, they function as an adjunct of financial interests and exercise power through the varied apparatuses of the punishing state. Of course, since September 2011, the paralyzing fog of depoliticization has been ruptured by the Occupy movement, the intermittent roar of angry workers, and of young people who refuse to cede their future to the new oligarchs, bankers, conservative think tanks, hedge fund managers, Christian extremists, and the corporate controlled liberal and conservative media apparatuses.

As a result of the triumph of corporate power over democratic values—made visible recently in the Citizens United Supreme Court case in which controls were eliminated on corporate spending on political campaigns—

²⁰ I have borrowed the term “zones of social abandonment” from João Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); see also Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The Free Press, 2012).

²¹ Angela Y. Davis, “State of Emergency,” in Manning Marable, Keesha Middlemass, and Ian Steinberg, Eds. *Racializing Justice, Disenfranchising Lives* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 324.

the authority of the state does more than defend the market and powerful financial interests, it also is expanding its disciplinary control over the rest of society.²² There is more at work here than, as David Harvey points out, a political project designed “to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites,”²³ there is also a reconfiguration of the state into what might be called a merging of the warfare, corporate, and the punishing state, or what Foucault and Virilio call a suicidal state.²⁴

Lending muscle to corporate initiatives, the suicidal state becomes largely responsible for managing and expanding mechanisms of control, containment, and punishment over a vast number of public institutions. As a weakened social contract comes under sustained attack, the model of the prison, along with its accelerating mechanisms and practices of punishment, emerges as a core institution and mode of governance under the suicidal state—a hyper mode of punishment creep now seeps into a variety of institutions.²⁵

In the United States, the state monopoly on the use of violence has intensified since the 1980s, and in the process has been directed disproportionately against young people, poor minorities, immigrants, women, and the elderly. Guided by the notion that unregulated, market-driven values and relations should shape every domain of human life, a business model of governance has eviscerated any viable notion of social responsibility and conscience, thereby furthering the dismissal of social problems and expanding cutbacks in basic social services.²⁶ The examples are endless and extend from the war on the poor, the reproductive rights of women, and poor minority youth to unions and public schools. There is more at work here than a resurgent war on what are now considered disposable populations and institutions. There is also a deep-seated religious and political authoritarianism that has

²² For two excellent sources on the politics of the state, see Peter Bratsis, *Everyday Life and the State* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007) and Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis, eds. *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

²³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Paul Virilio, “The Suicidal State.”

²⁵ Anne-Marie Cusac, *Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). Michelle Brown, *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society and Spectacle*, (NY: NY, New York U. Press, 2009); Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*, (Seven Stories Press, 2005).

²⁶ See Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

become one of the fundamental pillars of what I call a neoliberal culture of punishment. As the welfare state is hollowed out, a culture of compassion is replaced by a culture of violence, cruelty, waste, and disposability. Collective insurance policies and social protections have given way to the forces of economic deregulation, the transformation of the welfare state into punitive workfare programs, the privatization of public goods, and an appeal to individual culpability as a substitute for civic responsibility. At the same time, violence—or what Anne-Marie Cusac calls “American punishment”—travels from our prisons and schools to various aspects of our daily lives, “becoming omnipresent....[from] the shows we watch on television, the way many of us treat children [to] some influential religious practices.”²⁷ While the welfare state, even in its weakest dimension, has been under attack since the 1930s by right-wing politicians and intellectuals, what is new is the intensity of the attack and the utter indifference to widespread human suffering affecting marginalized populations ranging from low income families to poor minority youth.

Harvey has argued that neoliberalism is “a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” through the implementation of “an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”²⁸ Neoliberalism is more than a mode of economic rationality, it is also a pedagogical project designed to create particular subjects, desires, and values defined largely by market considerations. National destiny becomes linked to a market-driven logic in which freedom is stripped down to freedom from government regulation, freedom to consume, and freedom to say anything one wants, regardless of how racist or toxic the consequences might be. This neoliberal notion of freedom is abstracted from any sense of civic responsibility or social cost. In fact, “neoliberalism is grounded in the idea of the ‘free, possessive individual,’” with the state cast “as tyrannical and oppressive.”²⁹ The welfare state, in particular, becomes the arch enemy of freedom. As Stuart Hall points out in a devastating critique of neoliberalism, “The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free-market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth.”³⁰

²⁷ Anne-Marie Cusac, *Cruel and Unusual Punishment: The Culture of Punishment in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 3.

²⁸ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 19.

²⁹ Stuart Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” *Cultural Studies* 25:6 (November 2011), p. 706.

³⁰ Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution.”

Capital now controls most channels of communication and increasingly attacks vital public spheres such as public and higher education, determined to subject them to the dictates of consumer markets and for-profit control. What is new in this pedagogical register is the uncanny ability of consumer markets to shape almost every aspect of social life, and as Bauman points out, “the omnivorous capacity of consumer markets, their uncanny ability to capitalize on any and every human problem, anxiety, apprehension, pain or suffering - their ability to turn every protest and every impact of a 'countervailing force' to its advantage and profit.”³¹ This generation of young people are inundated with a neoliberal public pedagogy that encourages them to be egotistical, self-absorbed, spend beyond their means, and subordinate ethical considerations to the consumerist imperative for instant pleasure. Symbolic violence operates at full throttle in producing market-driven values and modes of agency that are as depoliticized as they are unburdened by the principles of conscience.

Paradoxically, neoliberalism severely proscribes any vestige of social and civic agency through the figure of the isolated automaton for whom choice is reduced to the practice of endless shopping, fleeing from any sense of civic obligation, and safeguarding a radically individualized existence. Neoliberal governance translates into a state that attempts to substitute individual security for social welfare, but in doing so offers only the protection of gated communities for the privileged and incarceration for those considered flawed consumers or threats to the mythic ideal of a White Christian nation. Neoliberalism refuses to recognize how private troubles are connected to broader systemic issues, legitimating instead an ode to self-reliance in which the experience of personal misfortune becomes merely the just desserts delivered by the righteous hand of the free market—not a pernicious outcome of the social order being high jacked by an anti-social ruling elite and forced to serve a narrow set of interests.

Under the regime of neoliberalism, no claims are recognized that call for compassion, justice, and social responsibility. No claims are recognized that demand youth have a future better than the present, and no claims are recognized in which young people assert the need to narrate themselves as part of a broader struggle for global justice and radical democracy. Parading as a species of democracy, neoliberal economics and ideology cancel out democracy “as the incommensurable sharing of existence that

³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *On Education*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), p. 29.

makes the political possible.”³² Symptoms of ethical, political, and economic impoverishment are all around us. And, as if that was not enough, at the current moment in history we are witnessing the merging of violence and governance along with a systemic disinvestment in and breakdown of institutions and public spheres that have provided the minimal conditions for democracy and the principles of communal responsibility. Young people are particularly vulnerable. As Jean-Marie Durand points out, “Youth is no longer considered the world's future, but as a threat to its present. [For] youth, there is no longer any political discourse except for a disciplinary one.”³³ Youth now represents the absent present in any discourse about justice, equality, hope, the future, and democracy itself and increasingly inhabit a state that mimics what Michel Foucault calls “an absolutely racist state, an absolutely murderous state and an absolutely suicidal state.”³⁴

As young people make diverse claims on the promise of a radical democracy in the streets, on campuses, and other occupied sites, articulating what a fair and just world might be, they are treated as criminal populations—rogue groups incapable of towing the line, “prone to irrational, intemperate and unpredictable” behavior.³⁵ Moreover, they are increasingly subject to orchestrated modes of control and containment, if not police violence. Such youth are now viewed as the enemy by the political and corporate establishment because they make visible the repressed images of the common good, the importance of democratic public spheres, public services, the social state, and a social shaped by democratic values rather than market values. Youthful protesters and others are reclaiming the repressed memories of the Good Society and a social state that once, as Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, “endorsed collective insurance against individual misfortune and its consequences.”³⁶ Bauman explains that such a state

lifts members of society to the status of citizens—that is, makes them stake-holders in addition to being stock-holders, beneficiaries but also actors responsible for the benefits’ creation and availability, individuals with acute interest in the common good understood as

³² Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, “Translators Note,” in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Truth of Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. ix.

³³ Jean-Marie Durand, “For Youth: A Disciplinary Discourse Only,” *TruthOut* (November 15, 2009), translated by Leslie Thatcher. Online at: <http://www.truthout.org/11190911>

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended’: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 260

³⁵ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 347.

³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, “Has the Future a Left?” *Soundings* 35 (Spring 2007), pp. 5-6

the shared institutions that can be trusted to assure solidity and reliability of the state-issued 'collective insurance policy.'³⁷

In an attempt to excavate the repressed memories of the welfare state, David Theo Goldberg spells out in detail the specific mechanisms and policies it produced in the name of the general welfare between the 1930s and 1970s in the United States. He writes:

From the 1930s through the 1970s, the liberal democratic state had offered a more or less robust set of institutional apparatuses concerned in principle at least to advance the welfare of its citizens. This was the period of advancing social security, welfare safety nets, various forms of national health system, the expansion of and investment in public education, including higher education, in some states to the exclusion of private and religiously sponsored educational institutions. It saw the emergence of state bureaucracies as major employers especially in later years of historically excluded groups. And all this, in turn, offered optimism among a growing proportion of the populace for access to middle-class amenities, including those previously racially excluded within the state and new immigrants from the global south.³⁸

Young people today are protesting against a strengthening global capitalist project that erases the benefits of the welfare state and possibility of a radical notion of democracy. They are protesting against a neoliberal project of accumulation, dispossession, deregulation, privatization, and commodification that leaves them out of any viable notion of the future. They are rejecting and resisting a form of economic Darwinism that has ushered in a permanent revolution marked by a massive project of depoliticization, on the one hand, and an aggressive, if not savage, practice of distributing upward wealth, income, and opportunity for the 1 percent on the other. Under neoliberalism, every moment, space, practice, and social relation is valued exclusively in terms of the possibility of financial investment and gain. Goods, services, and targeted human beings are ingested into neoliberal global waste machine, and dismissed and disposed of as excess. Flawed consumers now rise to the status of damaged and defective human beings. Resistance to such oppressive policies and practices does not come easy, and many young people are paying a price for such resistance. According

³⁷ Ibid., Zygmunt Bauman, "Has the Future a Left?" pp. 5-6.

³⁸ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, p. 331.

to OccupyArrests.com, “there have been at least 7719 arrests in over 112 different cities as of December 12, 2012.”³⁹

Occupy movement protests and state sponsored violence “have become a mirror”—and I would add a defining feature—“of the contemporary state.”⁴⁰ Abandoned by the existing political system, young people in Oakland, California, New York City, and numerous other cities have placed their bodies on the line, protesting peacefully while trying to produce a new language, politics, and “community that manifests the values of equality and mutual respect that they see missing in a world that is structured by neoliberal principles.”⁴¹ Well aware that the spaces, sites, and spheres for the representation of their voices, desires, and concerns have collapsed, they have occupied a number of spaces ranging from public parks to college campuses in an effort to create a public forum where they can narrate themselves and their visions of the future, while representing the misfortunes, suffering, and hopes of the unemployed, poor, incarcerated, and marginalized. This movement is not simply about reclaiming space, but also about producing new ideas, generating a new conversation, and introducing a new political language.

Rejecting the notion that democracy and markets are the same, young people are calling for the termination of corporate control over the commanding institutions of politics, culture, and economics, an end to the suppression of dissent, and a shutting down of the permanent warfare state. Richard Lichtman is right to insist that the Occupy movement should be praised for its embrace of communal democracy as well as an emerging set of shared concerns, principles, and values articulated “by a demand for equality, or, at the very least, for a significant lessening of the horrid extent of inequality; for a working democracy; for the elimination of the moneyed foundation of politics; for the abolition of political domination by a dehumanized plutocracy; for the replacement of ubiquitous commodification by the reciprocal recognition of humanity in the actions of its agents.”⁴² As Arundhati Roy points out, what connects the protests in the United States to

³⁹ See <http://stpeteforpeace.org/occupyarrests.sources.html>

⁴⁰ Durand, “For Youth: A Disciplinary Discourse Only.”

⁴¹ Kyle Bella, “Bodies in Alliance: Gender Theorist Judith Butler on the Occupy and SlutWalk Movements,” *TruthOut* (December 15, 2011). Online at: <http://www.truth-out.org/bodies-alliance-gender-theorist-judith-butler-occupy-and-slutwalk-movements/1323880210>

⁴² Richard Lichtman, “Not a Revolution?” *TruthOut* (December 14, 2011). Online at: <http://www.truth-out.org/not-revolution/1323801994>

resistance movements all over the globe is that young people “know that their being excluded from the obscene amassing of wealth of U.S. corporations is part of the same system of the exclusion and war that is being waged by these corporations in places like India, Africa, and the Middle East.”⁴³ Of course, Lichtman, Roy, and others believe that this is just the beginning of a movement and that much needs to be done, as Staughton Lynd argues, to build new strategies, a vast network of new institutions and public spheres, a community of trust, and political organization that invites poor people into its ranks.⁴⁴

All of these issues are important, but what must be addressed in the most immediate sense is the danger the emerging police state in the United States poses not just to the young protesters occupying a number of American cities, but also to democracy itself. This threat is particularly evident in the results of a merging of neoliberal modes of discipline and education with a war-like mentality in which it becomes nearly impossible to reclaim the language of obligation, compassion, community, social responsibility, and civic engagement. And unless the actions of young protesters, however diverse they may be, are understood alongside a robust notion of the social, civic courage, communal bonds, and the imperatives of a vital democracy, it will be difficult for the American public to challenge state violence and the framing of protest, dissent, and civic engagement as un-American or, worse, as a species of criminal behavior.

While there is considerable coverage given in the progressive media to the violence that has been waged against the Occupy movement protesters, these analyses rarely go far enough. I want to build on these critiques by arguing that it is important to situate the growing police violence within a broader set of categories that enables both a critical understanding of the underlying social, economic, and political forces at work in such assaults and allows us to reflect critically on the distinctiveness of the current historical period in which they are taking place. For example, it is difficult to address such state sponsored violence against young people and the Occupy movement without analyzing the devolution of the social state and the corresponding rise of the warfare and punishing state. The notion of historical conjuncture

⁴³ Arun Gupta, “Arundhati Roy: ‘The People Who Created the Crisis Will Not Be the Ones That Come Up With a Solution,’” *The Guardian/UK* (November 30, 2011). Online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/30/arundhati-roy-interview>

⁴⁴ Staughton Lynd, “What Is To Be Done Next?” *CounterPunch* (February 29, 2012). Online at: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/02/29/what-is-to-be-done-next>

is important here, because it both provides an opening into the diverse forces shaping a particular moment and allows for a productive balance of theory and strategy to inform future interventions. That is, it helps us to address theoretically how youth protests are largely related to and might resist a historically specific neoliberal project that promotes vast inequalities in income and wealth, creates the student loan debt bomb, eliminates much needed social programs, privileges profits and commodities over people, and eviscerates the social wage.

Within the United States, the often violent response to non-violent forms of youth protest must also be analyzed within the framework of a mammoth military-industrial state and its commitment to war and the militarization of the entire society. The merging of the military-industrial complex and unchecked finance capital points to the need for strategies that address what is specific about the current warfare state and the neoliberal project that legitimates it. That is, what are the diverse practices, interests, modes of power, social relations, public pedagogies, and economic configurations that shape the politics of the punishing state? Focusing on the specifics of the current historical conjuncture is invaluable politically in that such an approach provides a theoretical opening for making the practices of the warfare state and the neoliberal revolution visible in order “to give the resistance to its onward march, content, focus, and a cutting edge.”⁴⁵ This type of interrogative strategy also reclaims the necessity of critical thought, civic engagement, and democratic politics by invoking the pedagogical imperative that humans not only make history but can alter its course and future direction.

For many young people today, human agency is defined as a mode of self-reflection and critical social engagement rather than a surrender to a paralyzing and unchallengeable fate. Likewise, democratic expression has become fundamental to their existence. Youth are embracing democracy not merely as a mode of governance, but more importantly, as Bill Moyers points out, as a means of dignifying people “so they become fully free to claim their moral and political agency.”⁴⁶ Human agency has become a vital force to struggle over as part of an ongoing project in which the future remains an open horizon that cannot be dismissed through appeals to the end of history or end of ideology.⁴⁷ But to understand how politics refuses any

⁴⁵ Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” p. 706.

⁴⁶ Bill Moyers, “Discovering What Democracy Means,” TomPaine.Com (February 12, 007). Online: <http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2007/02/12/discovering—what—democracy—means.php>

⁴⁷ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1966); and the more recent Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

guarantees and resistance becomes possible; we must first understand the present. Following Stuart Hall, I want to argue that the current historical moment, or what he calls the “long march of the Neoliberal Revolution,”⁴⁸ has to be understood not only through the emergent power of finance capital and its institutions but also in terms of the growing forms of authoritarian violence that it deploys and reinforces. I want to address these antidemocratic pressures and their relationship to the rising protests of young people in the United States and abroad through the lens of two interrelated crises: the crisis of governing through violence and the crisis of what Alex Honneth has called “a failed sociality”⁴⁹—which currently conjoin as a driving force to dismantle any viable notion of public pedagogy and civic education. If we are not to fall prey to a third crisis—“the crisis of negation”⁵⁰—then it is imperative we recognize the hope symbolized and embodied by young people across America and their attempt to remake society in order to ensure a better, more democratic future for us all.

THE CRISIS OF GOVERNING THROUGH VIOLENCE

The United States is addicted to violence, and this dependency is fueled increasingly by its willingness to wage war at home and abroad.⁵¹ As Andrew Bacevich rightly argues, “war has become a normal condition [matched by] Washington’s seemingly irrevocable abandonment of any semblance of self-restraint regarding the use of violence as an instrument of statecraft.”⁵² But war in this instance is not merely the outgrowth of policies designed to protect the security and well-being of the United States. It is also, as C. Wright Mills pointed out, part of a “military metaphysics”⁵³—a complex of forces that includes corporations, defense industries, politicians, financial institutions, and universities. War provides jobs, profits, political payoffs, research funds, and forms of political and economic power that reach into every aspect of society. War is also one of the nation’s most honored virtues. Its militaristic

⁴⁸ Stuart Hall, “The March of the Neoliberals,” *The Guardian* (September 12, 2011). Online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/sep/12/march-of-the-neoliberals>

⁴⁹ Alex Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 188.

⁵⁰ John Van Houdt, “The Crisis of Negation: An Interview with Alain Badiou,” *Continent* 1:4 (2011): 234-238. Online at: <http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/viewArticle/65>

⁵¹ See, for instance, Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007).

⁵² Andrew Bacevich, “After Iraq, War Is US,” RSN (12/20/11). Online at: <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/424-national-security/9007-after-iraq-war-is-us>

⁵³ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 222.

values now bear down on almost every aspect of American life.⁵⁴ Similarly, as the governing through violence complex becomes normalized in the broader society, it continually works in a variety of ways to erode any distinction between war and peace.

Increasingly stoked by a moral and political hysteria, warlike values produce and endorse shared fears and organized violence as the primary registers of social relations. The conceptual merging of war and violence is evident in the ways in which the language of militarization is now used by politicians to address a range of policies as if they are operating on a battlefield or in a war zone. War becomes the adjective of choice as policymakers talk about waging war on drugs, poverty, and the underclass. There is more at work here than the prevalence of armed knowledge and a militarized discourse; there is also the emergence of a militarized society in which “the range of acceptable opinion inevitably shrinks.”⁵⁵ And this choice of vocabulary and slow narrowing of democratic vision further enable the use of violence as an instrument of domestic policy. How else to explain that the United States has become the punishing state par excellence, as indicated by the hideous fact that while it contains “5 percent of the Earth’s population, it is home to nearly a quarter of its prisoners”?⁵⁶ Senator Lindsay Graham made this clear-cut in his rhetorical justification of the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act by stating “that under this Act the U.S. homeland is considered a ‘battlefield.’”⁵⁷ The ominous implications behind this statement, especially for Occupy movement protesters, became obvious in light of the fact that the Act gives the U.S. government the right to detain “U.S. citizens indefinitely without charge or trial if deemed necessary by the president.... Detentions can follow mere membership, past or present, in ‘suspect organizations.’”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ See Gore Vidal, *Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of Amnesia* (New York: Nation Books, 2004); Gore Vidal, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (New York: Nation Books, 2002); Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books); Andrew J. Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America’s Path To Permanent War* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010); and Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).

⁵⁵ Tony Judt, “The New World Order,” *New York Review of Books* 11:2 (July 14, 2005), p.17.

⁵⁶ Cusac, *Cruel and Unusual Punishment*, p.2.

⁵⁷ Jim Garrison, “Obama’s Most Fateful Decision,” *Huffington Post* (December 12, 2011). Online at: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-garrison/obamas-most-fateful-decis—b—1143005.html>

⁵⁸ Garrison, “Obama’s Most Fateful Decision.”

Since 9/11, the war on terror and the campaign for homeland security have increasingly mimicked the tactics of the enemies they sought to crush, and as such have become a war on democracy. This is evident in the ongoing militarization of police departments throughout the United States. Baton-wielding cops are now being supplied with the latest military equipment imported straight from the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Military technologies once used exclusively on the battlefield are now being supplied to police departments across the nation: drones, machine-gun-equipped armored trucks, SWAT-type vehicles, “digital communications equipment, and Kevlar helmets, like those used by soldiers used in foreign wars.”⁵⁹ The domestic war against “terrorists” (code for young protesters) provides new opportunities for major defense contractors and corporations to become “more a part of our domestic lives.”⁶⁰ As Glenn Greenwald points out, the United States since 9/11

has aggressively paramilitarized the nation’s domestic police forces by lavishing them with countless military-style weapons and other war-like technologies, training them in war-zone military tactics, and generally imposing a war mentality on them. Arming domestic police forces with paramilitary weaponry will ensure their systematic use even in the absence of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil; they will simply find other, increasingly permissive uses for those weapons.⁶¹

These domestic paramilitary forces also undermine free speech and dissent through the sheer threat of violence, while wielding power that runs roughshod over civil liberties, human rights, and civic responsibilities.⁶² Given that “by age 23, almost a third of Americans are arrested for a crime,” it is not unreasonable to assume that in the new militarized state the views of young people as predators, threats to corporate governance, and disposable objects will intensify, as will the growth of a punishing state that acts out against young protesters in increasingly unrestrained and savage ways.⁶³

⁵⁹ Andrew Becker and G.W. Schulz, “Cops Ready for War,” RSN (December 21, 2011). Online at: <http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/316-20/9023-focus-cops-ready-for-war>

⁶⁰ Becker and Schulz, “Cops Ready for War.”

⁶¹ Glenn Greenwald, “The Roots of the UC-Davis Pepper-Spraying,” Salon (November 20, 2011). Online at: <http://www.salon.com/2011/11/20/the-roots-of-the-uc-davis-pepper-spraying/>

⁶² See, for instance, Steven Rosenfeld, “5 Freedom-Killing Tactics Police Will Use to Crack Down on Protests in 2012,” *AlterNet* (March 16, 2012). Online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/154577/5-freedom-killing-tactics-police-will-use-to-crack-down-on-protests-in-2012/>

⁶³ Erica Goode, “Many in U.S. Are Arrested by Age 23, Study Finds,” *New York Times* (December 19, 2011), p. A15.

Young people, particularly poor minorities of color, have already become the targets of what David Theo Goldberg calls “extraordinary power in the name of securitization... [viewed as] unruly populations...[who] are to be subjected to necropolitical discipline through the threat of imprisonment or death, physical or social.”⁶⁴

Shared fears and the media hysteria that promotes them produce more than a culture of suspects and unbridled intimidation. Fear on a broad public scale serves the interests of policymakers who support a growing militarization of the police along with the corporations that supply high-tech scanners, surveillance cameras, riot extinguishers, and toxic chemicals—all of which are increasingly used with impunity on anyone who engages in peaceful protests against the warfare and corporate state.⁶⁵ Too much of this violence is reminiscent of the violence used against civil rights demonstrators by the enforcers of Jim Crow in the fifties and sixties.⁶⁶ No longer restricted to a particular military ideology, the celebration and permeation of war-like values throughout the culture has hastened the militarization of the entire society. As Michael Geyer points out, militarization can be defined as “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.”⁶⁷ As the late Tony Judt put it, “The United States is becoming not just a militarized state but a military society: a country where armed power is the measure of national greatness, and war, or planning for war, is the exemplary (and only) common project.”⁶⁸ But the prevailing intensification in American society toward permanent war status

⁶⁴ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, p. 334.

⁶⁵ Lauren Kelley, “Occupy Updates: Extreme Police Violence in Berkeley, With Calls for a Strike; Harvard Protesters Shut Out of Harvard Yard,” *AlterNet* (November 14, 2011). Online at: <http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/728865/occupy—updates%3A—extreme—police—violence—in—berkeley,—with—calls—for—a—strike%3B—harvard—protesters—shut—out—of—harvard—yard/>; Conor Friedersdorf, “UC Berkeley Riot Police Use Batons to Clear Students from Sproul Plaza,” *The Atlantic* (November 10, 2011). Online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/print/2011/11/uc-berkeley-riot-police-use-batons-to-clear-students-from-sproul-plaza/248228/>; Al Baker, “When the Police Go Military,” *New York Times* (December 3, 2011), p. SR6; and Rania Khalek, “Pepper-Spraying Protesters Is Just the Beginning: Here Are More Hypermilitarized Weapons Your Local Police Force Could Employ,” *AlterNet* (November 22, 2011). Online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/153147/pepper-spraying—protesters—is—just—the—beginning%3A—here—are—more—hypermilitarized—weapons—your—local—police—force—could—employ>

⁶⁶ Phil Rockstroh, “The Police State Makes Its Move: Retaining One’s Humanity in the Face of Tyranny,” *CommonDreams* (November 15, 2011). Online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/11/15>

⁶⁷ Michael Geyer, “The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945,” in *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. John R. Gillis (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 79.

⁶⁸ Judt, “The New World Order,” pp. 14–18.

does more than embrace a set of unifying symbols that promote a survival-of-the-fittest ethic, conformity over dissent, the strong over the weak, and fear over responsibility. Such a move also gives rise to a “failed sociality” in which violence becomes the most important tool of power and the mediating force in shaping social relationships.

THE CRISIS OF SOCIALITY

A state that embraces a policy of permanent war needs willing subjects to abide by its values, ideology, and narratives of fear and violence. Such legitimation is largely provided through people’s immersion in a market-driven culture that appears increasingly addicted to consumerism, militarism, and the spectacles of violence endlessly circulated through popular culture.⁶⁹ Examples of the violent fare on offer extend from the realm of high fashion and Hollywood movies to extreme sports, video games, and music concerts sponsored by the Pentagon.⁷⁰ The market-driven celebration of a militaristic mindset demands a culture of conformity, quiet intellectuals, and a largely passive republic of consumers. It also needs subjects who find intense pleasure in spectacles of violence.⁷¹

In a society saturated with hyper-violence and spectacular representations of cruelty, it becomes more difficult for the American public to respond politically and ethically to the violence as it is actually happening on the ground. In this instance, previously unfamiliar violence such as extreme images of torture and death become banally familiar, while familiar violence that occurs daily is barely recognized, relegated to the realm of the unnoticed and unnoticeable. How else to explain the public indifference to the violence inflicted on non-violent youth protesters who are raising their voices against a state in which they have been excluded from any claim on hope, prosperity and democracy? As an increasing volume of brutality is pumped into the culture, yesterday’s spine-chilling and nerve-wrenching displays of violence lose their shock value. As the demand for more intense images of violence accumulates, the moral indifference and desensitization to violence grows, while matters of savage cruelty and suffering are offered up as fodder for sports, entertainment, news media, and other pleasure-seeking outlets.

⁶⁹ Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter, *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the War on Terror* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010).

⁷⁰ Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006).

⁷¹ Kostas Gouliamos and Christos Kassimeris, Eds. *The Marketing of War in the Age of Neo-Militarism* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

As American culture becomes increasingly marked by exaggerated aggression and a virulent notion of hard masculinity, state violence—particularly the use of torture, abductions, and targeted assassinations—wins public support and requires little or no justification, as U.S. exceptionalism becomes accepted by many Americans as a matter of common sense.⁷² The social impacts of a “political culture of hyper punitiveness”⁷³ can be seen in how structures of discipline and punishment have infiltrated the social order like a highly charged electric current. For example, the growing taste for violence can be seen in the criminalization of behaviors such as homelessness that once elicited compassion and social protection. We throw the homeless in jail instead of building houses, just as we increasingly send poor, semi-literate students to jail instead of providing them with a decent education. Similarly, instead of creating jobs for the unemployed, we allow banks to foreclose on their mortgages, and in some cases put jobless people in debtor’s prisons. The prison in the twenty-first century becomes a way of making the effects of ruthless power invisible by making the victims of such power disappear. As Angela Davis points out, “According to this logic the prison becomes a way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent.”⁷⁴ As the notion of the social is emptied out, criminality is now defined as an essential part of a person’s identity. As the rhetoric of punishment gains ground in American society, social problems are reduced to character flaws, insufficient morality, or a eugenicist notion of being “born evil.”⁷⁵

Another symptomatic example of the way in which violence has saturated everyday life and produced a “failed sociality” can be seen in the growing acceptance by the American public of modeling public schools after prisons and criminalizing the behavior of young people in public schools. Incidents that were traditionally handled by teachers, guidance counselors, and school

⁷² David Cole, “An Executive Power to Kill,” *New York Review of Books* (March 6, 2012). Online at: <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/mar/06/targeted-killings-holder-speech/>

⁷³ Steve Herbert and Elizabeth Brown, “Conceptions of Space and Crime in the Punitive Neoliberal City,” *Antipode* (2006), p. 757.

⁷⁴ Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), p. 41.

⁷⁵ One classic example of this neoliberal screed can be found most recently in an unapologetic defense of social Darwinism by Charles Murray. See Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012). For a critique of this position, see David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford, 2006); and Jonathan Simon, *Governing through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Create a Culture of Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

administrators are now dealt with by the police and the criminal justice system. The consequences have been disastrous for young people. Not only do schools increasingly resemble the culture of prisons, but young children are being arrested and subjected to court appearances for behaviors that can only be called trivial. How else to explain the case of the 5-year-old student in Florida who was put in handcuffs and taken to the local jail because she had a temper tantrum, or the case of Alexa Gonzales in New York who was arrested for doodling on her desk? Or 12-year-old Sarah Bustamatenes who was pulled from a Texas classroom, charged with a criminal misdemeanour, and hauled into court because she sprayed perfume on herself?⁷⁶ In the most extreme cases, children have been beaten, tasered, and killed by the police.

These examples may still be unusual enough to shock, though they are becoming more commonplace. What must be recognized is that schools in general have become combat zones where it is routine for every student to be subjected to metal detectors, surveillance cameras, uniformed security guards, weapons searches, and in some cases SWAT team raids and police dogs sniffing for drugs.⁷⁷ Under such circumstances, the purpose of schooling becomes to contain and punish young people, especially those marginalized by race and class, rather than educate them. "Arrests and police interactions... disproportionately affect low-income schools with large African-American and Latino populations."⁷⁸ For the many disadvantaged students being funnelled into the "school-to-prison pipeline," schools ensure their futures look grim indeed, as their educational experiences acclimatize them to forms of carceral treatment.⁷⁹ There is more at work here than a flight from responsibility on the part of educators, parents, and politicians who support and maintain policies that fuel this expanding edifice of law enforcement against the young and disenfranchised. Underlying the repeated decisions to turn away from helping young people is the growing sentiment that youth,

⁷⁶ Chris McGreal, "The US Schools with Their Own Police," *The Guardian* (January 9, 2012). Online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/09/texas-police-schools>³² A footnote in the text provides the following translation: "Chibani is Arabic for old man, here referring to the old men who play backgammon in the cafes of Belleville, a largely immigrant neighborhood in Paris."

⁷⁷ Criminal Injustice Kos, "Criminal Injustice Kos: Interrupting the School to Prison Pipeline," *DailyKos* (March 30, 2011). Online at: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/03/30/960807/-Criminal-Injustice-Kos-Interrupting-the-School-to-Prison-Pipeline>

⁷⁸ Smartypants, "A Failure of Imagination," *Smartypants Blog Spot* (March 3, 2010). Online at: <http://immasmartypants.blogspot.com/2010/03/failure-of-imagination.html>

⁷⁹ See Mark P. Fancher, *Reclaiming Michigan's Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (Michigan: ACLU, 2011). Online at: <http://www.nijn.org/uploads/digital—library/resource—1287.pdf>; and Advancement Project, *Test, Punish, and Push Out: How 'Zero Tolerance' and High-Stakes Testing Funnel Youth in the School-To-Prison Pipeline* (Washington, D.C.: Advancement Project, March 2010). Online at: <http://www.advancementproject.org/sites/default/files/publications/rev—fin.pdf>

particularly minorities of color and class, constitute a threat to adults and the only effective way to deal with them is to subject them to mind-crushing punishment. Students being miseducated, criminalized, and arrested through a form of penal pedagogy in prison-type schools provides a grave reminder of the degree to which the ethos of containment and punishment now creeps into spheres of everyday life that were largely immune in the past from this type of state and institutional violence.

The era of failed sociality that Americans now inhabit reminds us that we live in a time that breaks young people, devalues justice, and saturates the minute details of everyday life with the constant threat, if not reality, of violence. The mediaeval turn to embracing forms of punishment that inflict pain on the psyches and the bodies of young people is part of a larger immersion of society in public spectacles of violence. The Deluzian control society⁸⁰ is now the ultimate form of entertainment in America, as the pain of others, especially those considered disposable and powerless, is no longer an object of compassion, but one of ridicule and amusement. High octane violence and human suffering are now considered consumer entertainment products designed to raise the collective pleasure quotient. Brute force and savage killing replayed over and over in the culture now function as part of an anti-immune system that turns the economy of genuine pleasure into a mode of sadism that saps democracy of any political substance and moral vitality, even as the body politic appears engaged in a process of cannibalizing its own young. It is perhaps not farfetched to imagine a reality TV show in which millions tune in to watch young kids being handcuffed, arrested, tried in the courts, and sent to juvenile detention centers. No society can make a claim to being a democracy as long as it defines itself through shared hatred and fears, rather than shared responsibilities.

In the United States, society has been reconfigured to eliminate many young people's access to the minimal conditions required for living a full, dignified, and productive life as well as the conditions necessary for sustaining and nurturing democratic structures and ideologies. The cruelty and violence infecting the culture is both a symptom and a cause of our collective failure to mobilize resistance, while the widespread hardship that young people and other marginalized populations face today "has not found resonance in the public space of articulation."⁸¹ With the collapse of a market economy into a market society, democracy no longer makes a claim on the importance of the

⁸⁰ Giles Deleuze, "Societies of Control," *October*, 59, 1992, pp. 3-7.

⁸¹ Alex Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 188.

common good. As a mode of diseased sociality, the current version of market fundamentalism has turned the principle of freedom against itself, deforming a collective vision of democracy and social justice that once made equality a viable economic idea and political goal in the pursuit of one's own freedom and civil liberties. As Zygmunt Bauman insists, one of the consequences of this market-driven sovereignty is "the progressive decomposition and crumbling of social bonds and communal cohesion."⁸² Neoliberalism creates a language of social magic in which the social either vaporizes into thin air or is utterly pathologized. Shared realities and effects of poverty, racism, inequality, and financial corruption disappear, but not the ideological and institutional mechanisms that make such scourges possible.⁸³ And when the social is invoked favorably, the invocation is only ever used to recognize the claims and values of corporations, the ultra-rich, bankers, hedge fund managers and other privileged groups comprising the 1 percent. Self-reliance and the image of the self-made man cancel out any viable notion of social relations, the common good, public values, and collective struggle.

OCCUPYING THE POLITICS OF IMAGINATION AND REFUSING LIBERAL REFORMS

The Occupy movements have recognized that what erodes under such conditions is not only an acknowledgment of the historical contexts, social and economic formations, relations of power, and systemic forms of discrimination that have produced massive inequalities in wealth, income, and opportunity, but any claim to the promise of a substantive democracy. Increasingly, as both the public pedagogy and economic dictates of neoliberalism are contested by the Occupiers, the state responds with violence. But the challenges to militarism, inequality, and political corruption with which young people have confronted American society are being met with a violence that encompasses more than isolated incidents of police brutality. It is a violence emanating from an ongoing wholesale transformation of the United States into a warfare state, from a state that once embraced the social contract—at least minimally- to one that no longer has even a language for community—a state in which the bonds of fear and commodification have replaced the bonds of civic responsibility and democratic commitment. As a

⁸² Bauman, "Has the Future a Left?" p. 2.

⁸³ Barbara Ehrenreich, "How We Cured 'The Culture of Poverty,' Not Poverty Itself," *Truthout* (March 15, 2012). Online at: <http://www.truth-out.org/how-we-cured-culture-poverty-not-poverty-itself/1331821823>

result, violence on the part of the state and corporations is not just aimed at youthful protesters. Through a range of visible and invisible mechanisms, an ever expanding multitude of individuals and populations has been caught in web of cruelty, dispossession, exclusion, and exploitation.

The predominance of violence in all aspects of social life suggests that young people and others marginalized by class, race, and ethnicity have been abandoned as American society's claim on democracy gives way to the forces of militarism, market fundamentalism, and state terrorism. One challenge the Occupy Movements must face is not only how a metaphysics of war and violence has taken hold on American society, and the savage social costs it has entailed, but also what strategies can be employed to make the American public aware of the degree to which the punishing state now shapes social policies and wages war on students and others who contest its power. The current forms of social, political, and economic violence employed by the state undercuts any possibility of negotiation and points to the need for pedagogical strategies that inform the American public while challenging the pedagogical practices used by the financial elite to enact violence with impunity. This suggests making alliances with progressive lawyers to wage law suits against the police, exposing state violence through the new media, using screen culture to connect the violence used against students to the violence used abroad, and engaging in forms of civil disobedience in which nonviolence is used to draw out and highlight the violence of the state. The Occupy Movements need more than indignation to inspire action, they need to develop infrastructures, institutions, and resources that embody both passion and the building of institutions that offer a challenge and glimpse of what a new society would look like. The spreading imprint of violence throughout society suggests the need for a politics that not only critiques the established order but imagines a new one, one informed by a radical vision in which the future does not imitate the present. Critique must emerge alongside a sense of realistic hope, and individual struggles must merge into larger social movements. Clearly the rudiments of such a vision, one that moves beyond what Alain Badiou has called the "crisis of negation,"⁸⁴ which is a crisis of imagination, historical possibility, and an aversion to new ideas, can be found in the global protests of the Occupy Movement in North America and other youth resistance movements around the globe. What is evident in this world wide movement of youth protests is a bold attempt to imagine the possibility of another world, a refusal of

⁸⁴ John Van Houdt, "The Crisis of Negation: An Interview with Alain Badiou," *Continent*, 1.4 (2011). Online:<http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/viewArticle>

the current moment of historical one dimensionality, a refusal to settle for reforms that are purely incremental.

The deteriorating state of youth may be the most serious challenge facing educators, social workers, youth workers, and others in the twenty-first century. It is a struggle that necessitates a new understanding of politics, one which unsettles normal conventions and suggests thinking beyond the given, imagining the unimaginable, and combining the lofty ideals of democracy with a willingness to fight for their realization. But this is not a fight that can be won through individual struggles or fragmented political movements. It demands new modes of solidarity, new political organizations, and a powerful social movement capable of uniting diverse political interests and groups. It is a struggle that is as educational as it is political. Moreover, it is a struggle that is as necessary as it is urgent, and it is a struggle that cannot be ignored.

The Occupy Wall Street movement suggests that the young people are a constant source of creativity, possibility, and political struggle. Moreover, it points to a crucial political project in which new questions are being raised by many young people about an emerging form of authoritarianism in the United States that threatens the collective survival of vast numbers of people, not exclusively through overt physical injury or worse, but through an aggressive assault on social provisions that millions of Americans depend on. What is partly evident in the Occupy Wall Street movement is not only a cry of collective indignation over economic and social injustice that pose threats to humankind, but a critical expression of how young people and others can use new technologies, social formations, and forms of civil disobedience necessary for addressing the interrelated modes of domination that have been poisoning democratic politics since the 1970s.

The Occupy Wall Street protestors are inventing a new political language and mode of politics in which the claims to justice, morality, and social responsibility prevail. This spirit of action is not about providing recipes or tossing around facile slogans—it is about using new pedagogical tools, practices, and social relations to educate the rest of the American public about the dangers of casino capitalism as a new form of authoritarianism.

The protestors are making a claim for a sense of collective agency in which their voices must be heard as part of a concerted effort to shape the future that they will inherit. This effort is part of a new form of politics that offers resistance to the frontal assault being waged by casino capitalism against

social protections, economic justice, immigrants, unions, worker rights, public servants, democratic public spheres, the notion of the common good, and human dignity itself. And it does so by delineating the contours, values, sensibilities, and hidden politics of the mode of authoritarianism that now shapes the commanding institutions of power and everyday relations of the 99 percent, who are increasingly viewed as excess, disposable, and unworthy of living a life of dignity, shared responsibility, and hope. This task of delineation is not easy: the conditions of domination are layered, complex, and deeply flexible. Yet while the forms of oppression are diverse, there is a promising tendency within the Occupy Wall Street movement to refocus these diverse struggles as part of a larger movement for social transformation. And there is more. Such protests also embody the desire for new forms of collective struggle and modes of solidarity built around social and shared, rather than individualized and competitive, values.

America has become a suicidal state, prompting a new urgency for a collective politics and social movements capable of both negating the established order and imagining a new one. Until we address what Stanley Aronowitz has brilliantly analysed as “The Winter of Our Discontent” the suicidal state will continue to engage in autoimmune practices that attack the very values, institutions, social relations, and hopes that keep the ideal of democracy alive.⁸⁵ At the very least, the American public owes it to its children and future generations, if not the future of democracy itself, to begin to dismantle this machinery of violence and reclaim the spirit of a future that works for life rather than the death worlds of the current authoritarianism, dressed up in the spectacles of consumerism and celebrity culture. It is time for the 99 percent to connect the dots, educate themselves, and develop social movements that can rewrite the language of democracy and put into place the institutions and formative cultures that make it possible. Stanley Aronowitz is right in arguing that “The system survives on the eclipse of the radical imagination, the absence of a viable political opposition with roots in the general population, and the conformity of its intellectuals who, to a large extent, are subjugated by their secure berths in the academy [and while] we can to take some solace in 2011, the year of the protester...it would be premature to predict that decades of retreat, defeat and silence can be reversed overnight without a commitment to what may be termed a ‘a long march’ though the institutions, the workplaces and the streets of the capitalist metropolises.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Stanley Aronowitz, “The Winter of Our Discontent,” *Situations*, IV, no.2, (Spring 2012). Pp. 37-76.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, Aronowitz, “The Winter of Our Discontent,” p. 68.

The current protests make clear that this is not—indeed, *cannot* be—only a short-term project for reform, but a political movement that needs to intensify, accompanied by the reclaiming of public spaces, the progressive use of digital technologies, the development of public spheres, new modes of education, and the safeguarding of places where democratic expression, new identities, and collective hope can be nurtured and mobilized. How such a claim unfolds remains to be seen.

Such a project suggests making evident not only how casino capitalism intensifies the pathologies of racism, student debt, war, inequality, sexism, xenophobia, poverty, unemployment, and violence, but also how to take up the challenge of developing a politics and pedagogy that can actualize a democratic notion of the social—that is, further understand and collectively organize for a politics whose hope lies with defending the shared values, spaces, and public spheres that enable an emergent radical democracy. A formative culture must be put in place pedagogically and institutionally in a variety of spheres extending from churches and public and higher education to all those cultural apparatuses engaged in the production and circulation of knowledge, desire, identities, and values. Clearly, such efforts need to address the language of democratic revolution and a politics of the common good rather than the seductive incremental adjustments of liberal reform, or, for that matter an exclusive focus on single issue politics.

There is more at work here in opening a new conversation than developing a critical understanding of the ongoing mutations of capital, how it works, and its anti-democratic pressures and effects. To the Occupy Movement's credit it has offered a discourse around class warfare, inequality, and the injustices waged by the 99 percent that offers a narrative for real unity, as Richard Wolff has argued.⁸⁷ It has produced a new conversation that calls not only for a living wage, jobs programs, especially for the young, the democratization of power, economic equality, and a massive shift in funds away from the machinery of war and Wall Street but also a social movement that makes hope a real possibility by imagining what a radical democratic society would look like. And while its struggles and modes of opposition have become more localized in recent times, it faces the daunting task of developing into a broad popular uprising intent on transforming government policy and reconfiguring the lines of political and economic power, while exposing state-sanctioned law

⁸⁷ Richard Wolff in Conversation with David Barsamian, *Occupy the Economy: Challenging Capitalism* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2012).

enforcement's resort to more violence. Unlike the resistance that marked the sixties, with its emphasis on single issue movements, there is a dire need for a new conversation about society at large, especially regarding issues such as inequalities in wealth and power, environmental safeguards, worker's rights, and social protections. All of these issues point to the need for coordinated actions and alliances that produce larger coalitions and broad-based social movements. Moreover, in the face of increasing state violence against the Occupy movement, it is time to consider new strategies such as direct action and Gayatri Spivak's call for resurrecting the general strike,⁸⁸ which can be coordinated across the country with various groups as part of a broader agenda to change society in a number of critical areas extending from the economy and environment to education, labor rights, and health care.

The Occupy Movement needs a pedagogy capable of moving people; it needs a language that connects the struggle over individual and collective agency to "the visible lines of possibility."⁸⁹ For the imagination to be radical, it must be rethought in every different historical and social formation. As Gramsci pointed out, we are in a period of interregnum—a time when the past is losing its grip and the new is waiting to assert itself. While such a period offers no political guarantees, it does provide or at least gesture towards the conditions to reimagine "what is to be done," how it might be done, and who is going to do it.⁹⁰ There is no room for failure here because failure would cast the United States back into the clutches of authoritarianism—that while different from previous historical periods—shares nonetheless the imperative to proliferate violent social formations and a death-dealing blow to the promise of a democracy to come.

⁸⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "General Strike," *Occupied Media*, (February 12, 2012) <http://occupiedmedia.us/2012/02/general-strike/>

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Grossberg, *Caught In the Crossfire*, p. 309.

⁹⁰ Instructive here is Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).