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[O]ne has no choice but to do all in one's power to change that fate and at no matter what risk - eviction, imprisonment, torture, death. For the sake of one's children, in order to minimize the bill that they must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion. - James Baldwin(1).

The people have awakened. If change had happened through elites, there wouldn't have been real change. Now people understand their rights and know how to demand them. They realized their own power. -Ahmed Mahir, leader of the Egyptian Youth April 6th Movement

Within the last few months, we have seen an outpouring of student protests from all over the globe. Fifty thousand students took to the streets in London to protest tuition hikes, while "thousands of young people in Puerto Rico and Ireland are marching against cuts to student funding and fee increases."(2) Students in France and Greece are demonstrating with their bodies, confronting the police and registering their outrage over the imposition of severe austerity measures. In Spain and Italy, youth are challenging unemployment rates that have soared to 40 and 30 percent respectively. In Tunisia and Egypt, students have been at the forefront of uprisings that eventually led to the overthrow of authoritarian societies, which for too long forced young people to linger in a liminal space in which there were no jobs, no hope for the future and far too few freedoms. This general sense of frustration among young people is widespread in Europe and the Middle East. For instance, students marching in Rome "shouted, 'We don't want to pay for the crisis,' referring to the financial crisis that has turned ... labor market[s] from bad to worse. 'Where do I see my future? Certainly not in this country,' said protester, Morgana Proietti, expressing a common sentiment."(3)

Counterpublic spheres and modes of resistance that we once did not think young people could mount have erupted in a rush of emotional and political expressions and scattered demonstrations. Mass demonstrations have been organized through the emergent screen cultures of a generation well versed in new technologically assisted forms of social networking and political exchange. Governments complicit with a lethal combination of massive inequality, joblessness and ongoing cutbacks in social services are now the object of righteous youthful aggression in which buildings are occupied, pitched battles are waged in the streets and banners are dropped from national symbols like the Leaning Tower of Pisa and once impregnable governmental institutions. Shared sufferings, pent up repressions, ideological longings and emotional attachments have flared up in a massive collective demand by young people to be part of a future in which justice, democratic values and politics once again matter. Forging collective spaces of resistance, young people are expressing their long simmering anger and indignation against harsh injustices, growing inequalities and insufferable injuries in both totalitarian and allegedly democratic countries. The fear of political transgression that kept individual actors in check has given way to a politics in which dissent is amplified, multiplied and seized upon with vigor and moral courage that has seldom found such thunderous expression among young people since the late 1970s. Democracy is no longer being

defended. It is being reinvented as a kind of shared existence that makes the political possible.(4)

Moral outrage infused by a complex of affective connections, social despair and a deeply held sense of shared possibilities has created a spontaneous tsunami of collective protests, strikes, rallies and demonstrations that have toppled governments, prompted shameless retaliatory outbursts of state terrorism and further fueled the possibilities for a global sense of resistance among repressed youth everywhere. Young people have used the new media to mobilize mass demonstrations, pitting their bodies against the police, Army, and other repressive forces. But they have also used the Internet and various social networks such as Twitter and Facebook to reach across national boundaries. In doing so, they have shared experiences, gathered information, circulated strategies for dealing with the police and developed nonviolent modes of protest.(5) For example, young leaders in Egypt exchanged information "with similar youth movements in Libya, Algeria and Morocco and Iran."(6)

Signaling a generational crisis that is global in scope, young people have sent a message to the world that they refuse to live any longer under repressive political regimes sustained by a morally bankrupt neoliberal world. Throughout Europe, youth exercised their sense of collective agency by calling for a revision of how democracy both listens to and treats them. In doing so, they disrupted the neoliberal inclination to take flight from social and moral responsibility. They defied a social order in which they could not work at a decent job, have access to a quality education or support a family, a social order that offered them only a life stripped of self-determination and dignity. A generation that was viewed as no longer having or caring about the future decided to abandon whatever residual faith they might have had in official politics or, for those who had none, the depoliticizing cynicism that often accompanies a loss of hope in the future. In an outburst that indicted the lack of vision, courage and responsibility on the part of their elders, young people in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, France, Puerto Rico and Greece took history into their own hands. They were fighting not merely for a space to survive, but for a society in which matters of justice, dignity and freedom are objects of collective struggle. These uprisings signal a new stage in which young people once again are defining what John Pilger calls the "theater of the possible."(7)

The shimmering fantasy, if not illusion and banalization, of hope gave way to a politics of collective action and massive resistance. From Tunis to Paris, a politics emerged that revealed a longing for the not yet and still possible. While marked by different historical contexts and diverse problems, this is a new kind of global politics in which the promise of democracy is reclaimed as a site of resistance rather than being used as either a hypocritical slogan for defending a repressive status quo or an empty appeasement promoting endless deferral of the promise of a better life. Students in Western Europe, in particular, are doing more than protesting cuts in educational funding and higher tuition rates; they are also loudly rejecting the market-driven insistence that education neither qualifies as a public good, nor should it be valued as a democratic public sphere. Nina Power, one of the student protesters in London, makes this clear in a comment reported in *The Guardian* UK. She insisted, "It was a protest against the narrowing of horizons; a protest against Lib Dem hypocrisy; a protest against the increasingly utilitarian approach to human life that sees degrees as nothing but 'investments' by individuals and denies any link between education and the broader social good."(8) Giuliano Amato, a former Italian prime minister, in an interview with the country's largest newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, makes clear that what students are protesting against involves more than economic issues. As he puts it, "they are also against a general situation in which the older generations have eaten the future of the younger ones."(9)

Underlying these youth protests in various countries are a set of conditions that reflect differing economic and political contexts. Yet, at the same time many of these nations share a disdain for young people and a not too hidden willingness to take advantage of any youth who are deemed valuable, leaving the rest to be increasingly viewed as troublemakers and subject to a growing apparatus of discipline and control. Under the global regime of a harsh, endlessly commodifying market-driven society that nonetheless parades under the banner of global democratization, many youth are confined to what anthropologist Joao Biehl provocatively calls "zones of social abandonment."⁽¹⁰⁾ These expanding groups of young people, especially those marginalized by class, race and immigrant status, are defined as a liability, no longer worthy of either social investment or the promise of a decent future. They are deprived of those autonomous social spaces in which the conditions exist for them to narrate themselves as individual and social agents. Meanwhile, politics under neoliberalism has been redefined through the double registers of corruption and punishment - not behind people's backs, as Marx once supposed it, but in full spectacular view of the world.

Out of place and subject to a grating diversity of realities that reveal massive unemployment, underpaid temporary work, skyrocketing tuition, escalating rent, rising food costs, deepening poverty and the indignity of having to live with their parents, youth no longer symbolize one of the most crucial investments enabling a society to build on its dreams. On the contrary, placed at the limits of the social, youth have become, as Jean and John Comaroff point out, "the creatures of our nightmares, of our social impossibilities and our existential angst."⁽¹¹⁾ Moreover, any expression of dissent invites state sanctioned rage, violence, torture and imprisonment. Both banned and abandoned by society, too many young people around the globe now live in what Zygmunt Bauman calls "a state of perpetual emergency."⁽¹²⁾

Every generation for the last 30 years has endorsed neoliberal policies, leaving today's young people not only without a voice, but also saddled with a set of economic, political and social conditions that have rendered them devalued, marginalized and ultimately disposable. Evidence of the ongoing disinvestment in youth across the globe is all too visible and has come to the forefront of student protests in a number of countries. For example, as the social value placed on higher education as a public good declines, students are increasingly valued, when valued at all, as wage earners. This is rather ironic since there are few jobs for them once they graduate. That the forces at work in capitalist countries - whether putatively democratic or overtly authoritarian - deny young people a future can be seen in a litany of disheartening figures. Elias Holtz sums it up well. He writes:

In capitalist countries worldwide, young people are sandwiched between the increasingly impossible expense of schooling and the dried-up job market. Youth unemployment rates are staggering. They are above 40 percent in Spain, 30 percent in Italy and an average of 20 percent for the European Union overall. In North Africa, unemployment of recent university graduates is almost 27 percent in Morocco and over 19 percent in Algeria. A third of all Arab youth are unemployed.... Corporations and employers have also moved to a more exploitative model of temporary work contracts, unpaid internships and part-time employment. This liquidizes the young labor force, allowing companies to hire and fire at will, without the responsibility of providing job security or benefits. Many young people are forced to live at home in rich countries - unable to afford to live independently. In poorer states, they peddle goods on the street to survive.⁽¹³⁾

In countries like the United States, driven largely by financial speculation, market values and the lure of short-term profits, young people are relegated to the status of commodities, a source of cheap labor or simply human waste. According to the logic of neoliberalism and what can only be described as its perversion of the social, youth as a long-term social investment fails to register politically or ethically. Instead, young people exist - if it can be called an existence - merely as consumers, clients or fodder for the military and prison-industrial complex.

As more and more young people are subject to the dictates of the punishing state, they are positioned within a culture of surveillance and cruelty marked by dead time. Futureless, they have been stuck in holding patterns that make clear that America's market-driven economy is deeply disconnected from humanity's collective relationship and responsibility to youth and the future.(14) Young people, for the last three decades in a variety of Western societies, have been led to believe that their choices no longer carry any serious consequences and that a better future is no longer open to them. As Lawrence Grossberg argues, youth have been condemned to "a new modernity in which there can be only one kind of value, market value; one kind of success, profit; one kind of existence, commodities; and one kind of social relationship, markets."(15) The global recession has intensified the war on youth, as professionals and politicians who make up a global business class now displace democracy with austerity and, in doing so, produce a hidden order of politics in which the "demand for the people's austerity hides processes of the uneven distribution of risk and vulnerability."(16)

What is new in these youth revolts that are rewriting the politics of the Middle East and Western Europe is a refusal on the part of young people to be written out of the future. The violence of the neoliberal state and its democratic and authoritarian articulations reveals a politics in which young people are labeled as an apathetic generation comfortable with living in a "state of stupor, in a moral coma" in order to justify denying their basic needs and forcing them to bear the brunt of a growing culture of cruelty.(17) Under these circumstances, there has been a concerted effort on the part of authoritarian and corporate states to destroy all those democratic public spheres that enable new models of association. If young people are granted the time, resources and support to reclaim a future that does not imitate the present, these models will have a better chance at creating the conditions for a future that makes good on the ideals and promises of democratization. What is remarkable about the mass revolts in Europe and the Middle East today is that young people have taken the lead in rejecting a future which, for the last 30 years or more, has been shamelessly mortgaged by both Western countries embracing a form of zombie politics and economic Darwinism and authoritarian societies in the Middle East that exhibit a deep hatred for democracy.

After living through years of a debilitating and humiliating disinvestment in the future, young people have hit the streets to reject the dismantling of services provided by the social state, the selling off of public goods, the politics of unchecked individualism, the rise of the punishing state, the collapse of long-term planning for the social good and the all encompassing and iniquitous power of corporate and authoritarian modes of sovereignty. At the heart of the emergent struggles we are witnessing all over the globe are youth movements that refuse to be silent and are more than willing to shatter, as Jacques Rancière puts it, the "coordinates of the sensible [and] bonds that enclose spectacles ... within the machine that makes the 'state of things' unquestionable."(18) Students and young people are now fighting back, affirming new modes of solidarity, forming alliances with workers and labor organizations and embracing a vision of democracy committed to economic and political equality. Most remarkably, this new generation of young people is able not only to think in terms that relate isolated problems to larger public considerations, but also to recognize the importance of a civic society

that provides the formative culture necessary for self-governing democratic societies. Hence, the emphasis on the new media, social networks and the Internet is not merely about dodging the repression of dissent. It is, more importantly, about creating new democratic public spheres where the values, ideas, dialogue, knowledge and social relations necessary for a democracy can take root, if not flourish.(19) It is about creating counterpublic spheres that "assert the public character of spaces, relations and institutions regarded as private" or currently limited to members of the ruling classes and authoritarian elites.(20) This is a generation that is fighting back and, in doing so, inventing new pedagogical tools to expose the official scripts of power while, at the same time, constructing new modes of association and struggle based on democratic ideals and values. One 15-year-old student speaking at a London youth conference captures the spirit of what it means for his generation to challenge contemporary injustices and inequality. He states:

We were meant to be the first post-ideological generation, right? ... That never thought of anything bigger than our Facebook profiles and TV screens.... I think now that claim is quite ridiculous, now we've shown that solidarity and comradeship and all those things that used to be associated with students are as relevant now as they've ever been. We are now the generation at the heart of the fight-back.(21)

What is promising about these student protests is that, while they may have begun in relation to specific issues such as rising tuition costs or mass unemployment, they have both gained momentum and successfully mobilized other constituencies such as labor by connecting single issues to a wider set of economic, social and political conditions. In doing so, these new social movements have called the larger neoliberal Zeitgeist into question. Specific issues have given rise to broader considerations. As a result, the totality of neoliberal and totalitarian societies have begun to fragment and weaken, offering a space for a broad alliance of individuals and groups, who are seeking not only political reform, but also meaningful and pervasive ideological and structural changes.

In the face of the mass uprisings in Western Europe and the Middle East, many commentators have raised questions about why comparable forms of widespread resistance are not taking place among American youth. Everyone from left critics to mainstream radio commentators voice surprise and disappointment that American youth appear unengaged by the collective action their counterparts in other countries are participating in and promoting. Courtney Martin, a senior correspondent for The American Prospect, suggests that American students are often privileged and view politics as something that happens elsewhere, far removed from local activism.(22) She writes:

Those who are politically active tend to set their sights on distant horizons - the poor in India, say or the oppressed in Afghanistan.... Many of us from middle- and upper-income backgrounds have been socialized to believe that it is our duty to make a difference, but undertake such efforts abroad - where the "real" poor people are. We found nonprofits aimed at schooling children all over the globe while rarely acknowledging that our friend from the high school football team can't afford the same kind of opportunities we can. Or we create Third World bicycle programs while ignoring that our lab partner has to travel two hours by bus, as he is unable to get a driver's license as an undocumented immigrant. We were born lucky, so we head to the bars - oblivious to the rising tuition prices and crushing bureaucracy inside the financial aid office.(23)

The other side of the overprivileged youth argument is suggested by longtime activist Tom Hayden, who argues that many students are so saddled with financial debt and focused on what it takes to get a job that they have little time for political activism.(24) Student activism in the United States, especially since the 1980s, has been narrowly issues based, ranging from a focus on student unionization, gender equity, environmental issues and greater minority enrollment to "the establishment of ethnic studies programs in universities or health-care benefits for graduate students," thus circumscribing in advance youth participation in larger political spheres.(25) Simon Talley, a writer for Campus Progress, may be closer to the truth in claiming that students in the United States have less of an investment in higher education than European students because, for the last 30 years, they have been told that higher education neither serves a public good nor is an invaluable democratic public sphere.(26)

These commentators along with many others all underestimate the historical and current impacts of the conservative political climate on American campuses on the culture of youth protest. This conservatism took firm hold with the election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of both neoconservative and neoliberal disciplinary apparatuses since the 1980s. Youth have in fact been very active in the last few decades, but in many instances, for deeply conservative ends. As Susan Searls Giroux has effectively argued, a series of well-funded, right-wing campus organizations have made much use of old and new media to produce best-selling screeds as well as interactive web sites for students to report injustices in the interests of protesting the alleged left totalitarianism of the academy. She writes:

Conservative think tanks provide \$20 million annually to the campus Right, according to the People for the American Way, to fund campus organizations such as Students for Academic Freedom, whose credo is "You can't get a good education if they're only telling you half the story" and boasts over 150 campus chapters. Providing an online complaint form for disgruntled students to fill out, the organization's website monitors insults, slurs and claims of more serious infractions that students claim to have suffered. Similarly, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, founded by William F. Buckley, funds over 80 right-wing student publications through its Collegiate Network, which has produced such media darlings as Dinesh D'Souza and Ann Coulter. There is also the Leadership Institute, which trains, supports and does public relations for 213 conservative student groups who are provided with suggestions for inviting conservative speakers to campus, help starting conservative newspapers or training to win campus elections. Or the Young Americans for Freedom, which sponsors various campus activities such as "affirmative action bake sales" where students are charged variously according to their race or ethnicity or announcements of "whites only" scholarships.(27)

Liberal students, for their part, have engaged in forms of activism that also mimic neoliberal rationalities. The increasing emphasis on consumerism, immediate gratification and the narcissistic ethic of privatization took its toll in a range of student protests developed over issues such as the right to party and "a defense of the right to consume alcohol." As Mark Edelman Boren points out in his informative book on student resistance, alcohol-related issues caused student uprisings on a number of American campuses. In one telling example, he writes "At Ohio University, several thousand students rioted in April 1998 for a second annual violent protest over the loss of an hour of drinking when clocks were officially set back at the beginning of daylight savings time; forced out of area bars, upset students hurled rocks and bottles at police, who knew to

show up in full riot gear after the previous year's riot. The troops finally resorted to shooting wooden 'knee-knocker' bullets at the rioters to suppress them."(28)

All of these explanations have some merit in accounting for the lack of student resistance among American students, but I'd like to shift the focus of the conversation. Student resistance in the United States must be viewed within a broader political landscape that, with few exceptions, remains unexamined. In the first instance, students in Western Europe, in particular, are faced with a series of crises that are more immediate, bold and radical in their assault on young people and the institutions that bear down heavily on their lives. In the face of the economic recession, educational budgets are being cut in take-no-prisoners extreme fashion; the social state is being radically dismantled; tuition costs have spiked exponentially; and unemployment rates for young people are far higher than in the United States (with the exception of youth in poor minority communities). European students have experienced a massive and bold assault on their lives, educational opportunities and their future. Moreover, European students live in societies where it becomes more difficult to collapse public life into largely private considerations. Students in these countries have access to a wider range of critical public spheres; politics in many of these countries has not collapsed entirely into the spectacle of celebrity/commodity culture; left-oriented political parties still exist; and labor unions have more political and ideological clout than they do in the United States. Alternative newspapers, progressive media and a profound sense of the political constitute elements of a vibrant, critical, formative culture and range of public spheres that have not erased the possibility to think critically, engage in political dissent, organize collectively and inhabit public spaces in which alternative and critical theories can be developed.

Because of the diverse nature of how higher education is financed and governed in the United States, the assault on colleges and universities has been less uniform and differentially spread out among community colleges, public universities and elite colleges, thus lacking a unified and highly oppressive narrative against which to position resistance. Moreover, the campus "culture wars" narrative has served to galvanize many youth around a reactionary cultural project while distancing them from the very nature of the economic and political assault on their future. All this suggests another set of questions has to be raised. The more important questions, ones which do not reproduce the all-too-commonplace demonization of young people as apathetic, are twofold. First, the issue should not be why there have been no student protests, but why have the protests that have happened not been more widespread, linked, sustained? The student protests against the draconian right-wing policies attempting to destroy the union rights and collective bargaining power of teachers supported by Republican Gov. Scott Walker in Wisconsin is one example indicating that students are engaged and concerned. There are also smaller student protests taking place at various colleges, including Berkeley, CUNY, and on other campuses throughout the United States. But student activists appear to constitute a minority of students, with very few enrolled in professional programs. Most student activists are coming from the arts, social sciences and humanities (the conscience of the college). Second, there is the crucial issue of what sort of conditions have young people inherited in American society that has undermined their ability to be critical agents capable of waging a massive protest movement against the growing injustices they face on a daily basis? After all, the assault on higher education in the United States, while not as severe as in Europe, still suggests ample reasons for students to be in the streets protesting such policies. Close to 43 states have pledged major cuts to higher education in order to compensate for insufficient state funding. This means an unprecedented hike in tuition rates is being implemented, enrollments are being slashed, salaries are being reduced and need-based scholarships

in some states are being eliminated. Pell Grants, which allow poor students to attend college, are being cut. Robert Reich has chronicled some of the impacts on university budgets, which include: Georgia cutting "state funding for higher education by \$151 million"; Michigan reducing "student financial aid by \$135 million";(29) Florida raising tuition in its 11 public universities by 15 percent; and the University of California increasing tuition by 40 percent in two years.(30) As striking as these increases are, tuition has steadily risen over the past several decades, becoming a disturbingly normative feature of post-secondary education.

One reason students are not protesting these cuts in large numbers may be that, by the time the average American student now graduates, he or she has not only a degree, but also an average debt of about \$23,000.(31) The vast majority must balance jobs with academics, leaving no opportunity to protest, however motivated a student might be. This debt amounts to a growing form of indentured servitude for many students that both undercuts any viable notion of social activism and is exacerbated by the fact that "unemployment for recent college graduates jumped from 5.8 percent to 8.7 percent in 2009." (32) Crippling debt plus few job opportunities in a society in which individuals are relentlessly held as solely responsible for the problems they experience leaves little room for rethinking the importance of larger social issues and the necessity for organized collective action against systemic injustices. In addition, as higher education becomes one of the most fundamental requirements for employment, many universities have reconfigured their mission exclusively in corporate terms, replacing education with training and defining students as consumers, faculty as a cheap form of subaltern labor and entire academic departments as "cost centers and revenue production units."(33) No longer seen as a social or public good, higher education is increasingly viewed less as a site of struggle than as a credential mill for success in the global economy.

Meanwhile, not only have academic jobs been disappearing, but given the shift to an instrumentalist education that is technicist in nature, students have been confronted for quite some time with a vanishing culture for sustained critical thinking. As universities and colleges emphasize market-based skills, students are neither learning how to think critically nor how to connect private troubles with larger public issues. The humanities continue to be downsized, eliminating one source of learning that encourages students to develop a commitment to public values, social responsibilities and the broader demands of critical citizenship. Moreover, critical thinking has been devalued as a result of the growing corporatization of higher education. Under the influence of corporate values, thought in its most operative sense loses its *modus operandi* as a critical mediation on "civilization, existence and forms of evaluation."(34) Increasingly, it has become more difficult for students to recognize how their education in the broadest sense has been systematically devalued and how this not only undercuts their ability to be engaged critics, but contributes further to making American democracy dysfunctional. How else to explain the reticence of students in protesting against tuition hikes? The forms of instrumental training they receive undermine any critical capacity to connect the fees they pay to the fact that the United States puts more money into the funding of war, armed forces and military weaponry than the next 25 countries combined - money that could otherwise fund higher education.(35) The inability both to be critical of such injustices and to relate them to a broader understanding of politics, suggests a failure to think outside of the normative sensibilities of a neoliberal ideology that isolates knowledge and normalizes its own power relations. In fact, one recent study found that "45 percent of students show no significant improvement in the key measures of critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing by the end of their sophomore years."(36) The corporatization of schooling over the last few decades has done more than make universities into adjuncts of corporate power. It has also produced a culture of illiteracy

and undermined the conditions necessary to enable students to be engaged and critical agents. The value of knowledge is now linked to a crude instrumentalism and the only mode of education that seems to matter is one that enthusiastically endorses learning marketable skills, embracing a survival-of-the-fittest ethic and defining the good life solely through accumulation and disposing of the latest consumer goods. Academic knowledge has been stripped of its value as a social good; to be relevant and therefore funded, knowledge has to justify itself in market terms or simply perish.

Enforced privatization, the closing down of critical public spheres and the endless commodification of all aspects of social life have created a generation of students, who are increasingly being reared in a society in which politics is viewed as irrelevant, just as the struggle for democracy is erased from social memory. This is not to suggest that Americans have abandoned the notion that ideas have power or that ideologies and visions can move people. Unfortunately, the institutions and cultural apparatuses that generate such ideas seem to be primarily controlled by the corporate media, right-wing think tanks, and other conservative groups. Public pedagogy is dominated by the right, whose activities proceed, more often than not, unchallenged from a left that has never taken public pedagogy seriously as part of its political strategy. The rise of the Tea Party movement seems to have no counterpart among progressives, especially young people, though this may change given the arrogant and right-wing attack being waged on unions, public-sector workers and public school educators in Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio, New Jersey, and other states where Tea Party candidates have come to power.(37)

In a social order dominated by the relentless privatizing and commodification of everyday life and the elimination of critical public spheres, young people find themselves in a society in which the formative cultures necessary for a democracy to exist have been more or less eliminated, reduced to spectacles of consumerism made palatable through a daily diet of game shows, reality TV and celebrity culture. What is particularly troubling in American society is the absence of vital, formative cultures necessary to construct questioning agents, who are capable of seeing through the consumer come-ons, who can dissent and act collectively in an increasingly imperiled democracy. Sheldon Wolin is instructive in his insistence that the creation of a democratic, formative culture is fundamental to enabling both political agency and a critical understanding of what it means to sustain a viable democracy. According to Wolin,

democracy is about the conditions that make it possible for ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs. What is at stake in democratic politics is whether ordinary men and women can recognize that their concerns are best protected and cultivated under a regime whose actions are governed by principles of commonality, equality and fairness, a regime in which taking part in politics becomes a way of staking out and sharing in a common life and its forms of self-fulfillment. Democracy is not about bowling together but about managing together those powers that immediately and significantly affect the lives and circumstances of others and one's self.(38)

Instead of public spheres that promote dialogue, debate and arguments with supporting evidence, American society offers young people a conservatizing, deformative culture through entertainment spheres that infantilize almost everything they touch, while legitimating opinions that utterly disregard evidence, reason, truth and civility. The delete button has replaced the critical knowledge and the modes of education needed for intimacy, long-term commitments and the search for the good society. Attachments are short-lived and the pleasure of instant gratification cancels out the coupling of freedom, reason and responsibility. As a long-term social investment,

young people are now viewed as a liability, if not a pathology. No longer a symbol of hope and the future, they are viewed as a drain on the economy and if they do not assume the role of functioning consumers, they are considered disposable.

Within the last 30 years, the United States under the reign of market fundamentalism has been transformed into a society that is more about forgetting than learning, more about consuming than producing, more about asserting private interests than democratic rights. In a society obsessed with customer satisfaction and the rapid disposability of both consumer goods and long-term attachments, American youth are not encouraged to participate in politics. Nor are they offered the help, guidance and modes of education that cultivate the capacities for critical thinking and engaged citizenship. As Bauman points out, in a consumerist society, "the tyranny of the moment makes it difficult to live in the present, never mind understand society within a range of larger totalities."(39) Under such circumstances, according to Theodor Adorno, thinking loses its ability to point beyond itself and is reduced to mimicking existing certainties and modes of common sense. Under such circumstances, thought cannot sustain itself and becomes short-lived, fickle and ephemeral. If young people do not display a strong commitment to democratic politics and collective struggle, it is because they have lived through 30 years of "a debilitating and humiliating disinvestment in their future," especially if they are marginalized by class, ethnicity and race.(40) What is new about this generation of young people is that they have experienced first-hand the relentless spread of a neoliberal pedagogical apparatus with its celebration of an unbridled individualism and its near pathological disdain for community, public values and the public good. They have been inundated by a market-driven value system that encourages a culture of competitiveness and produces a theater of cruelty that has resulted in "a weakening of democratic pressures, a growing inability to act politically, [and] a massive exit from politics and from responsible citizenship."(41) If American students are not protesting in large numbers the ongoing intense attack on higher education and the welfare state, it may be because they have been born into a society that is tantamount to what Alex Honneth has called "an abyss of failed sociality [one in which] their perceived suffering has still not found resonance in the public space of articulation."(42)

Of course, there are students in the United States who are involved in protesting the great injustices they see around them, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the corruption of American politics by casino capitalism, a permanent war economy and the growing disinvestment in public and higher education. But they are indeed a minority and not because they are part of what is often called a "failed generation." On the contrary, the failure lies elsewhere and points to the psychological and social consequences of growing up under a neoliberal regime that goes to great lengths to privatize hope, derail public values and undercut political commitments. The way society conceptualizes youth, especially poor youth of color, has changed from viewing youth as a symbol of hope and promise into a sign of trouble and threat. What is clear as a result of this "failed sociality" is that, if democracy is going to deliver on its promises, not only do young people need to have a passion for public values, social responsibility and participation in society, but they also need access to those public spaces that guarantee the rights of free speech, dissent, a quality education and critical dialogue.

At the heart of such public spaces is a formative culture that creates citizens who are critical thinkers capable of "putting existing institutions into question so that democracy again becomes society's movement ... that is to say, a new type of regime in the full sense of the term."(43) Young people need to be educated both as a condition of autonomy and for the sustainability of democratization as an ongoing movement. Not only does a substantive democracy demand citizens capable of self- and social criticism, but it also, once again, requires a critical formative culture in which people are provided

with the knowledge and skills to be able to participate in such a society. What we see in the struggle for educational reforms in Europe and the Middle East is a larger struggle for the economic, political and social conditions that give meaning and substance to what it means to make democracy possible. When we see 15 year olds battle the established oppressive orders in the streets of Paris, Cairo, London and Athens for a more just society, they offer a glimpse of what it means for youth to enter "modernist narratives as trouble."(44) But trouble here exceeds dominant society's eagerness to view them as a pathology, as monsters and a drain on the market-driven order. Instead, trouble speaks to something more suggestive of a "productive unsettling of dominant epistemic regimes under the heat of desire, frustration or anger."(45) The expectations that frame market-driven societies are losing their grip on young people, who can no longer be completely seduced or controlled by the tawdry promises and failed returns of corporate dominated and authoritarian regimes.

These youth movements tell us that the social visions embedded in casino capitalism and deeply authoritarian regimes have lost both their utopian thrust and their ability to persuade and intimidate through threats, coercion and state violence. Rejecting the terrors of the present and the modernist dreams of progress at any cost, young people have become, at least for the moment, harbingers of democracy fashioned through the desires, dreams and hopes of a world based on the principles of equality, justice and freedom. In doing so, they are pointing to a world order in which the future will certainly not mimic the present. What might be characterized by some commentators as an outburst of youthful utopianism reminiscent of the 1960s may in fact be the outcome of "the most concrete and pressing reality."(46) Youth culture has proven to be global in its use of new media, music and fashion and increasingly in terms of its collective anger against deep-seated injustice and its willingness to struggle against such forces. It is only a matter of time before American youth recognize that they are more than consumers; market-driven society is not synonymous with democracy; private rights are not more important than the social good; and society's view of them as pathological and disposable demands a call for massive resistance in the streets, schools and every other public space in which justice and democracy matter.

One of the most famous slogans of May 1968 was "Be realistic, demand the impossible." The spirit of that slogan is alive once again. But if it is to become more than a slogan, young people in the United States must join their counterparts across the globe in struggling to continue to build the formative cultures, critical public spheres, social movements and democratic institutions necessary to make that recognition and struggle possible. Thus, the most important question to be raised about American students is not why they do not engage in massive protests, but when will they look beyond the norms, discourses and rewards of the neoliberal society they have inherited from their elders? When will they begin to learn from their youthful counterparts protesting all over the globe that the first step in building a democratic society is to imagine a future different than the one that now stunts their dreams as much as their social reality? Only then can they be successful in furthering the hard and crucial task of struggling collectively to make a future based on the promise of democratic freedom happen. Taking a cue from the youth movement that helped to topple the Hosni Mubarak government, American youth must "understand their rights and know how to demand them" and realize "their own power" just like their counterparts in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Serbia, and all those other countries coming out of the darkness, heralded by the right to freedom, justice and equality

Footnotes:

1. James Baldwin, "The Fire Next Time" (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 104.
2. Elias Holtz, "The Global Student Revolt: Youth Protests Demand Education for All, Not Just for the Rich," *Socialism.com* (February 2011)..
3. Cited in Rachel Donadio, "Europe's Young Grow Agitated Over Future Prospects," *New York Times* (January 1, 2011), p. A6.
4. Pacale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, "Translator's Note," in Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Truth of Democracy" (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. xi.
5. For one of the intellectual resources used by youth leaders to develop nonviolent modes of protest, see Gene Sharp, "From Dictatorship to Democracy" (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institute, 2010).
6. See, for instance, David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, "Dual Uprisings Show Potent New Threats to Arab States," *New York Times* (February 13, 2011), p. A1.
7. John Pilger, "The Revolt in Egypt Is Coming Home," *Truthout.org* (February 10, 2011)..
8. Simeon Talley, "Why Aren't Students in the U.S. Protesting Tuition, Too?" *Campus Progress* (December 23, 2010).
9. Cited in Donadio, "Europe's Young," p. A6.
10. Joao Biehl, "Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment" (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).
11. John and Jean Comaroff, "Reflections on Youth, from the Past to the Postcolony," in Melissa S. Fisher and Greg Downey, eds., "Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on the New Economy" (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 268.
12. Zygmunt Bauman, "Freudian Civilization Revisited - Or Whatever Happened to the Reality Principle?" *Journal of Anthropological Psychology*, No. 21 (2009), p. 8.
13. Holtz, "The Global Student Revolt."
14. I am paraphrasing here from Sally Davison, "Ecowars," *Soundings*, Issue 34 (Autumn 2006).
15. Lawrence Grossberg, "Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics and America's Future" (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p. 264.
16. Gesa Helms, Marina Vishmidt and Lauren Berlant, "Affect and the Politics of Austerity: An Interview Exchange With Lauren Berlant," *Variant*, 39/40 (Winter 2010).
17. Leo Lowenthal, "Atomization of Man, False Prophets: Studies in Authoritarianism" (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), p. 182.
18. Cited in Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, "Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum* (March 2007), pp. 260-261
19. I take this issue up in Henry A. Giroux, "The Crisis of Public Values in the Age of the New Media," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 28: 1 (2011), pp. 8-29.
20. Jacques Rancière, "Democracy, Republic Representation," *Constellations* 13:3 (2006), p. 300.
21. Holtz, "The Global Student Revolt."
22. This theme is taken up in great detail in Courtney Martin, "Do It Anyway: A New Generation of Activists" (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010). The analysis suffers from the same sort of privilege that it critiques. It suggests that not only are privileged middle-class kids the vanguard of change for this generation, but they suffer from both a narcissistic refusal to look inward and an ego-driven sense of politics that is as narrow as it is paternalistic and missionary in focus. This critique is too simple, lacks complexity and appears to suffer from the same problem to which it is objecting.
23. Courtney E. Martin, "Why Class Matters in Campus Activism," *The American Prospect* (December 6, 2010).
24. *Ibid.*
25. Mark Edelman Boren, "Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject" (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 227.
26. Talley, "Why Aren't Students."
27. Susan Searls Giroux, "Between Race and Reason: Violence, Intellectual Responsibility and the University to Come" (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 79.

28. Edelman Boren, "Student Resistance," p. 228.
29. Robert Reich, "The Attack on American Education," ReaderSupportedNews.org (December 23, 2010).
30. In a personal correspondence to me, David Theo Goldberg spells out the nature of the cuts at the University of California system. He writes: "The projection for next year is a \$500 million cut to the UC budget from previous state support of \$3.3 billion or so (and an overall budget of \$19 billion) for the system. About a \$50 million cut to each of the campuses. And another \$500 million unfunded mandate to pick up campus contributions to pensions. So we are looking at something like an overall 3-6% cut of entire budget (including salaries and student support and all). Student fees have increased a total of 40 percent in past two years, though only those whose families earn more than \$180,000 a year get to pay the full fees; those earning under somewhere in the vicinity of \$80,000 a year pay no fees at all - so about half UC student population pay less than full fees. That said, [Governor Jerry] Brown has mandated that UC cannot raise fees again to deal with the next round of cuts - or else will lose further state funding proportionately. And where California goes often goes the rest of the nation."
31. There are many books and articles that take up this issue. One of the most incisive commentators is Jeffrey Williams, "Student Debt and the Spirit of Indenture," *Dissent* (Fall 2008).
32. David Masciotra, "The Rich Get Richer and the Young Go Into Deep Debt," *BuzzFlash* (December 6, 2010).
33. Simon Head, "The Grim Threat to British Universities," *New York Review of Books* (January 13, 2011).
34. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Truth of Democracy," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 9.
35. Tom Engelhardt, "An American World War: What to Watch for in 2010," *Truthout.org* (January 3, 2010). See also Andrew Bacevich, "The New American Militarism" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Chalmers Johnson, "Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Empire" (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).
36. Eric Gorski, "45% of Students Don't Learn Much In College," *Huffington Post* (January 21, 2011). The study is taken from Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, "Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
37. For an informative commentary on these anti-union tactics and assaults on public schoolteachers and public education, see Faiz Shakir, Benjamin Armbruster, George Zornick, Zaid Jilani, Alex Seitz-Wald, and Tanya Somanader, "The Main Street Movement," *The Progress Report* (February 23, 2011). For those who believe that public workers are the problem, this chart on inequality tells a different story altogether. See: Dave Gilson and Carolyn Perot, "It's the Inequality, Stupid." *Mother Jones* (March/April 2011)
38. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 259-260.
39. Zygmunt Bauman, "Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 159.
40. Bauman, "Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers" p. 235. I have also taken up this theme in great detail in Henry A. Giroux, "Youth in a Suspect Society" (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
41. Zygmunt Bauman, "The Individualized Society" (London: Polity, 2001), p. 55.
42. Alex Honneth, "Pathologies of Reason" (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 188.
43. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime," *Constellations* 4:1 (1997), p. 10.
44. Jean and John Comaroff, "Reflections of Youth," pp. 268.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Cited in Brault and Naas, "Translators Note," p. xii.