

Paths From Erich Fromm: Thinking Authority Pedagogically

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ABSTRACT: Critical psychologist, Erich Fromm, addresses the notion of authority in a way that reveals it as an ethical issue, one that teachers and other political workers must confront everyday. When combined with his work on negative freedom, Fromm provides an important contribution to the way we might think authority pedagogically, using power productively and non-authoritatively in the service of democratic ideals. Drawing from Fromm's work, this article confronts the disturbing relationship between individualism on one hand, and the ability for individuals to think collectively and transform social structures on the other. In this context, atomization becomes a dimension of both fascism and capitalism, one that positions freedom as the antithesis of political action.

RÉSUMÉ: Le psychologue critique, Erich Fromm, aborde la notion d'autorité sous un aspect éthique; celui que les professeurs et autres travailleurs politiques doivent confronter chaque jour. Fusionné à son étude sur la liberté négative, Fromm apporte une contribution importante sur l'idée que nous pouvons nous faire de l'autorité pédagogique en usant d'un pouvoir efficace et non autoritaire pour des idéaux démocratiques. Tiré de son travail, ce papier met en opposition les relations dérangeantes entre individualisme d'un côté, et collectivisme de l'autre. Ce collectivisme où les individus ont la faculté de penser en groupe et de transformer les structures sociales. Dans ce cas présent, la fragmentation prend la dimension du fascisme et du capitalisme en même temps; ce qui positionne la liberté comme une antithèse à l'action politique.

But although foreign and internal threats of Fascism must be taken seriously, there is no greater mistake and no graver danger than not to see that in our own society we are faced with the same phenomenon that is fertile soil for the rise of Fascism anywhere: the insignificance and powerlessness of the individual.

This statement challenges the conventional belief that by freeing the individual from all external restraints modern democracy has achieved true individualism. We are proud that we are not subject to any external authority, that we are free to express our thoughts and feelings, and we take it for granted that this freedom almost automatically guarantees our individuality. The right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own; freedom from external authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to establish our own individuality. (Fromm, 1941, pp. 240-241)

Introduction

Erich Fromm's work is relevant in our contemporary context because it draws attention to the relationship between the political and psychological, suggesting a troubling but important link between the neoliberal construct of individualism on one hand and between our ability to question authority and our potential to transform our consciousness on the other. In this context, there is a need to understand the fascist implications of atomization as it manifests itself in the disconnect between social autonomy and individualistic ideologies. In the face of this disconnect, I will attempt to develop a theory of pedagogical authority that situates it as a force for creating a trans-cultural disruption of consciousness that shifts the cognitive, affective, and ideological relationships we have to each other, to nature, and to social structures in the direction of *freedom towards*. Fromm's critical psychology brings explicit attention to the importance of confronting authoritative structures politically and *thinking authority pedagogically* as necessary steps in authorizing a new consciousness, one that locates individuality within social groups and understands dissent as a principle of freedom.

In what follows, I will argue for a productive notion of pedagogical authority that crosses the theoretical borders of modernism, feminism, and postmodernism (see Giroux, 1997). Out of the postmodern is a concern with difference and the histories, languages, knowledges, memories, and experiences of those that are all too often excluded from political decision making. Out of feminism comes a commitment to transform patriarchal and authoritarian practices of power. Out of the

modern is a radical concern with human solidarity, equity, and social justice. It is radical because it demands not only a critique of power in understanding human relations, but also its redistribution. Together these ideas suggest a critical postmodern feminist paradigm in which to link the personal to the global, identifying a basic universal ethic against which human suffering – regardless of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation – can be confronted and transformed. In the context of Fromm's work, the critical postmodern feminist paradigm is appropriate because it calls attention to the dynamic convergence of identity, experience, and the politics of representation with ideological systems, structures, and cultural formations.

Finally, I will discuss some of the critical paths – political and pedagogical – that lead from Fromm's work on authority and power. Reflecting upon the relationship between individual thinking and hegemony, Fromm's work provides an important pedagogical challenge to educators and other political workers. His thoughts provoke a consideration of the hegemony of individualism in the context of democratic life. As the epigraph that opens this paper suggests, shadows of fascism do not necessarily reflect the lock step of jack-booted soldiers. Rather, shadows of fascism sometimes stretch out from the feet of an atomized and free constituency.

Background on Erich Fromm

Rethinking authority in pedagogical terms necessitates a critical analysis of both the psychological and ideological. The work of critical psychologist and theorist, Erich Fromm, provides an important dynamic to the notion of authority because, like other critical theorists from the Frankfurt School, he wanted to reconcile Marx and Freud. Although inarguably a humanist, Fromm's work anticipates some of the complexities and political impulses of postmodern and feminist discourses, such as his work on matriarchy and history's effect on the psyche. By wanting to reconcile Freud and Marx, Fromm's work naturally crossed and merged the theoretical borders of the psychological, societal, and political. Fromm believed that "psychoanalysis could provide the missing link between ideological superstructure and socioeconomic base. In short it could flesh out materialism's notion of man's essential nature" (Jay, 1973, p. 92).

According to Martin Jay (1973), Fromm "understood man's nature as something created through relatedness to the world and interaction to others" (p. 89). In this way, Fromm affirmed the idea of a human

nature, although it was not a fixed notion. Rather it was an "idea of man's potential nature" (p. 89). One major advancement Fromm made in integrating Marx and Freud was using "psychoanalytic mechanisms as the mediating concepts between the individual and society – for example, in talking about hostility to authority in terms of Oedipal resentment of the father" (p. 91).

This led to his developing a social psychology; that is, a way of understanding social and psychological processes as deeply interrelated. As Jay explains, "the task of an analytical social psychology was to understand unconsciously motivated behavior in terms of the effect of the socio-economic substructure on basic psychic drives" (1973, p. 92). Fromm argued that societies had unique libidinal structures; that is, each society contained a combination of "human drives and social factors" (p. 93). How this libidinal structure was affected by changing socio-economic conditions and the disjunction that this change could cause should be, Fromm argued, the subject of social psychology.

Importantly some of Fromm's strongest critics were his colleagues in the Frankfurt School, namely Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. Specifically, they criticized Fromm's revisionist social psychology by arguing that it mistakenly tried to "psychologize culture and society" thereby ignoring Freud's notion that "psychology was necessarily the study of the individual" (Jay, 1973, p. 103). For Adorno, this was a serious mistake because it jeopardized the libido, which under Freudian influence, "implied a stratum of human existence stubbornly out of reach of total social control" (p. 103). In his effort to critique Freud's patriarchal and libido theories, Fromm and other revisionists, it was argued, had embraced a conformity that "smoothed over social contradictions" (p. 105). At a time when the brutalities of the Holocaust informed all of the School's work, Fromm's optimism was considered by some to be as much dangerous as it was naive. Nevertheless, Fromm's work is important because it stubbornly reclaims a psychological perspective that resists positivistic impulses just as it struggles to understand the relationship between the individual and larger social and political structures.

Notes on the Crisis of Authority in Critical Educational Discourse

I will take up the issue of authority in the context of the late 1980s in which postmodern theory and postcolonial theory were appropriated in

feminist educational theory, critiquing authority – especially as it was sometimes discussed in the literature of critical pedagogy – for its authoritarian implications (see Weiler, 1992). Many educational theorists who were excluded by critical pedagogy's neo-Marxist framework of the 1970s and early 1980s found an important ally in these theories of difference, identity, discursivity, and power. These theories offered a new language to critique Marxist universal declarations and ideas overburdened by a language of emancipation and utopian promises. The "post" theories brought to the fore the exclusions of modernity, the problems of progress, the rational irrationalities of modernism, the scientism of Marxism, and the hegemony of patriarchy. It was a period of time in the (de)construction of knowledge in which the "posts" and feminism were extremely valuable in bringing attention to the normalizing discourses embedded within modernity's master narratives. In the context of education specifically, Debra Britzman (1992) writes that as a consequence of these new theoretical discourses, educational theorists began to understand that:

Pedagogy is not just about encountering critical knowledge but also about constructing contextually dependent relations that recognize the power of lived experiences and of ideology. Methods of specifying one's pedagogy, identifying one's interests and investments, and resisting totalizing claims of transcendence are the contributions of this new scholarship. Equally important is the admission of the limits of the teacher and the contradictory desires she or he holds (p. 153).

More generally, Ihab Hassan cites postmodern theory as part of a "culture of 'unmaking' whose key principles include: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decentrement, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimation" (as cited in Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 256). Both Britzman's and Hassan's characterization of postmodern feminist theory draws attention to its penchant for the negative; that is, it often occupies a certain negative function, producing critiques that unravel what is as well as what could be. Ironically, the "post" prefix is one of the only positive or productive moves in an otherwise negative theory. This is not a critique of postmodern work as pessimistic, like Richard Rorty (1998) famously unleashes against postmodernists, but rather is an observation about the negative functions of a theoretical paradigm that exists primarily in the realm where the prefixes "de," "un," and "dis" draw the map of inquiry, and as such diminish the link between critique and possibility.

Nevertheless, the postmodern feminist challenge is important because it begs us to ask, What might it mean for educators to *think authority pedagogically* in the face of the inevitable instability and partiality of experience and knowledge? As cultural theorist Susan Bordo (1997) suggests in relation to what we can and cannot know, it is true that

We *cannot* know with certainty. But this merely means that we are fallible, our assessments provisional, our actions subject to revision. It should not be taken as a cause for fatalism or passivity To act responsibly and with hope, it's not necessary that we know the final outcome of our actions. (p. 191)

In other words, how might we construct a pedagogical project which encourages us to act with passion and commitment in the face of partial understandings, while, at the same time, forces us to forge alliances and combat social atomization as part of a larger commitment to democratic concerns, such as liberty, equality, and social justice?

Erich Fromm and the Productivity of Ethical Authority

The crisis of pedagogical authority is essentially an ethical crisis, because it positions teachers outside the scope of "encouraging human [and political] agency" (Aronowitz, 1998, p.10). Moreover, it discourages teachers from recognizing the interventionist nature of pedagogical work. This places both students and teachers in the unfortunate position of struggling to achieve freedom *from* authority. Fromm (1995) called this type of freedom "negative freedom" because it imprisons individuals within a social matrix of isolation, fear, and anxiety. As such, negative freedom undermines political agency because it attacks individual spontaneity, the pinnacle, Fromm believed, of positive freedom (p. 220). Negative freedom creates the conditions for a fear of authority by positioning authority as the opposite of freedom, while, at the same time, offering itself as the only hope for escape.

But instead of escaping into a world in which individual creativity, political agency, and social responsibility guide the creation of democratic formations, people escaping from negative freedom find themselves dependent on a new type of bondage. "Thus freedom – as freedom from – leads into new bondage" (Fromm, 1995, p. 221). The repercussions of this cycle – negative freedom, escape into new structures of domination, dependency due to isolation and the denial of the spontaneous self, then a renewed escape from negative freedom into new bondage – causes a crisis in the educational sphere by delimiting

political agency to those actions which denounce political power in the name of freedom, negative freedom.

Unfortunately, students are seriously affected by this crisis of authority in three specific ways. First, they are made to succumb to the power of the university-corporate complex regarding what and how they are to learn. Second, those who are marginalized by dominant social, cultural, and political systems are rarely taught, and rarely get to see authority and power used in any way other than as an instrument of oppression and domination. This is no small matter. Teachers who retreat from authority help to perpetuate systems of oppression by teaching their students, by example, that there is no productive or oppositional way to employ authority without becoming authoritarian. Third, a crisis of authority often motivates a pedagogy that is first and foremost about "instill[ing] humanistic values in a nonrepressive way" (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 4). Safety and security become the dominant factors in creating a "liberatory" classroom. As Fromm's work suggests, this only helps perpetuate a condition of "negative freedom;" that is, it works to establish a strategy of "first, do no harm" (p. 3).

By presenting politics as a *hindrance* to freedom, the conditions for democratic self-institution are threatened. As Hannah Arendt (1968) argues, "we are inclined to believe that freedom begins where politics ends ... [even though] ... the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom and that this freedom is primarily experienced in action" (pp. 149, 151). Freedom outside an apparatus of authority moves us "outside the sphere of human action, intervention, or struggle" (p. 96). Moreover, freedom understood outside the authority of political action and social engagement devolves into unfreedom; that is, into a system of governance in which people are free to suffer economic injustice and cultural oppression without institutional interventions on one hand, and minus political agency on the other. For example, people in the United States enjoy the freedom to choose a private health care plan, but without personal resources or social intervention that freedom devolves into unfreedom; that is, they are free to be sick. For another example, African-Americans are free to go into any bank and apply for a mortgage, but regardless of their economic resources, if a racist culture dominates, the applicant will most likely be denied that money. In this case, the freedom to apply is made meaningless without political guarantees. These guarantees are realized through people's ability to act in and upon the world. Echoing Bordo, this does not mean that we always know the outcomes of our participation. It simply means that political

participation is necessary for freedom to mean more than, stealing from Janis Joplin, "having nothing left to lose."

In the context of pedagogy and schooling, a productive pedagogical authority would be responsible for interrogating, unsettling, and displacing the authoritative forms of negative freedom that have been legitimated through dominant ideological apparatuses. As Fromm (1995) recognized, the ideological authority that educators must displace is not so much "internal authority" or the internalized expression of external authority, which can appear as "duty, conscience, or super-ego," but rather they must unsettle and displace what he called "anonymous authority" (p. 144). Anonymous authority's pedagogical function is to remove any visible signs of social and political systems of thought, to make the ideological a matter of commonsense (p. 144). As Fromm's research revealed, "conscience rules with a harshness as great as external authorities, and, furthermore, that frequently the contents of the orders issued by man's conscience are ultimately not governed by demands of the individual self but by social demands which have assumed the dignity of ethical norms" (p. 144).

Breaking into this hegemony is made even more difficult given that the language of conscience and socio-psychology has been somewhat lost in critical educational discourses. As a consequence, the celebration of "freedom" outside of its dialectic to authority has normalized itself into our commonsense. "Instead of overt authority," Fromm argues, "*anonymous' authority* reigns It seems to use no pressure but only mild persuasion" (Fromm, 1995, p. 144). Moreover, he finds that anonymous authority works effectively to hinder political agency by removing a concrete object for resistance. The "moral courage" and "personal independence" that comes from fighting against an oppressive and unjust authority – internal or external – is severely diminished as both the "command and commander have become invisible" (p. 144).

The hegemony of anonymous authorities demands that teachers and other political workers rethink authority in pedagogical terms. That is, if we begin to think authority pedagogically not only do we complicate its role in the development of counter-hegemonic practices, but we also situate it as a principle of insurgency and critical thought. In this context, naming the anonymous provides a viable object of resistance.

Fromm's work suggests a number of conditions and capacities that inform a critical postmodern feminist notion of pedagogical authority. This pedagogical authority must recognize its own relationship to conditions of established power, while, at the same time, attempt to

disrupt those conditions. This view of authority rejects the notion of repression as power's only dimension. As Foucault writes, repression is:

Quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely judicial conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as a wholly negative, narrow skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? (1980, p. 119)

Fromm agrees although moves beyond the "how" of power, to theorize the "who" and the "what" of power as well. Foucault asserts the productivity of power, but fails to complete the hermeneutical gesture. Without the "what" and the "who," the "how" of power is left circulating not unlike wind through the leaves. Neither repressive nor liberating, power creates and destroys, but, in the end, is not thought as constitutive of ideology and the people who legitimate it as commonsense. Power is faceless, bodiless, and mindless; creating instead faces, bodies, and minds. This is certainly an important discursive aspect of power, but it tends to negate the specific location of power, once, in fact, it has been embodied, inscribed, and localized. At the point of localization, one way power becomes manifest is in authority, suggesting in concrete terms a "what" and a "who."

A critical postmodern feminist authority understands the "what" of power as the authority of the institution, the classroom, the desks and chairs, the texts, the division of labor and time, and the various methods used in the schooling enterprise. These things combine to create a *collateral regime of authority*, for it is in the reified materiality of school life that power often functions in a disciplinary way. Rarely is the legitimacy of these constructs challenged. The life of the school is, in part, conditioned by these seemingly innocuous and inorganic elements. Textbooks claim a legitimacy based upon their inclusion in the curriculum and the appearance they give as complete knowledge domains as opposed to partial, ideological, and power driven. The school itself is poised as the operative mechanism of behavioral constraint, with its tiled corridors, sectioned rooms, and panoptical surveillance. Collective learning-teaching, action based learning/research initiatives, interdisciplinary studies, team teaching, to name but a few strategies, are made inconvenient at best, and impossible to initiate at worst. But, of course, these things, in and of themselves, do not guarantee repressive or progressive systems of schooling. As important a consideration is the

production and utilization of knowledges and the realities they legitimate and de-legitimate.

Disciplinary knowledge often drives curriculum and pedagogies as opposed to the contexts of the students and teachers. Disciplinary knowledge is understood as relevant regardless of whether it responds to the social realities of teachers and students. Knowledge is no longer something that needs to be produced, but rather is bought and sold, the teacher as seller and the students, of course, as consumers. But it is the teachers who are also consumers in this transmission model of schooling, for they must invest in the value of disciplinary knowledge (if not the knowledge itself) if they are to be good sales associates. Perhaps more significant (and troubling) is the anonymous authority of these disciplinary knowledges to name and legitimize what is appropriate to teach and learn. In effect, they often discount what they cannot address, and celebrate what they can.

Within a critical postmodern feminist paradigm, the "who" of power is characterized by both resistance and hegemony. Students are amazing examples of this dynamic. As teenagers, they often have a natural inclination to rebel, resist, and question authority. Too often, these democratic skills are purged through the dominant ideologies that institute school life. Against these dominating ideologies, students, it must be admitted, have little recourse. But that is different than saying that they have none. Students continually engage in acts of resistance, sometimes to their detriment. Nevertheless, from rallies against sweatshop labor to personal initiatives that challenge assignments, grading, and syllabi, student rebellion debunks the myth of false consciousness. Theirs might be called a *dearticulated consciousness*; that is, a consciousness felt at the level of the affective, but not yet linked to a critical vocabulary.

Teachers, principals, and other administrators are, for the most part, the second significant "who" of power. Quite often, these professionals are at odds with each other. Nevertheless, there are some important connections among them that must be addressed. Mainly, their presence within the manifestations of official power situates them at the precipice of liberatory action on one hand or becoming complicit to oppressive systems of schooling and education on the other. Although their positions and practices are more complex than this dichotomy suggests, I think it is important, through simplifications, to understand directly how some practices play out materially in a way that produces winners and losers. For example, how these professionals utilize their authority

– *what they authorize as legitimate knowledge, behavior, pedagogy, and curriculum* – situates them as engaging in a freedom toward, or a freedom from. Liberatory teachers and administrators who *authorize power in the service of redistributing power* operationalize their authority in the service of liberation. These are people conceptualizing freedom in terms that project it forward. No longer an escape from the political, these educational workers use the relationship between politics and education and schooling as a doorway into the mechanisms of teaching and learning. Teachers and administrators that authorize power only in the service of critique tend to diminish power to the level of repression thereby denying its productive elements. Lastly, teachers and administrators who retreat from the political in order to find freedom have only found a negative freedom; that is, a freedom that hides from social responsibility and political participation in the name of neutrality and autonomy.

Thinking Authority Pedagogically in an Age of Terror/ism

The war on terrorism presents educators with modern images of global power. This war brings attention to the overwhelming role media play in constructing not only the conditions to exercise or constrain what Donaldo Macedo (1994) calls literacies of power, but also legitimizes these conditions as necessary in the fight against terrorism. Not historically unique, self-censoring as well as governmental and corporate censoring play a major role in what gets reported, how it gets reported, and when it gets reported. In this context, freedom of speech and other civil liberties are now considered luxuries of peace. For example, the United States government, as a means of protecting national security, now sanctions racial profiling. Searches of private residences no longer have to meet previously defined notions of just cause. Wiretapping and surveillance of religious and political organizations are considered useful and legal practices for defending national security. Dominate representations of terror and terrorists and the policies that follow present educators with the challenge of using their authority to create what Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (1991) have called a “pedagogy of representations” (p. 18).

In this context, a pedagogy of representations intervenes into dominant representations – pedagogically, politically, semiotically, and epistemologically. Because representations teach us about ourselves,

while legitimating certain behaviors and attitudes, they are powerful forces in constructing our commonsense notions of social reality.¹ Representations often simplify social and political events, making what is right or wrong seem obvious. Or, they make what is real,

Appear to be so enormously complicated that only a 'specialist' can understand [it], and he only in his limited field, actually – and often intentionally – tends to discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter. (Fromm, 1941, p. 250)

A teacher who engages in a pedagogy of representations complicates these oversimplifications and deflections by providing and encouraging students to undertake a more complex accounting of the represented event, acknowledging that experts and specialists are not the only voices that have important things to say. Resisting relativistic thinking, teachers must *think their authority pedagogically* by intervening into the postmodern slide of meaning by recognizing how dominant power restrains our interpretive and creative capacities.

To begin to develop a critical position concerning the war on terrorism, representations should, in part, be addressed structurally by linking them to power/knowledge and authority. As Fromm writes, "the particular difficulty in recognizing to what extent our wishes – and our own thoughts and feelings as well – are not really our own but put into us from the outside is closely linked up with the problem of authority and freedom" (1941, p. 253). As if free from the mechanisms of the church and state, we have conceded to the rule of capital, and live as though it does not function authoritatively. Believing, for example, that corporate media's control over the majority of representations we see has no effect on the quality and complexity of those representations seems to have infiltrated mass consciousness so that to suggest otherwise provokes disdain. Recognizing the authoritative rule of capital accumulation is to acknowledge, at the least, media censorship as the rule as opposed to the exception (McChesney, 1997). But how does the rule of capital normalize itself, making anonymous its mechanisms of control? One partial answer is through the saturation and repetition of a one-dimensional worldview that poses as a totality. This strategy has the effect of fracturing social reality, fostering a dislocated sensibility, just as it obfuscates the specific ideological structures out of which the representations are born.

The authority of capital to condition our freedom is, in part, concealed by a concerted appeal to individuality and difference. "In the

name of "freedom," writes Fromm, "life loses all structure" (1941, p. 251). This is why it would not be an overstatement to say that it is a pedagogical imperative to make linkages between the individual and the structures in which that individual has come to know her or himself. To reconstitute a "structuralized picture of the world" is to enhance our individuality and creative capacities, not to diminish them (p. 250). This is so because we only know ourselves through our relationships to each other. In turn, our relationships to each other function, in part, as an affect of the structural realities in which they exist. This is not to say that our relationships do not then have an effect on the structures themselves. But the power of social structures to construct identities is, in the end, more forceful than an individual's ability to transform social structures. By drawing attention to the structures that inform the postmodern aesthetic, we are one step closer to transforming those structures through *collective action* as opposed to individual effort. This process provokes a sense of security as opposed to the alienation and anomie that an investment in the individual self often exacerbates, because it locates individuals in relation to each other and the physical world. Assuredly, one of democratic capitalism's greatest tricks is to mask its hegemony through the seductive guise of commodified difference and individuality; a trick that has decimated community and democratic life in exchange for the market and hyper-individualism.

The dominant media's representation of the bombings and the subsequent call by the United States government for patriotic consensus illustrates this hegemonic process. Generally speaking, we are compelled to consent, and in so doing are encouraged to demonize and criminalize the authority of dissent. In this context, dissent is no longer a *principle* of democracy and a free society. Rather, it comes to signify an "anti-American" (read anti-human) attitude and a counterpoint to unity. Through the imposition of unity, we are supposed to ignore the pervasive dis-unity of power in the United States and around the world, a common enemy replacing the project of addressing the concerns of the least advantaged amidst our differences (see Connell, 1993). This hegemonic process manufactures a commonsense about power and nation by constructing dissent and dissenters as a potential threat to national security. In a disturbing dichotomy articulated by the Bush administration that states that you are either with us or against us, political dissention and terrorism come to occupy the same discursive location. In other words, democratic principles have been replaced by totalitarian ideals, in which subversion is no longer understood as that

which makes democratic life, at one and the same time, both difficult and viable. Rather, it is to be criminalized and demonized in the name of freedom. Political philosopher, Cornelius Castoriadis (1997) calls this conception of freedom "degraded" because it presupposes the individual as both a threat to dominant power as well as its potential victim (p. 137). In either case, "power (and even of society) [is understood as a] necessary evil" (p. 137).

Pedagogical Challenges in Troubling Times

Troubling our capacities as teachers and political workers to authorize a politically critical social imaginary, our present neoliberal condition promotes an erosion of public space and the rapid privatization of public institutions, exacerbates a tangible sense of despair and cynicism, exiles private troubles beyond the domain of public concerns, and effectively dismantles our social autonomy and the democratic guarantees that it implies. Technologically advanced modes of surveillance such as Internet probes, hidden cameras on public streets, and satellites that silently and invisibly witness the movements of daily life intervene unmolested as a consequence of the privatization of public life which, as Stanley Aronowitz (1999) argues, follows from the same "principle of atomization" that guided the Nazi's organization of the masses both in production and civil society (p. 50). Consequently, these molestations upon civil society have become normalized as the rule of capital's subordination of the rule of law becomes a matter of commonsense.

The irony is that while conservatives and liberals advocate for individualism, the free market, and smaller government as a way to ensure privacy and individual freedom, we have a diminishing sense of privacy as well as less authority to resist capital's incursions. Unlike George Orwell's infamous portrayal of government incursions into private life in his book *1984*, we struggle for autonomy under the atomizing gaze of corporate power, which is always on the lookout for more efficient ways to accumulate capital. Only through public involvement, the expansion of the public sphere, and a reaffirmation of our common concerns are our individual rights, our ability to fight for particular concerns, and our social autonomy guaranteed. Interestingly, the inverse is not true.

A concentration on individualism under the guise of autonomy minus the social referent of equitable power sharing leads not to the need for publicly oriented discourses and practices, but instead informs a politics of individuality outside the sphere of social responsibility. The autonomy

of capital accumulation, in this instance, becomes the snake eating its own tail. Sooner or later, freedom in the name of capitalistic individuality minus the social referent of equitable power sharing will eliminate vital forms of autonomy and freedom. In this scenario, modern capitalism appears more like fascism when, as Aronowitz (1999) quoting Marcuse writes, fascism is the "consummation of competitive individualism. [As such] the regime releases all those forces of brutal self-interest which the democratic countries have tried to curb and tried to combine with the interest of freedom. Social groups are replaced by the crowd" (p. 49).

The crowd then becomes an object to control. It must be disciplined and restrained or else it will rage out of control. Social groups, on the other hand, demand the rights and necessary guarantees to participate in social and political life. We need to look no further than the recent World Economic Forum in New York City to see how dominant power represented dissenting social groups and thereby transformed them into a riotous crowd needing to be controlled. Once social groups are transformed in the public consciousness and become a crowd that threatens the power/knowledge of dominant institutions, the autonomous project becomes a threat to those in power. This process is characterized by not only a lack of civic agency, but also by a disincentive towards social autonomy. Dependencies get created through an appeal to power's ability to know what is right, what social and political pursuits are worth taking, and what is up for contestation and change. In the face of this heteronomic power, dissent is no longer a principle of a viable democratic project, but rather is its threat.

Conclusion: Activism as Pedagogical Praxis

In order to begin to confront the increasingly entrenched ideological force of atomization, I will briefly recommend several curricular projects that I believe can, at the least, make hope concrete and authority pedagogical. In practical and pedagogical terms, an activist curriculum could take any number of forms. For example, students could be introduced to the history of insurgent struggles and then be asked to rearticulate those struggles in contemporary terms. Students might be asked to do an analysis of power as it exists in the schools, and then research different kinds of power shifting strategies. Students might be encouraged to research different coalitions that are struggling to bring about structural change. Students could be educated in the practices of civil disobedience, understanding the risks and benefits of such action.

Students might learn to identify allies so that they can form collective and unified power blocs in the schools that they will work. Students could be educated in the practices of public address, so that they feel comfortable addressing large audiences about contentious issues. Students might be educated to defend their own progressive practices in historical and democratic terms; in political terms that are strategically thought out in regards to their implications. Students could be educated in legal policy and citizenship. Students might be taught about the union and its role in history generally and its role in education specifically. They might be educated in the practices of unionization and democratic relations. Obviously, I could go on.

The point, finally, is to begin to develop a socially and politically engaged pedagogy, one that not only works from a progressive methodological position, but one that invests in a radical curriculum that is driven by a theoretically defensible project. By making the fatalism of neoliberalism – with its penchant for atomization and hyper-individualistic capitalism – unconvincing, it is possible to initiate both a psychological and socio-economic transformation, two constituent dimensions in the human struggle *toward* freedom.

NOTES

1. By using the word "teach" I do not mean to suggest that this process is conscious as much as it is effective in conditioning our thoughts and imaginations. Undoubtedly, people learn from media and representations. It therefore goes to reason that these things, in part, function pedagogically.

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