Article

Searching for a Common Place: Thoughts on Crisis, Marginality, and Social Change

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Abstract: This essay describes our neoliberal moment of crisis as a displacement of meaning regarding the more established notions of margin-center. Our times paradoxically 'unite' in that we are unwittingly governed by a financial logic that privileges personal gain over collective well-being. With this in mind, the essay will discuss strategies for examining oppression and imagining progress that is multidimensional and intersectional and thinks about the contestatory power in political and intellectual discourses that are linked to a multi-layered, feminist-gendered perspective in order to point to avenues that might lead to incisive political transformation.

Keywords: crisis; neoliberalism; marginality; democracy; liberal arts; gender

1. Politics Not as Usual

We find ourselves immersed in a moment of grave societal crisis. The margins in our societies have become disposable, lacking in representation, irrelevant to the processes that legitimate the operations of our democratic and economic systems. Yet, a very wide net seems to have been cast in establishing these borders for, in today's world, a considerable size of the population has been set aside. The margin is no longer exclusively the place for those expelled from the social fabric and political arena because of their alternative visions, different voices, or contrasting perceptions, qualities that, on the other hand, make societies strong, expansive, and progressive. Today, the margin has become the center, for marginality is an ever-expansive site that shelters both contestation and accommodation, as our educational institutions highlight. The term unites these historical opposites in what has become a state of affairs that has the majority of the population suffering the consequences of the fruitless pursuit of personal or social advancement and of the abandonment of governments of their responsibilities towards the majority. Both 'Main Street' and 'Back Street' have become disposable for currently only monolithic economic objectives and monotone definitions of democracy are believed relevant, the two fully imbricated in a neoliberal conceptions of life.

Such an approach advocates for placing the needs of financial institutions and their profits over those of individuals or citizens, maximizing gains and returns at the expense of those social policies directed at improving our lives. Neoliberalism also brands the individual in a particular way, constricting bodies into normative (consumerist) versions of themselves, devoid of pleasures or desires that are not intimately linked with the economic orthodoxy of gain and profit. Our neoliberal democracies strive to eliminate from the political sphere those who venture an alternative to the status quo and privilege the representation of financial and corporate power over the interests of citizens, the former abusively elevated—as in the case of the US—even to the status of political subjects with civic rights.

Despite many dissatisfactions and limitations, the traditional political sphere might still be the best transformational toolbox at hand to address our current state of affairs. This arena is grounded in

the power (albeit restrained) of our neoliberal democracies to challenge and transform the existing political landscape. Political analysts like Noam Chomsky, for example, are still optimistic that the economic and political configurations responsible for the grave situation that we face today can be reversed (Chomsky 2014), although the current political souring in the US is a worrisome development. Their confidence originates in their understanding the genealogy of the processes that cause the human suffering of our time, processes that begin in the deplorable political decisions that resulted when financial institutions, markets, and profit co-opted the policies of the social welfare state. Today's financial institutions are transnational, with extraterritorial effects, not subjected to the laws of any particular nation, economic powerhouses that are exempt from abiding national laws approved by democratically elected parliaments. The globe is their playhouse as they engineer how to bypass local regulations by moving their assets between countries, a strategy that international trade agreements protect and solidify. Since international institutions of control are absent or without any regulatory power, the entire planet has been turned into a wild, unsupervised market. Trees are envisioned as lumber, people as cheap labor, precious natural resources as mere raw materials, solidarity turned into facile nationalistic propaganda encouraging exploitation. If a culture, a person, or a landscape does not render a monetary gain, it becomes nonexistent to neoliberal markets. They are dispensable after they become invisible.

If only those objects, people, and resources suitable of being turned into economic gain matter, why then are financial institutions rescued when their excesses place them on the verge of bankruptcy making them no longer profitable? The great irony of our day is that in times of financial crisis—due to the mismanagement of those transnational institutions—the nanny state is expected to fulfill its function and come to the rescue of financial capital via the public good. As was stated in the 1970s, this is socialism for the rich and their corporations, a depletion of public budgets in their name, assuring that large profits remain in private hands. We are still living under the same paradigm. In more recent times, the economic crisis of 2008 put this to the test again, even though today's "socialism for the rich" reads in the more neutral tone "too big to fail". Apparently, those who lost their homes, jobs, and savings, those who woke up one morning in financial and family duress not of their own making, were too small to be rescued.

This asymmetrical relation between private profits and the public rescue of private corporations is responsible for the depletion of those public funds needed to support the welfare state. Everywhere we look the resources that guarantee basic social protections like public health, education, retirement, housing, or care of the elderly or disabled have been or are in the process of being depleted. Societies are no longer united around the idea of the interdependency of their citizens. The old social-democratic motto, "to each according to his or her needs", has been substituted for "to each according to his or her economic and political power". Democracies are crumbling because an extreme form of individualism—egotism, narcissism—has replaced the social links that are at the root of every society. Societies are no longer governed according to the rule of the people; instead, we now are experiencing the rule of the few who accumulate wealth to an unimaginable degree and demand, as they meddle with political institutions, that not only economic policy be drafted to their benefit but also all things social. The latter have sequestered the democratic system, subverting it into a plutocracy, the US Trump presidency being a case in point, and the majority of EU countries closely following suit.

Against plutocracy, some ascribe to a form of old-fashioned nationalism. Borders should be closed; ethnic, racial, religious, socio-economic, and political differences erased; common sense must prevail. This contradictory 'utopian' world is one where global free trade is combined with the strict confinement of people within a model of the nation-state defined in exclusively nativist terms. The 19th century colonial undertones are clear; the disasters associated to the European colonial empires, well-known. This 'global nationalism' will never be a solution to plutocracy.

For others, the fight against plutocracy takes shape in an acute form of communitarianism under the auspices of religious fundamentalism. However, neither dogmatic interpretations of religious texts nor the close following of the Bible, the Koran, or the Torah are guarantors against the supremacy of

monetary interests in social and political life. If economic power manipulates democratic rule in order to better legitimate markets and profits, religious fervor is a weak defense against the cruelty of the acts committed against the welfare of whole populations in the name of free trade. This type of religiosity cannot provide the intellectual tools needed to help understand the status quo of our world even if it does appeal in some way to the suffering that the current state of affairs inflicts upon the majority of the world's people in varying degrees. Notwithstanding the pernicious linkage between religiosity and terrorism, it should be acknowledged that many of the brutal discriminations inflicted upon those leading a non-normative way of life fly on the coattails of moral or religious superiority as well.

In today's world, given the power of nationalist and religious ideologies when conceived as tools of liberation, it is not easy nor is it advisable to dismiss their influence upon those looking for strategies to overcome the impending disasters awaiting their families and communities. At the same time, it would be preposterous to appeal to a shared ethnicity or to a common religion as a means to convince plutocrats of the damage imposed on the majority of their fellow nationals or brethren. So, if the response to neoliberalism does not lie within hard-core nationalism or religious fundamentalism, where do we turn for alternatives? Let us be reminded that we are not doomed to accept our current economic and political inequalities as inevitable or as a natural state of affairs. The problems we face today are neither unavoidable nor are they the result of natural causes. They originated in a particular configuration of economic, political, and cultural forces in our immediate historical past. Another configuration of forces would have given way to a different social setting today. Change is possible: we must be aspirational and attempt to reverse a process that has clearly gone too far.

To begin, we need an acute understanding of the forces at play and to recognize the submission of the political and democratic spheres to the sovereignty of the economic (Chomsky 2014; Brown 2015). This is the result of a long process of increasingly complex entanglements of the different arenas and of reconfiguring them along the conceptual logic of finance and gain (Harvey 2005). Things could have worked out otherwise, but today, more than ever, political decisions are not made with collective betterment in mind, but rather with the goal of maximizing the financial profits of the few. Never has wealth been so exponentially and disproportionately concentrated and yet this unfair distribution of fortune goes insufficiently questioned, somehow on a 'natural' and unwieldy course of excess, melodramatic in size, terrifying in its effects. How is it that the 'free lunch' mentality for the wealthy passes as economic gain for the majority? Why do we passively accept the dismantling of the democratic process, limiting and curtailing collective participation inch by inch? Why have we allowed the political process to be reduced to discriminating between candidates who represent safe and comfortable pseudo-alternatives but never between individuals who challenge or offer a distinctly alternative political vision? Are we really comfortable accepting this turn to plutocracy, this top-down, authoritarian re-ordering of society?

Chomsky reminds us that nothing is written in stone (Chomsky 2014). Pessimistic cynicism will not take us very far nor reverse the current situation; nor will distrust in the power of political commitment and activism in deepening the democratic system with its corollary of justice and equality. We know too well that change is, unfortunately, complex and stubborn, not an easy one-directional movement of progress. Energizing advancements and disappointing setbacks go hand in hand.

One place to begin curtailing the immense political and economic power of financial institutions and their global networks is to try to re-territorialize, if not their operations, at least their responsibilities. If lax and deregulated operations are the sign of our times, perhaps the moment has come to make the world of profit and gain accountable again, at least locally, given the absence of global regulatory or political organizations. When international corporations are more powerful than local governments, political responsibility needs to be grounded on something more tangible and stronger than the instruments of control in place today. These agencies and mechanisms (parliaments, trade agreements, labor laws, etc.), while undoubtedly key to the safeguarding of democracy, have proven fickle and corruptible by special interests. Our wounded democracies are in need of much more. There must be a way to regulate and curtail the control of the powerful in their quest for maximum economic

exploitation but it demands political will. For John Berger (2014), however, the injury runs deeper. Territorial constrictions, legislative reforms, and regulatory instruments operate on a scale that do not address the horrors committed to our core, to our sense of humanity, to the micro politics of the interrelationality that bind us in society. Change must address form and content.[1]

For the author, territorializing, i.e., rethinking 'place', is a firmly politicized process that entails an active resistance to homogenization and standardization. Given the obstacles placed in our way, this is an inevitably long and cumbersome undertaking for it requires a wide array of rediscoveries of the 'obvious' that include, for example, finding the means to place human activity within a web of sustainable relations with the physical and emotional worlds that surround us; creating networks of solidarity among the peoples who inhabit the Earth; imagining a purpose in life unrelated to profit or with accumulation, a drive guided by the wish to improve our lives and those of others. However, the opposite rules the land. The physical world is just a container of raw materials waiting to be used, ethical principles like those of solidarity have been diminished, difference is rejected and criminalized, a case in point being, for example, the restrictions imposed on the free movement of individuals across national borders, solidarity prevails only among the powerful, the only goal in life is to buy more no matter what, and our well-being has been reduced to overcoming one single emotion: the vulnerability of fear.

If solidarity is emptied of its meaning, it becomes quite simple to erect barriers that exclude those who question the so-called 'natural' affiliations within the national community, whether this difference is homegrown or comes from abroad. Europe, for example, is a continent where war, exile, extermination, and political and cultural repression have been so pervasive over the last century that identity can no longer be grounded on the precarious and questionable notion of belonging to any of its artificial memberships. Traditionally, hegemonic identitarian frameworks based on birth, territory, language, or religion have been irrevocably rooted in exclusionary politics. Facile limitations to education, welfare systems, or civil society are justified at times on thin economic grounds, appealing to limited resources that need to be more efficiently allocated to those who 'deserve' them by the nation. But should a democracy worth its name classify citizens according to their legal status and limit their participation in political and social life? Should simplistic notions of the nation be used as a discriminatory tool erasing differences and needs rooted in biased uses of race, social class, and gender? Can the application of justice be contingent upon having a welcomed identity and/or nationality? Of course not.

In mainstream media and political discourse, it has become unproblematic, for example, to link the depletion of public welfare funds to supposedly systemic abuses by immigrants. In other words, when majority populations face moments of economic duress the logic of xenophobia reawakens and blinds progressive approaches to difference and the social contract. Should the narrative of immigration quotas trump that of the right to economic migration? Likewise, the advances of the political agendas of feminist and gender-sensitive thinking get manipulated to the point of justifying the exclusion of the foreign other based on a facile and reductionary conceptualization of this subject's cultural history or political agency. Why does a defense of the rights of women or of queer subjectivities only take center-stage and become suddenly 'ours' when we feel threatened by the foreign bodies that will 'contaminate' the European paradise? Underlying this approach is the belief in a theoretical framework that confronts civilizations (West against East) and religions (Christianity versus Islam).

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[1] There is a long list of solidarity movements worldwide that are looking for new ways of connecting political change with quality of life, struggles that go beyond the fight for legitimate political and economic rights and focus instead on how human rights go hand in hand with an imagining of how the peoples of the world can resist our neoliberal plutocracies. We are referring to the new kinds of social and economic networks that have flourished since the 2008 economic meltdown, some examples being: the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign (US), the PAH (Plataforma Anti-Deshaucios/Platform Against Foreclosures) (Spain), Ni Una Menos/Not One Women Less (Argentina), BlackLivesMatter (US), the 15-M Movement (Spain), La nuit debout/Sleepless Nights (France), Standing Rock (US), or worldwide solidarity movements with refugees like the recent Syrian crisis or the constant horror of drownings in the Mediterranean.

Both phenomena work willingly together and give way to responses that emphasize the superiority of the West and of Christianity over other cultural and religious manifestations. In EU Europe, for example, it is interesting to note that those who defend conservative and retrograde attitudes against homosexual marriage, for example, then appeal to the protection of the rights of women and non-normative individuals when they advocate closing their national borders to immigration from either poorer non-EU countries or from North Africa. In times of crisis, it is imperative to unmask these contradictions in order to elaborate an alternate imagining of citizenship distanced from these blindnesses.

The rejection of difference and dissidence via immigration also entails converting fear into a central guiding principle of social interaction at the individual and collective level. One could easily argue that the protection offered by the welfare state adds to the unease caused by generalized vulnerability when threatened during times of crisis. The less protected we feel the more afraid we are of losing our social safety net. The facile response of the nationalist to this precarity requires the demonization of immigrants, who supposedly either deplete the funds 'justifiably' reserved for the nation, abusing a system that was not intended for their support, or brutally attack the society that welcomes them by committing acts of terror. The falsehoods in this depiction are blatant for immigrants are sources of growth and betterment of all societies and, unfortunately, the victims, not the executioners, of terrorist attacks stemming from religious fundamentalism. However, fear does seem to trump rationality. Fear is, unquestionably, a handy device in traditional political terms for it is a very effective instrument for controlling populations in any society, even those that boast a healthy degree of political freedom, level of wealth, and social equity, for fear masks the underlying causes of this collective sense of vulnerability. Instead of uniting forces with those who suffer most from the effects of neoliberal globalization, most Europeans and Americans defend their small niche of wealth against those who have almost none. Instead of fighting against governments that only protect a casino-like financial system—and not its citizens—we ridiculously blame immigrants for our own shortcomings in dealing with rampant inequality and injustice within our societies.

We owe it to Paul Virilio to have proposed a Ministry of Fear as a substitute for the traditional and now outdated Ministry of War (Virilio 2005, p. 32). The powers in today's world are no longer interested in conquering and dominating other countries with the purpose of exploiting their natural resources and their people's labor (or not only). Instead, a supposed Ministry of Fear controls populations locally by managing the apprehensiveness installed in us and linked to the needs of neoliberal capitalism. For Virilio, our times are ones that turn affective ties into a totalitarianism of emotion. He calls this world unity in controlled affect, the "community of synchronized emotions" (Virilio 2010, p. 47) and it is against this 'community' that we must strive if we wish to take back what is rightfully ours: difference, speech, others (Virilio 1996, pp. 88, 93, 65). We face a fight for listening and contemplation (Berger 2014), of acknowledging ecological imbalances and near catastrophes. It entails a struggle to reclaim otherness, of acknowledging that you and I are inevitably entangled; and it is also a collective effort in recuperating language, meanings, and conceptual frameworks that will facilitate a better understanding of the maladies of our times.

In conclusion, we need to operate in different scales, globally and locally, but always close to home. In this way, following Chomsky, political activism should think in global terms when addressing problems and solutions and demand local responsibilities; as Berger suggested, affective ties also need a territory of sorts for they are dependent on our bodies and on our relations with others and with the planet. Activism must also seek to question all forms of nativist identities whose only purpose is to exclude and marginalize instead of facilitating integration; and, finally, as Paul Virilio proposed, political labor has to dispel the fear of others, as it creates a better language to rescue our lives from totalitarianism. The next section will address the new knowledge the world of political activism might wish to make its own as well as outline different types of political imaginaries that do not sit complicit with a caricature of the political when reduced to that of procedural elections.

2. Avenues for Change

No fundamental change in society can ever occur without developing ways of examining oppression and imagining progress that are multidimensional and intersectional. It is for this reason that we wish to spend some time here thinking about the contestatory power in political and intellectual discourses that are linked to a multi-layered, feminist-gendered perspective for it might not be obvious for some why neoliberal thought in the economic and political spheres are inherently patriarchal and phallocentric systems of oppression. What do we learn when gender and ethnicity are tapped as axes of analysis? Why would it be important to crisscross poverty, inequality, exclusion, discrimination, or deterritorialization, with gender, ethnicity, and class identity and relations? The answer is quite simple: a better interpretative frame should lead to stronger and more incisive political transformation. However, the translation of this project into actual social and political justice can be a minefield. For example, the 'feminization' of the peoples of so-called Third World, of immigrants, or of anyone on the margins within the countries considered central powerhouses is a pre-requisite to making them invisible and disposable in today's world order.

The same could be said about the dislocation of non-normative gender identities, sexualities, desires, or pleasures. Within the options of neoliberal embodiment these are areas of surplus, that it so say, areas of no value because they cannot be easily assimilated given their subversive and transgressive capabilities. Nevertheless, these surplus areas could be the foundation of a new libidinal economy or network of social interaction that would be motivated by desires and needs that are not exclusively driven by profit and gain. The first system aims at the betterment of our lives outside of the logic of success and market advancement while the latter only recognizes human needs if these can be expressed in terms of shareholder returns.

Where to begin? One place to look for answers is close to home for those of us involved in teaching and research: the growing and powerful corporate university and the kind of knowledge it privileges. Institutions of higher education, think tanks, or research institutes heavily depend upon the sponsorship of economic giants for the advancement of study and the funding of educational projects. Within this context, it is increasingly difficult for universities to fulfill their mission of supporting groundbreaking activities that decenter and question conventional knowledge. Educational practices and scholarly pursuits that pose a resistance to the needs of the neoliberal behemoth, that intentionally point to the fissures within the status quo, tend to find many roadblocks in their path for neoliberalism gets uncomfortable when desires, pleasures, needs, and knowledge itself try to break away from the regulatory logics of the disciplines. One need only pay attention to the kinds of 'success' stories that universities index as their own.

Educational models like the one offered through a liberal arts education attempt to disengage from the overspecialization that the neoliberal version demands, the latter being a format that undermines critical thought as it overstates the importance of skills or technical expertise. One could easily suspect a malicious turn in the devaluing of the arts and the humanities in this shift for the core mission of educational institutions has evolved from being a schooling for citizenship and democracy to one of the mercantilization of the individual, each of us becoming our own 'enterprise'. If today, institutions of learning seem increasingly less interested in addressing the pressing issues of our times from a humanistic point of view, it is because success is measured in exclusively quantifiable terms. Humanistic inquiry has been historically underfunded but in today's neoliberal world, the challenge is quasi ontological, for the probing into the world's problems from a literary or artistic point of view is almost deemed anathema, highly incomprehensible in today's economic parlance. The same can be said about the social scientist who needs to limit her disciplinary inquiries to becoming exercises of simple data collection. In the US, and increasingly so in Europe, public universities have become subservient to the needs of the market, i.e., to the issues deemed appropriate not by researchers and teachers but by the long arm of corporate influence over curricula and the measurement of outcomes. In the EU context, when the Bologna Process shifted the parameters of 'success' onto skills and metrics involving the labor market, it turned the 'measurable' into its new dogma, therefore, undermining the

long tradition of preparing students to become critical and engaged citizens. For sure, our students need applicable job skills and the university is certainly one of the places to acquire them. However, when did critical thinking, historical perspective, creativity, or a strong ethical formation, for example, stop being part of a well-educated student's qualifications? Those seeking employment in any field never stop being citizens of the world and hence should be actively engaged in understanding its complexities and sufficiently informed so as to critique and discriminate among solutions. A society that does not privilege models of education that lead to critical thinking, social awareness, ethical reflection, and social change is a society that has surrendered its collective well-being to special interest groups, to corporate agendas solely dedicated to balance sheets and the maximization of profits, not to the common good. Learning and research must always boast of independence, of unveiling uncomfortable truths, or it will be not.

In the corporate university, inequality, injustice, or unfairness are no longer operable values needed to explain societal troubles. Causes are buried under thick layers of propaganda-like discourses that make collective struggles and structural impediments the result of individual failure. Knowledge, for the most part, is not directed at benefitting public welfare, at better understanding the roots of our collective state of affairs, at instilling 'doubt' where the arrogance of zealot-like over-specialization prevails. Of course, it would be foolish to propose a facile rejection of practical skills, technological know-how, or quantifiable results. These are all highly important, but nevertheless, limited in scope and subtlety. In this light, the solutions to a grave societal issue like poverty, for example, have little to do with analyzing the political, cultural, or social ramifications of class relations, gender inequity, or global structures of economic power. We prefer to squander the explanatory power of a solid matrix of interconnected analyses and instead find solutions within the more limited explanatory frameworks that arise from a technologically and neoliberal inspired epistemology that can simplify the complexities of all things social into dubious, simplistic, and sometimes even nefarious answers like the building of increasingly larger prisons to confine social discontent and unrest within its walls.[2]

When university campuses surrender to this model they run the risk of becoming desolate intellectual landscapes making in Henry Giroux's terms 'common sense' and 'personal opinion' the litmus test for understanding reality (Davis 2003, pp. 6, 19). And while both are part of our cognitive world, it would be disingenuous not to point to how they have the potential of making the questioning of all things hegemonic more difficult, of being called to the service of eliminating alternative ways of perceiving the world. As a consequence, it seems 'natural' for university administrators to think of students as 'customers' (Giroux 6) and for students to demand gratification and results for the money they have spent on their education. Our institutions of higher learning run the risk of turning into supermarkets of superficial knowledge. One need only observe that our students increasingly dismiss the value of doubt, of grappling with discomfort, when confronted with critical thought and unconventional modes of inquiry, wary of actual freedom and personal growth. Many times, the success of a course is measured in solipsistic terms, i.e., in the level of personal satisfaction (grade) and safety (conformity) a course and faculty member offer. Why do educators find it increasingly difficult to question the demands of these 'consumers'? And among our students, which of them dare to question the so-called intellectual authority derived from common sense and opinion? Dissent is not in high demand and it is even suppressed (Davis 2003, p. 17) so while we wait for answers, teaching focuses more and more on the mindset of skills-based content and less so on unraveling the intricacies of social unrest and advancement. Hence it becomes increasingly difficult for our collective 'common sense' not to emulate the models of unjustified disagreement, whimsical opinion, emotional outbursts, or values put into circulation by the media outlets that are masterful in manufacturing consent.

Notwithstanding admirable exceptions, the model of education developed in most schools and universities has little to do with learning how to organize our personal and collective interactions from

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[2] This is a topic developed extensively in Angela Davis's writings (Giroux 2014).

alternative cultural, political, religious, or economic points of view. Given how neoliberal dictums displace empathy and compassion from all examples of informed and intelligent thinking about society, it would follow that university level learning does not find it urgent to partake any longer in discussions about what enhances or restricts life. Universities have become notorious for ignoring the humanistic needs of societies for individuals are above all consumers and not citizens. If the outcome of a solid education is exclusively measured along these lines, i.e., in potential earnings, access to power, and so on, it would seem clear that the model of profit and gain has been naturalized, despite its brutality and blindness. We live in times where it does not matter if success implies condemning parts of the world to long-term systemic poverty or to environmental disasters that will endanger life on the planet in the years to come. Why does this model make it so easy for those in power or its acolytes to ignore the social responsibility of the effects of these so-called successful practices? Why is life constructed upon disjunctives (my gain is your loss) and not in making the interconnectedness of life the guiding political principle of our times?

There is a gender story here as well for capitalism and its neoliberal ideology go hand in hand with a particular kind of gender, racial, geographic and class supremacy linked, of course, to patriarchy. Joan Acker (2010), for instance, did not hesitate to affirm that capitalism was a white male project (Acker 2010, p. 138) a project grounded on aggression, domination, and individualism. It would logically follow, for Acker, that capitalism would unsurprisingly conceptualize bodies, sexualities, and desires exclusively in terms of economic relations (Acker 2010, p. 143). Desires not satisfied by consumerism, sexualities independent of the normative, or bodies that do not exhibit canonical beauty fall outside of a 'usefulness' in a market-driven, commodified sense and, therefore, are rendered useless. All unyielding realms, like the road to our emotional well-being or notions about happiness or justice, to name a few, are either feminized or dislocated to occupying non-traditional masculine spaces which this heteronormative system writes in very precise and narrow ways. Those who are deemed unfit, unstable, nonconforming, or dangerous are pushed to the margins and 'downgraded' as unproductive.

In this regard, if one were to study prostitution under this framework, the entanglement of sex work with male violence against women, immigration, or the legal status of sex workers plays a very small role in understanding this phenomenon given how capitalist advocates see prostitution as a mere commercial agreement between two free agents. This approach is indifferent to the commodification of women's bodies and genitalia and disinterested in the disparity of power between the agents of this sexual transaction. In this unrealistic world of evenly coupled individuals, prostitution has little to do with sexism or with class or racist abuses. These are merely 'inefficiencies' easily resolved in a perfect market. This is why some time ago Angela Davis would not accept fighting sexism if the framework did not include race and class inequalities (Davis 1981, p. 142). In all of her work she is very careful in outlining why class and racial exploitation are inherent to capitalism itself and understood that it "does not discriminate between" or among the sexes (Davis 1981, p. 142). While it is certainly true that there is enough mistreatment to go around, we would also be misguided not to acknowledge that capitalism already makes gender one of its structural pillars. Both the consumer society of the 1960s as studied by (Debord 1995) and (Baudrillard 1998) and today's neoliberal, all-encompassing market logic of the financialization of all things human (Martin 2002) are built around a dual cultural rationale that dissociates 'things' from their origins (labor) and uses modes of 'seduction' and gender identity to entice us to the fold. In other words, formulations about gender identity and sexuality are part and parcel of capitalism's operational logic and success.

When studied together, capitalism, patriarchy, and today's educational model appear to be working in coordination, attempting to erase political and economic alternatives that might question the status quo of the world as we know it. More equitable commercial transactions, gender relations, or less instrumentalized learning are not on the horizon. We know that a utilitarian logic dominates us as human beings and reduces the complexity of our humanity and of the world to its usefulness within a frightful economic schema geared exclusively towards profit and the instrumentalization of all things

tangible (people, animals, resources) and intangible (ideas, social relations, emotion). Any economic, social, cultural, or learning system that does not eagerly support this state of affairs is labeled a failure, deemed for 'losers'. However, this is an illogical statement, if one were to pause a bit, for in neoliberal society 'failure' of the majority (the 99%) is the law of the land. In John Berger's terms, we live within a prison-like paradigm, whereby the few (1%) are kept safe, their dominance unquestioned by the walls of a 'prison' that keeps the majority out. Our wanting to climb that wall and to belong to the group of the select few is the driving motor of this engine. It makes us believe that this societal state of affairs of shortfallings, disappointments, and crises are "personal failings" (Davis 2003, p. 12). It is difficult to imagine a better explanation of this situation in what Giroux terms a hypermasculine context (Davis 2003, p. 16) of individualism, competition, and instrumentality. This total "disdain for community" (Davis 2003, p. 2), of those on the "outside" in Berger's words, comes with the privileging of an identity in heterosexual terms, according to Jack Halberstam (Halberstam 2011, p. 94), and with a frame of mind that could be termed pathological individualism. This is an identity that requires the segregation of the individual from his/her community, living and imagining in isolation, and severing from the human condition our affective needs, as if this were possible.[3]

Perhaps the time has come to counterbalance this model with a "new relation to life, culture, knowledge, and pleasure" (Halberstam 2011, p. xiv). We might be ready to do things differently, to shift priorities, to undo orthodox learning. Inspired by Michel Foucault's formulation of subjugated knowledge, Halberstam proposes a transformation of our social and cultural spheres by recuperating the transformative potential of the "low" or what Marxists like Antonio Gramsci termed the "popular." Subjugated knowledge is a matrix of radical alternatives that aspirationally fall outside of the logic of neoliberal thought and worldview. These alternatives are emancipatory, at least in spirit, whereby they open a window of opportunity within an excessively monolithic system dominated by the instrumentalization of all things human and within nature.

In our universities, we need to strive to teach courses that are counterintuitive, produce research that questions the comfort of disciplinary borders. Keeping close to the ground, to those experiences otherwise deemed unimportant, forgettable, or irrelevant, making abstraction germane for the experience of the "concrete" (Halberstam 2011, p. 15) will help undo the logic of our times. This more engaged stance helps us commit to producing knowledge that will destabilize the status quo of our fields, classrooms, and institutions. In Halberstam's thinking, this kind of approach to learning and its usefulness entails embracing "pirate cultures" of contestation, rupture, and discontinuity (Halberstam 2011, pp. 18–19), a clear break from officialdom. It requires adherence to failure, to the roughness of what does not quite fit.

An ethos of the singular, an ethos embedded in the arts, will be one that rescues us from our place in the 'market' of life and brings us closer to those places where joy, change, commitment, memory, and experience have always nested. Following Halberstam's lead, the times might be ripe for embracing a "truly political negativity" (Halberstam 2011, p. 110), one that requires being ready "to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to lash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate" (Halberstam 2011, p. 110) every idea and value in our way that subjugates. If a new political identity can emerge under this ethos, then we will have proven that those on the outside were able not only to look up and inwards towards the few but also to the side and see themselves surrounded by the many. Keeping alive the tension between our collective identities and dreams and our singular experiences will be the task at hand. And keeping the edges rough, too.

3　Pier Paolo Pasolini found the situation so grave in the earlier stages of neoliberalism that he would remark in "Cinema of Poetry" (1972) that the 1960s had seen the birth of a new anthropological type, that of the ill bourgeois who is obsessively attached to the world (Pasolini 1988, p. 181).

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