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Abstract

The idea of freedom is a central figure in the ideology of neoliberalism. In the contemporary context, neoliberals argue that rolling back regulations and the marketization of social life create more choices and thus more freedom. While this position in fact dissimulates the increasing powerlessness of ordinary people, it also has roots in older philosophical arguments—in particular in the work of the economist and philosopher F.A. Hayek, whose thought has been a central inspiration for neoliberal policy. I begin my discussion here with an analysis of his concept of freedom. I believe that the ideologeme of freedom is central to securing neoliberalism's persistent hegemony, and that it needs to be engaged by critics at some depth. In spite of the failures and suffering produced by neoliberalism in practice, it retains a moral appeal for many, and not only those who are its principal beneficiaries. This appeal rests on the supposed symbiosis—and even identification—of neoliberalism (and capitalism itself) with freedom. Therefore, a critical-theoretical investigation of the philosophical and ideological architecture of this equation is urgent. In this article, I undertake this investigation in order to reveal the specific structures of violence that are the actual and positive content of neoliberal freedom.

Keywords: neoliberalism, political economy, ideology, critical theory/pedagogy, freedom

The idea of freedom is a central figure in the ideology of neoliberalism. In the contemporary context, neoliberals argue that rolling back regulations and the marketization of social life create more choices and thus more freedom. While this position in fact dissimulates the increasing powerlessness of ordinary people, it also has roots in older philosophical arguments—in particular in the work of the economist and philosopher F.A. Hayek (1944/2007; 1960/2011), whose thought has been a central inspiration for neoliberal policy. I begin my discussion here with an analysis of his concept of freedom. I believe that the ideology of freedom is central to securing neoliberalism's persistent hegemony, and that it needs to be engaged by critics at some depth. In spite of the failures and suffering produced by neoliberalism in practice, it retains a moral appeal for many, and not only those who are its principal beneficiaries. This appeal rests on the supposed symbiosis—and even identification—of neoliberalism (and capitalism itself) with freedom. Therefore, a critical-theoretical investigation of the philosophical and ideological architecture of this equation is urgent. In this article, I undertake this investigation in order to reveal the specific structures of violence that are the actual and positive content of neoliberal freedom.

Beyond the contradictions at the level of philosophy, we also live neoliberal freedom in the present through particular experiences of responsabilization, vulnerability, and even destitution, and it is important to analyze this category at this level as well. Neoliberal freedom operates in this context less at the level of rules and rights, and more at the level of ways of being, constructing kinds of subjectivity which themselves already embody the impossible

contradictions that characterize neoliberalism as doctrine and policy. A critical, and critical-pedagogical, response has to be able to expose these determinations as well and to struggle to create the possibility of other subjects—and the subjects of other possibilities. The irony is that in a world that has been decided by neoliberalism what we may most need to be freed from is its vaunted “freedom” itself. If, as I argue, neoliberal freedom is ultimately a profound form of capture, then critical pedagogy needs to work with students to imagine, against it, an emancipatory project that is itself only made real within a collective struggle against power and domination.

F.A. Hayek: Freedom, Idealism, and Violence

For F.A. Hayek, the Austrian philosopher, economist, and social theorist whose work has been a crucial source for and influence on neoliberal theory and practice, freedom in the first instance means *freedom from coercion*: “We are concerned... with that condition of men in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as is possible in society. This state we shall describe throughout as a state of liberty or freedom” (1960/2011, p. 57). Hayek distinguishes this sense of freedom from a notion of freedom as indicating a lack of *physical* constraint, and also from *political* freedom proper (participation in the choice of government). Most importantly, Hayek distinguishes his notion of freedom from that which identifies it with the condition of being able to do or have whatever one wants. He argues that this latter notion is expressed in the redistribution of resources carried out by socialism, which he condemns as confused and dangerous. In his own minimalist definition, which defines freedom through a negative—the lack of coercion—Hayek seems in the first instance to hold to a classically liberal formulation. This minimalism allows him to claim a certain definitional purity and to avoid the ambiguity of competing usages, even if it does not rule out constraint entirely. That is, if a free society does not avoid coercion altogether, he argues, at least it reduces it to a minimum by countenancing its limited use by the state solely in order to prevent more harmful forms of private coercion.

In fact, Hayek is ultimately impatient with an entirely negative account of freedom. Rejecting a pure *laissez-faire* position with regard to government, he believes that political, social, and economic conditions can be *optimized* for the exercise of freedom, and for the growth and development at which, he argues, freedom aims. Thus, interventions by the state, if undertaken with care, can secure the conditions in which freedom flourishes. This belief in the possibility of positive action is the first sense in which his philosophy departs from a purely negative and formal position. Second, he argues that the essential moment of freedom in contemporary society is in the economic sphere, and that the growth of commerce has been intimately connected to the deepening of freedom in modernity. This identification of freedom broadly with “industrial freedom” (Hayek, 1944/2007, p. 70) gives the concept a historical content. His thesis here is the foundation for the properly neoliberal precept that identifies freedom with the capitalist market, and the exercise of freedom with the accumulative drive. Freedom for Hayek, like nature for Rousseau, is not automatically or immediately accessible; rather, through the careful work of law and policy the ground must be cleared of that which militates against it.

It is this apparently paradoxical turn, in which the optimal conditions for a freedom that is fundamentally suspicious of the state are achieved through a series of calculated state interventions, that Foucault (2008) explicates in terms of the idea of neoliberal *governmentality*.

As Foucault argues, neoliberalism does not in fact seek to do away with the state. Rather, it aims to insinuate its own rationale of competition and entrepreneurialism into the very heart of government. We can see this particularly in the neoliberal account of the law. Thus, the law for Hayek is stripped of transcendent purpose; its function is solely instrumental: “The ideal type of law, on the other hand, provides merely additional information to be taken into account in the decision of the actor” (1960/2011, p. 218). The law should not substitute the goals of government for that of the individual. Instead, the law should serve to stabilize the social environment, letting actors know what conditions they can count on and what they are responsible for. As with economic policy, law should serve to optimize conditions for the exercise of freedom, understood as freedom to compete and to accumulate. And this is not just an analogy, since according to Hayek economics provides a crucial foundation for intelligent governance more broadly:

Much of the opposition to a system of freedom under general laws arises from the inability to conceive of an effective co-ordination of human activities without deliberate organization by a commanding intelligence. One of the achievements of economic theory has been to explain how such a mutual adjustment of the spontaneous activities of individuals is brought about by the market, provided that there is a known delimitation of the sphere of control of each individual. An understanding of that mechanism of mutual adjustment of individuals forms the most important part of the knowledge that ought to enter into the making of general rules limiting individual action. (1960/2011, p. 229)

Not only does Hayek link the terrain of the law to the terrain of economics in this passage, but he also argues that the same rationale of “effective coordination” underlies, or should underlie, both spheres. This coordination is achieved through a stability secured through effective rule making. It is through this notion of law as *delimitation* that Hayek squares the circle of individual freedom vs. state administration, and it is under cover of this theory that actually existing neoliberalism justifies government actions on behalf of capital: these actions, it argues, only clear the ground of impediments to commerce. Implicit in Hayek, and explicit in neoliberal policy, is the idea that freedom means freedom to compete and accumulate; and in an account in which society is understood as capitalist market, the proper actor can ultimately only be the possessor of capital, or in fact capital itself.

In this way, neoliberalism offers up a brutally realist idealism. The seductiveness of Hayek, for those with material or ideological investments in the status quo, is that he sets out a highly abstract and formal system of law and governance, uncompromising in its principles and untroubled by competing goals, which seems at the same time to be fully embodied in contemporary society. As if it were a kind of perverse Buddhism, Hayek’s lofty theory illuminates the perfection of reality itself—but in his case this means the perfection of a freedom grounded in the market, the perfection of a world ordered and organized by capital. Hayek’s philosophy belongs to that rare species of idealism that has muscled its austere strictures into reality itself. But once firmly established as reigning ideology and rationality, it is precisely this idealist austerity that allows neoliberalism to be oblivious to its actual effects, and to the suffering that it everywhere creates. Of course, this obliviousness is already demanded as a central principle by this philosophical system, which refuses any evaluation in terms of the consequences it produces. Thus, for Hayek, the actual effects of the freedom he recommends on individuals are quite independent of its essential virtue. Indeed, “to be free may mean freedom to starve, to make costly mistakes, or to run mortal risks” (1960/2011, p. 69). Likewise, the extreme inequality that this market freedom produces is not merely unavoidable, he argues, but

desirable, since inequality allows the privileged to pioneer new ways of life and to marshal resources leading to civilizational advance.

Hayek's hostility to the welfare state is not so much based on the immediate effect of its systems of provision, but rather on the threat they pose to the proper ordering of conditions for freedom. As he would have it, the careful engineering required to lay the groundwork for freedom as competition is destroyed by obtrusive protections for workers and the poor. Thus, the monetarism that he recommends in terms of economic policy, which seeks above all to check the growth of inflation, aims not only to stabilize conditions for investors and savers but also to prevent the growth of state services and benefits (which he believes accelerate as a response to inflation) as well as the Keynesian consensus that supports them (Hayek, 2006/2011, p. 465). This regulatory growth contaminates the purity of the freedom Hayek contemplates, which is represented in the contention of competing capitals. But what is optimized of course in this competition is not really the freedom of the individual, but rather power's own freedom, and the growth of power *for itself*, which is ultimately Hayek's main concern—even if this accumulation is represented as the advance guard of a more general progress. Under this banner, Hayek's system transmutes the drive to domination into virtue. In Hayek, the revanchist impulse that Duménil and Lévy (2005) describe as mobilizing neoliberalism's assault on working people globally and its draining of resources from periphery to center is made elegant; the very violence of capitalism glitters as if it were the geometric proof of the philosopher's thesis. Is it any wonder that the intellectual sheen—and cover—offered by this philosophy has been so irresistible for those who view the world from positions of command?

Experiences of Neoliberal Freedom: Flexibility and Responsibilization

Hayek's understanding of freedom does not result in a simple opposition between the individual and society. In fact, he emphasizes that as society develops, we are more and more dependent, as individuals, on knowledge that is embodied in shared customs and institutions, which are the result of adaptations over generations:

It might be said that civilization begins when the individual in the pursuit of his ends can make use of more knowledge than he has himself acquired and when he can transcend the boundaries of his ignorance by profiting from knowledge he does not himself possess. (2006/2011, p. 73)

According to Hayek, there is a broad stock of collective knowledge, embodied not only in science but even in social habits, that crucially orients the actions of individuals. In this regard, his emphases anticipate in unexpected fashion the work of contemporary theorists such as Hardt and Negri (2004, 2009), who have described the collective intelligence and creativity that increasingly organize social production. The essential difference, of course, is that for Hayek collectivity and collaboration are simply effects of and platforms for the principle of *competition*, since they arise out of a process of adaptation in which unsuccessful forms of organization are discarded, and since they serve as a starting point for competitive innovations. In this way, rather than the isolated individual being counterposed to the networked collectivity, this entire ensemble is unified by the principle of competition that works through it. One is tempted to see in neoliberalism, as prefigured by Hayek, a kind of frightening Hegelian resolution to the dialectic between the individual and the organic community, in which the conduct of both poles of this opposition comes to express a fundamental entrepreneurial rationale.

Actually existing neoliberalism apparently coheres with this aspect of Hayek's vision. On the one hand, "teamwork" has become a key trope and modality of work and leisure, and a range of dimensions of human sociability and communicativity have been incorporated within the process of capital accumulation (especially in the service industries). Other kinds of freedom as well—especially freedom as *flexibility*—have increasingly come to characterize the labor process. Thus, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) document the transition in post-Fordist France from a paradigm of business management based on hierarchy and individualized meritocracy (in the 1960s) to one based on autonomy, teamwork, and "leadership" (beginning in the 1990s). In this new management paradigm, the authority of the boss is replaced by a working environment apparently characterized by trust, creativity, and self-control. The underlying objective of management becomes the mobilization of personal skills and capacities rather than the direction of activity from the top down. Boltanski and Chiapello recount how firms deliberately co-opted radical demands of the 1960s for greater creativity and autonomy, divorcing a movement toward workplace freedom and conviviality from the critique of capitalist exploitation with which it had been connected in the protests of the time. Clearly, the shift that they describe is widespread beyond France itself, and has only accelerated since their study was undertaken. Furthermore, flexibilization has increasingly dispensed with its veneer of worker-friendliness, as on-demand production and service schedules throw lives into chaos and poverty. In this context, autonomy as precarity proves the unity of freedom and competition that Hayek described, while also preserving the dark outline of his austere definition of freedom itself: true freedom as *freedom to starve*. In this historical progression, freedom becomes, paradoxically, the mode in which we most perfectly live our own domination, as Wendy Brown (2003) points out.

In education as well, neoliberalism has to some extent involved a devolution of responsibility for control and discipline from the system to the individual, while maintaining the authorities' power of ultimate decision. The moral framework of the contemporary educational accountability apparatus consists in the idea that teachers and students are ultimately solely responsible for learning "outcomes." At the less privileged end of the schooling spectrum this means inviting poor students and students of color to blame themselves (for the sin of attending under-resourced and punitive schools). At the more privileged end of the spectrum this means, for students, being responsible for investing in oneself as the embodiment of a continually accumulating cultural, symbolic, and academic capital. Not only does this invitation to an entrepreneurial orientation reorganize the experience of grade school; in addition, Simons and Masschelein (2008) show how a process of lifelong learning as optimization of human capital is associated with a paradigm shift in education more broadly—toward what they call the "learning apparatus." In this context, neoliberalism sets us free to manage our own educational portfolio. The degree of our initiative in this regard determines not only our employability, but also our personal fulfillment and sense of virtue. A "rich" life for the successful learner as portfolio builder depends on a fidelity to the neoliberal imperative to make the most of every opportunity (O'Flynn & Peterson, 2007). Importantly, "success" here is tied to the mobilization of an effectively experienced autonomy, a process of *responsibilization* with which students identify. Likewise, failure within the logic of the neoliberal learning apparatus is supposed to be understood in terms of this autonomy and responsibility—as a bad choice that itself proves the freedom of the neoliberal subject.

Neoliberal freedom as governmentality, for Foucault (2008), is a rationality that organizes the relationships of subjects to themselves—as entrepreneurs of their own human capital—at the same time that it reconstructs the meaning of government at the level of the state

itself. But in addition, as Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) study indicates, the structure of neoliberal freedom works at the system level as a powerful strategy for evading the immanent contradictions of capitalism. On the terrain of production, post-Fordism's shift to a framework of autonomy, self-control, and collaboration works to render the sclerotic apparatus of accumulation newly supple. On the terrain of policy and ideology, the shift in neoliberalism to a grammar of choice, responsibility, and self-actualization works as an update to capitalism's clunky operating system—seeming to recognize and even “empower” individuals within a system which was always before thought to reduce and disempower them (Harvey, 2005). But this paradoxical reconciliation of opposites—freedom as internalization of control, empowerment as isolation in competition—in fact puts the lie to late capitalism's impressive sheen. The shift to teamwork, communication, and networks that is the signature of this era takes shape after all within a system characterized ultimately by a logic of predation, and in this context our impulses to affiliate and collaborate in material and intellectual labor become an important instrument of exploitation, including in “creative” and educational occupations. Thus, if the image of freedom in neoliberalism seems to reconcile irreconcilable opposites, the actual content of neoliberal freedom is ultimately invasion, speed-up, and surveillance.

For this reason it is important to understand neoliberal freedom in terms of ideology, and not simply in terms of a grammar of power. However, it is not so much that we are tricked into believing that we are free in neoliberalism, but rather that the seductive image of this freedom works as a symbolic compensation for our actual precariousness. For instance, the proliferating systems of choice in education (i.e. networks of charters, magnets, and demonstration schools) seek to dazzle us at the same time that a broader disinvestment in public schooling proceeds apace. This is not exactly false consciousness, but it suggests that much of what we learn to desire and consume in neoliberalism's new landscapes of choice in fact ends up making us, collectively, fractured and vulnerable rather than liberated.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Real Subsumption and Subjective Destitution

Critical theorists have described the way that alienation in late capitalism is obscured and submerged by the false needs of a one-dimensional consumerist society (Marcuse, 1991). But neoliberalism goes one step further in that there is a shift in it from this submerged alienation to a condition of colonization and *enclosure* of social potentiality. In this process, the space of alienation itself—the ultimate estrangement of self from society—is itself enclosed, so that power comes to invest and control both poles of the contradiction. In this context, our most authentic struggles for well-being and self-expression (e.g. mental and physical self-care, romantic relationships, or spiritual practices) are organized in an entrepreneurial mode and seem to be just one more expression of the neoliberal ethos. Even the most intimate modalities of freedom now seem to belong to power.

A crucial effect of this shift is that senses of freedom that cannot be articulated in neoliberal terms appear delusional and incoherent. Within neoliberalism's logic of “capitalist realism” (Fisher, 2009), individual or collective emancipatory projects that would challenge neoliberalism's basic conditions are refused; such projects become fantastic, obsolete, or unintelligible. In particular, revolutionary struggles are constructed as vestiges of an archaic period and as expressing an embarrassing ideological backwardness. Neoliberalism seeks to transform precisely the *realism* of revolutionary movements—a realism that focuses on decisive contradictions, and which recognizes that meaningful change must occur at the level of the social

whole—into a naïve idealism, which supposedly does not recognize the proper limits of the imagination.

This transformation in the meaning of freedom in the present can be helpfully understood in relation to the process in late capitalism of *real subsumption*. As Marx (1867/1976) explains, in real as opposed to formal subsumption, capitalism not only comes to monopolize the means of production, but actually to absorb and transform the *relations* of production—the conditions and modes of work. Society is in this way fundamentally molded by capital. This idea has been pressed further by Negri (2003), who argues that in real subsumption (and contemporary capitalism) all use-value becomes exchange-value, capital occupies society as a whole, and work becomes the very “time of life.” In this process, as capital invests and absorbs being and imagination, subjectivity itself becomes a crucial site of political antagonism and struggle. Liberation, from this perspective, is more than a struggle against processes of exploitation in production, or against dominant forms of ideological common sense; liberation means a struggle for different ways of being, different temporalities, and different subjectivities. While Negri’s vision of *exodus* from the time of capital is rather hard to imagine in the context of the actual enclosures of neoliberalism, his analysis is generative. In particular, the idea of real subsumption allows us to bring together a Marxist analysis of capital with a Foucauldian consideration of governmentality, as Read (2009) points out. At this point of intersection, the meaning of freedom has to be investigated in terms of the politics of the subject. In other words, the questions “Are we free?” and “What kind of freedom do we have?” have to be explored together with the questions “Who are we?” or “What have we become?”

The 1978 remake of the science fiction horror film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* dramatizes this neoliberal condition. In the film, an extraterrestrial species takes over the identities of the inhabitants of San Francisco, first producing (in immense pods) replicas of people’s bodies, and then absorbing their minds while they sleep. In contrast to the original 1956 version of the film, which can be analyzed in terms of cold-war paranoias regarding ideological conformity (of either the left or the right), the nature of the invasion in the 1978 remake is more subtle and disturbing: the horror is not that the body-snatching invaders make everyone the same in relation to one another, but rather that as the invasion occurs *everyone remains the same*. In other words, what is most frightening in the remake is that we are invaded and absorbed without any noticeable ripple in the surface of our lives and society: we are made alien within our very self-identification. Indeed, as the protagonists in the film worry about what is happening to their partners and neighbors, it turns out that the hip psychotherapist (played by Leonard Nimoy) who helps them to work through these anxieties has in fact already been taken over by the invaders. This is the creeping horror of neoliberalism and real subsumption: that in authentically becoming ourselves we end up merely expressing the system’s inner reason. Ultimately the lesson of the film is not that we are threatened by frightening invaders; rather, it is that we ourselves, in ourselves, are already alien.

To put these reflections in the context of the consideration of freedom, we might say that in neoliberalism it is not so much that our freedom is false (as in older forms of alienation), but rather that *it is we who are false*. Real subsumption encloses and collapses the contradiction between the alienated and the authentic, and colonizes the truth of the subject. It is not only the emphasis on freedom as competition in markets that is important in Hayek and fellow-travelers, then, but also the *subject of freedom* that their accounts presume. In short, capitalism needs to be thought about here in terms of ontological invasion. In the context of this process of invasion, a critical sense of emancipation will have to upset the terms within which we are allowed to

coherently construct ourselves. In education, and for critical pedagogy in particular, this points to the necessity not just of familiar kinds of critique, but also of praxis at the level of ways of being.

Against Neoliberal Liberty: Starting Points for Critical Pedagogy

The first task for a pedagogy against neoliberalism—*and against neoliberal freedom*—is to challenge the prevailing definition of freedom itself. It is important to return to Hayek to interrogate the narrowness of the simple definition he offers for freedom: the absence of coercion directed against individuals. Teachers ought to consider with students other meanings for freedom, especially senses that Hayek polemicizes against: freedom as collective struggle for justice, freedom as political liberty and political voice, and freedom as freedom from oppression and exploitation. These senses persist in the shadows of the prevailing abstract and individualistic definition; they can be recovered and explored in critical pedagogical work across the curriculum.

Of course, it is also important to recognize the limits of the account given by Hayek even of his own minimalist definition, which is modeled for him on the idea of market freedom. Against Hayek, freedom from coercion for the individual might instead be taken to refer to liberty not just in relation to the state, but also from the increasingly immoderate demands of capital; it might include liberty to imagine and create outside of the narrow ideological limits of the given. And we have not even broached the innumerable contradictions between the minimalist liberal maxim and the actual neoliberal reality: in particular that a system supposedly founded on a suspicion of the state in favor of the citizen has overseen an unprecedented growth in the state's carceral and security apparatuses (Wacquant, 2009), a remarkable expansion of surveillance, and a proliferation of special bureaucracies—including the bureaucracy of neoliberal educational accountability (Hursh, 2007). These contradictions should be explored by critical educators.

However, the reconfiguration of work, education, and social relationships in the neoliberal era also enrolls us into subjectivities and ways of being that work below and beyond ideological common senses (De Lissovoy, 2015). The entrepreneurial self, which is also a self prepared for particular regimes of communication, flexibility, and surveillance on the job or in the classroom, secures the rule of neoliberalism in its very postures, habits and dispositions. A critical pedagogy aiming to work at this level has to engage students in an investigation that is embodied, emotional, and ethical as much as it is ideological. Neoliberal accountability in education—which is essentially an unceasing audit and indictment, offered up in the form of standardized tests, behavior management plans, and systems of “value-added” measurement of teachers—lays the foundation for anxious subjectivities terminally attuned to their personal statistical troughs: to skills needing improvement, to lagging potentials, and to gaps in “achievement.” To expose and challenge this regime is to consider our own deeply embodied performances and performativities (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Here a teacher's actions and affects, his or her invitations to a different set of educational relationships, are crucial; these should propose kinds of communication and solidarity that can unravel the tightly wound knot of neoliberal subjectivity. For example, *admitting and acknowledging* in the classroom dialogue a range of emotional responses—including anxiety, anger, resistance, and even boredom—as starting points for critical inquiry is a first step to understanding the contradictions that young people in school must live as students in the neoliberal era. Once acknowledged, these feelings

can be explored and analyzed in relation to the social and political structures of which they are the effect (or to which they respond).

Freire (1996) described the processes of “adhesion” to the oppressor and “fear of freedom” which secure oppressive social systems and banking models of education at the level of subjectivity. We ought to revisit Freire’s psychoanalytic inquiry in the context of the present day. What is the glue that holds together the neoliberal subject? What secures the submission of that subject, at the level not just of belief but also of habit and practice, to the foreshortened horizons of austerity and competition? A crucial clue here is in the way that power in neoliberalism works through the permission of specific kinds of autonomy, and not simply through marginalization. Thus, in the present, students and teachers may not so much be *afraid of freedom* (Freire’s original diagnosis), as *anxious in their autonomy*. Just as firms in post-Fordism tend to externalize the costs of control to workers themselves (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), neoliberal schooling makes students responsible for their own integration or lack of integration into systems of opportunity and structures of identification. Penalties and rewards are represented as following automatically on personal choices. In this context, a key task for critical pedagogy may be to pry students away from this anxious autonomy and to introduce the possibility of other social temporalities (Negri, 2003) and other notions and practices of freedom. In this context, the hope that Freire emphasized as central to critical pedagogy becomes a hope not just that the world might be different, but that we ourselves might be built from different imaginations and desires, and that we might be released from a fragmentation that isolates us in ourselves.

In short, it may be that a basic task for critical pedagogy in the present is to rescue students from the isolation of their vaunted “freedom.” Students today are “free” to navigate hostile educational environments; “free” to submit to constant monitoring of their bodies and minds; “free” to blame themselves for the injuries visited upon them by authorities; “free” to obsessively accumulate tokens of intellectual compliance; “free” to be discriminated against on the basis of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; “free” to endure a stultifying pedagogical regimen of study skills; and so on. In the perverse logic of the school, the demoralization experienced by students is proof of their freedom, since this demoralization is supposed to follow from their own poor choices. In this context, critical pedagogy should in fact be oriented *against* “freedom,” and in favor of solidarity. Critical pedagogy should propose this question: What senses of self, intellectual commitments, and political projects might we be able to find once we are emancipated from the confines of this *neoliberal liberty*?

Conclusion

Against the violent abstraction of neoliberalism, which seeks to hold the individual apart from society and history and understands freedom as inhering in this imaginary gap, we need to counterpose a different definition and vision. Within a critical perspective, freedom, and emancipation are constituted by their opposition to power; they are made real in the process of struggle against oppression. Freedom cannot be protected as a property of the individual, since it exists only in the space of contradiction that opposes collective antagonists: the people and the rulers. Much less can freedom be identified with “industrial freedom” or the liberty to move and compete in markets. This latter definition is an apotheosis of capitalism, making it the condition and goal of human being and creativity. Neoliberalism’s awful appeal is in its exaltation of the actual, its spiritual vindication of the system’s pervasive violence. If Hayek’s grim philosophy

planted the seeds for this vindication, in the present it is everywhere the order of the day. Breaking with this religion means not just repudiating its philosophical precepts and principles of policy, but also refusing the ways of being that sustain these principles. A re-imagination of freedom is in this way part of the broader project of building different subjects and subjectivities. It means looking beyond the narrow neoliberal autonomies that are permitted to us, and the isolation and precariousness that accompany them, and instead to a sense of freedom as the movement itself of struggle for a different time of life.

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