

Neoliberal Neurosis Theorizing for the Potential of a Heterophonic Curriculum

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Abstract

The concept of human subjectivity raises questions about how individuals engage with the world to maintain and cultivate a sense of self. In this article, I pay attention to the formative and complementary dimensions of human subjectivity—persistence and transformability—and propose an alternative to the curriculum paradigm propelling neoliberal subjectivity. First, I draw on Foucault’s theory of the economic subject and Freudian neurosis to illustrate how neoliberal structures can engender neurotic forms of subjectivity, which give prominence to economic efficiency and independent sacrifice. I discuss the impact of neoliberal pressures on subjectivity, especially their tendency to champion perpetual self-control and performance. Second, I utilize the concept of the death drive as a framework for reimagining a curriculum capable of varying the effects of neoliberal neurosis by moving towards a less egocentric consciousness. The analysis of neoliberal neurotic subjectivity and the lens of the death drive ultimately offers insights into the “heterophonic” potential of a curriculum. I argue that, on the heterophonic ground, the curriculum can roughly be in sync with seemingly contradictory yet interconnected elements, such as death and life, rather than solely seeking survival and instrumental modes of subjectivity in pursuit of economic maximization.

Keywords: *neurosis; psychoanalytic perspective; neoliberalism; subjectivity; curriculum theory*

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Introduction

Pinar (2019) argues that curriculum can be conceived as a complicated conversation “in which academic knowledge, subjectivity, and society become reciprocally reinvigorated” (p. 10). The curriculum sketches the contour of education, which “requires subjectivity in order for it to speak, for it to become embodied, to become actual. Without the agency of subjectivity education evaporates, replaced by conformity compelled by scripted curricula and standardized tests” (Pinar, 2019, p. 23). Our subjectivity enables conversation to germinate in, about, and around knowledge, playing a meaningful role in shaping relationships with self, others, and society. Meanwhile, this interactive potential of the curriculum does not always occur on an equal footing. Levin (1989/2019) points out that a conversation is an event involved in the agendas of an institution: “The participants in the conversation are never merely individuals; they are always also representatives of institutional power, bringing with them a multiplicity of vested interests – and many virtually inaudible agendas” (p. 111). Therefore, the curriculum woven around conversation opens an aperture where intersections between individual subjectivity and social dynamics expand knowledge.

Among many views on conversation, psychoanalytic perspectives especially highlight the intricacy of conversation between analysts and analysands while tracking the pressure of inner and outer forces on subjectivity, which may prevent individuals from unconstrained and freedom. Lacan (1961) notably highlights that “transference” refers to “the feelings experienced by the analysand with respect to the analyst,” while “countertransference,” that is, “feelings experienced

by the analyst in analysis,” arises continuously in response to the analysand (p. 162). This process of constructing analytical connections, comparable to the “analytic bridge game” (p. 161), encompasses the domains of “the symbolic, the imaginary and real,” involving unforeseen “introjection and projection” (Lacan, 1961, p. 297). Thus, psychoanalysis is an extensive “theory of interpretation” seeking to understand speakers’ speech “symptomatically, erotically, and therapeutically” (Britzman, 2011, p. 3). Its journey entails understanding human anxiety, repression, and attachment relationships by “binding concrete and symbolic into an interpretive housing” (Luxon, 2013, p. 96). The exploration of *psycho-* builds space for “the social imaginary” where individuals live, write, and speak (Britzman, 2009, p. 109). Psychoanalysis does not exclusively address the impacts of nature. Freud’s ideas about temporality enclose both individual experiences and broader cultural influences (Perelberg, 2018). Namely, through the revelation of psychic events, psychoanalytic approaches shed light on “unexplained neurotic symptoms” of fantasies and struggles without “being lost with the actual current situation” (Freud, 1925/1995, pp. 25–27). The social realm of this situation nowadays appears in education systems that cherish market-oriented principles, endless self-sacrifice, and self-scrutiny. This neoliberal trend can transform school curricula into rigid routines designed to produce human resources for private enterprises and the nation-state’s economic survival.

Indeed, neoliberal governance operates more directly in curriculum development through “an international restructuring of labor and capital” (Baltodano, 2012, p. 490), as it consistently calls attention to individual performance. Neoliberal governance emphasizes

educational content geared towards producing “safe knowledge” (Moore, 2015, p. 158) to promote national economic excellence and growth. Within this context, the paradigm of performative “repairment” (Moore, 2015, p. 138) becomes noticeable, whereby individuals are continuously expected to rectify their errors through “a remedial and correctional focus” of their institutions (Gardner et al., 2023, p. 10), “fear” of deviating from the established neoliberal societal structure (Goh, 2023, p. 169), and socially required positions as citizens (Guerrero Farías, 2021, p. 1106). This neoliberal flow stresses outcome-based learning models that foreground the role of experts in learning and assessment methods, which exacerbates the pressure for individual accountability and student achievement (Melanson, 2023; Pinto, 2016), as well as teachers’ ongoing struggles with identity formation and (re)negotiation processes (Reeves, 2018).

Bearing this in mind, in this article, using conceptual lenses from Freud’s psychoanalytic perspectives on neurosis, I aim to theorize and challenge neurotic subjectivity towards the alternative directions of the curriculum. The intention of this article is not to discuss the specific curriculum and evaluate its effectiveness but rather to address the substantive issue of subjectivity, according to which the curriculum can be perceived as more intersubjective instead of monosubjective. I expressly conceptualize the concept of neurosis that can be orchestrated through neoliberalism’s rise to power while illuminating how neoliberal neurosis is attached to self-reliant entrepreneurial subjectivity for the knowledge of self-sacrifice and performativity.

Moreover, to counteract the neurotic operation of subjectivity, I emphasize the psy-

choanalytic concept of the death drive, “an instinct of destruction directed against the external world and other organisms” (Freud, 1923/1995, p. 646). The death drive is not linearly associated with engendering the inorganic state, as it cuts across the libidinal drive for the continuity of one’s life. Freud (1927/1995) points out that “[d]eath itself is not extinction, is not a return to inorganic lifeless, but the beginning of a new kind of existence which lies on the path of development to something higher” (p. 696). De Masi (2015) further proposes that pleasure is not entirely reliant on defending against external pressures; instead, “the destructive mechanisms,” whether directed inward or outward, can be influential as those pursuing individual survival “through self-affirmation and satisfaction of the drives” (p. 457).

Drawing from Freudian insights into the death drive, I propose that the death drive can challenge habitual neoliberal subjectivity, which offers a valuable perspective for reimagining educational curricula towards facilitating a reciprocal collective consciousness, a concept often reflected in heterophonic music. Heterophony, “a form of pitch blending in which individuals generate similar musical lines but in which these lines are poorly synchronized” (Brown, 2007, p. 3), can be a rich metaphor for the curriculum. As different players’ melodies overlap, heterophony contributes to “the revelation of inner emotions,” exploring different dimensions of melodic phrases (Nezelschi, 2019, p. 202). This artistic form illustrates instinctual, intentional, and serene aspects of the life and death flow, helping reframe the instrumental pursuit of neoliberal subjectivity as a possibility of varying the curriculum.

Society from the Emergence of Neoliberal Neurosis

Neurosis has a strong relationship with anxiety. Freud (1933/1995) notes that human anxiety involves both realistic and neurotic characteristics. A sense of anxiety creates an expectation of danger against which the *ego* seeks imminent relief for self-protection. However, the *ego*'s defensive process generates struggles, tensions, and untreated anxiety (see also Freud, 1924/1961), which repress pleasure-seeking drives and cause a "flight from reality with neurotic consequences" (Isin, 2004, p. 224). Discharging the pressures of anxiety is thus a significant task for the *ego* to preserve the reality principle and navigate externally imposed conditions. The problem is that when the tension is inadequately discharged, a sense of struggle becomes neurosis, where the fantasy of liberation from repression (Freud, 1966) and reality result in cognitive dissonance. Individuals with neurosis may feel helpless and sometimes lose control of their agitation (Freud, 1926/2013).

Moreover, Jung (1969) points out that the unconscious represents life itself, "an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama which primitive man rediscovers, by means of analogy" (p. 7). Neurosis happens when the unconscious is suppressed and "life turns against us" (Jung, 1969, p. 288). Individuals with intense neurosis would find themselves caught in an endless loop of egocentric absorption, characterized by worries, anxiety, and insecurity until they step out of their private sphere and reveal those truths to the outside of neurosis, that is, to *the other*: "The reason for evil in the world is that people are not able to tell their stories" (Jung, 1977, as cited in O'Brien & O'Brien, 2020, p. 145). Stories allow individuals to reconcile parallel pro-

cesses within their unconscious with the terrain of consciousness. It is perhaps not stories' "inherited ideas" but "inherited possibilities of ideas" (Jung, 1969, p. 66) that can help regenerate the self by means of "symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to [our] consciousness by way of projection" (Jung, 1969, p. 6). In this way, the conscious and unconscious should be balanced and allow each other through "open conflict and open collaboration at once" for "an indestructible whole, an 'individual'" (Jung, 1969, p. 288).

As for individuals within society, Freud (1930/1995) suggests that civilization is concerned with the social order to prevent violent instincts from destroying it. Civilization involves transitioning from a barren, non-living state to a *forceful* space that alleviates individuals' existential threats and aggressiveness towards others. Indeed, most societal systems such as families, communities, movements, institutions, and religions serve as sanctuaries, disavowing individuals' unconscious knowledge of death as the primary drive to prevent "the terrors of eternal nothingness" (Freud, 1900/2010, p. 272). However, when society becomes a defensive apparatus to adapt itself to the yearning for safety and protection, it can induce citizens to resolve their fear of failure, loss, and uncertainty through their febrile obsession with external authorities such as laws, traditions, economic principles, and charismatic leaders. Taubman (2012) posits that although terror could be "the very kernel of our being," it is not ours at all, as it "[provokes] the defensive rush to cure or control others" (p. 186).

In Westernized and capitalist societies, as a form of repressive social project, neoliberalism has governed citizens through "mar-

ket, performance and audit controls/measures/practices and responsabilisation” (Bailey, 2013, p. 816). Wilson (2014) underscores that the predominant governance systems in contemporary societies are shaped by the nation-state and influenced by market forces, which obscure the constraints of instrumental rationality. Foucault (2008) especially considers neoliberalism as an art and the rationality of government. For Foucault (1996), “all human behaviour is scheduled and programmed through rationality” (p. 299); thus, governmental rationality manifests itself in how the government or social dominance rationalizes certain beliefs and attitudes for public management. Accordingly, neoliberal rationalities have tactics or technologies designed to achieve specific objectives that transform individuals’ perception of the world, fabricating the coincidence between their dreams and reality (Miller & Rose, 1990). Lemke (2001) claims that neoliberalism can be more clearly grasped not “just as ideological rhetoric” but as “a political project” to construct “a social reality” (p. 203). It emphasizes managerial economics, particularly methods of “(self-) regulation and domination,” with its “way of doing things” aiming to permeate individuals’ bodies and their perception of availability (Foucault, 2008, p. 318).

Specifically, there would be two neoliberal rationalities’ *ways of doing things* that affect human subjectivity based on Foucault’s ideas about governmentality. These are two techniques for producing governable subjects striving to fulfil social aspirations for them. First, *techniques of dominance* relate to pan-optic technology, creating rationality which has a logic “not only of efficiency but also of normalization” (Foucault, 1984, p. 27). It is a project of making predictable human subjects

by developing a classification of abnormalities based on binary oppositions such as mad/sane or ill/sound. Not only can these techniques objectify specific individuals or groups, but they can also urge subjects to realize the extent to which they are separated from norms and perceived as abnormal by others. In doing so, they make subjects visible and bring them under the control of a generalized gaze. According to Cohen (1997), this gaze is “normalising gaze,” composed of a “network of gazes” that are “incarnated in the scientific ‘observations,’ objective ‘examinations,’ and impersonal ‘investigations’” (p. 89) of the disciplines’ exerting their power through invisibility. In consequence, normalizing gazes develop into “normalising Other,” which “provokes the self-sacrifice of freedom on the altar of utility” (Cohen, 1997, p. 92).

Second, *techniques of the self* elucidate how subjects persistently and actively preserve themselves. Foucault (1993, as cited in Dilts, 2011, p. 9) articulates that “techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination.” Although subjects are not always reactive, their reasoning occurs in socially and historically variable contingencies. Foucault (1996) thus declares that the “practices of the self” are based not so much on the invention of individuals as on the given moments and the ways “that are proposed, suggested, imposed upon [individuals] by [their] culture, society, and social group” (pp. 440–441). Subjects can take a mode of their subjectivity; however, societal norms often govern their behaviours, reinforcing dominant perspectives that marginalize unconventional ways of defining and understanding the self.

In this light, neoliberal governance produces a psychic mode of neurotic normalcy, creating tensions between individuals’ singularities and social expectations. Although

most types of neurosis develop neurotic defences through the ego, neoliberal neurosis would accelerate individuals' self-defence by placing an external authority that performs the function of the *superego*, extending its power of mastery over the self to "relinquish the ego's narcissistic libidinal cathexis" (Freud, 1923/1995, p. 657), the pleasure-seeking drives. Namely, neoliberal neurosis changes individual reality, penetrating the internal body through the principles of the external world and facilitating egoistic defence against the libidinal *id*; the internalized instability can constantly control the representation of reality. The result of this neurotic repression is the ego's fantasy about prolific objects, such as capital and credentials, to fill its absence of ontological certainty.

Wilson (2014) especially asserts that neoliberalism is "a form of obsessional neurosis" (p. 307) whereby the blind submission to the order of a market society constructs the sense of reality. When capital and markets act as buffers against anxiety, individuals may see their existence primarily as a shortcut to identify and invest in profitable objects libidinally for the self. According to Mitchell and Black (2016), Freud attributes this "fantasy gratification" to the internalization of objects because identification with objects and the ensuing relief occurs when "instinctual gratification" becomes impossible and fades away (p. 40). Fulfilling fantasies for profit encourages the growth of wealth as a universalizing axiom (Masny & Waterhouse, 2016). This process guides human desires by converting social norms into market values (Holland, 2007), emphasizing the monetary values of instrumentally *technologized* bodies over traditional capital.

Therefore, Feher (2009) identifies that "the rise of human capital as a dominant subjective form is a defining feature of neoliberalism" (p. 24). While attached to capitalism's universalizing axiom, neoliberal rationality specifies what should be conceived, what can be put forward, and what must be accepted. As a result, Colebrook (2006) claims that each becomes "a labouring being whose force is decoded and deterritorialized through money and labour" (p. 127). As free traders, individuals are in danger of perpetual training and competition that may bring about "a sense of inferiority which is so common in neurotics" (Freud, 1920/1990, pp. 14–15), where concerns about their depreciation cause constant pressure to live up to social expectations instead of an acceptance of human equality of facing economic mortality and nothingness. By dwelling on neoliberal neurosis, subjectivity eternalizes itself through performative technologies, such as choice, competition, and calculation (Lazzarato, 2009).

Subjectivity Ingrained in Neoliberal Neurosis

As neurosis relates to existential concerns, super-egoic neoliberal neurosis compels the ego to respond to neurotic tension. Freud (1926/2013) claims that rather than being a cause of anxiety, compulsive repression involves the consciousness of anxiety. Britzman (2011) maintains that repression is one of anxiety's defence mechanisms; therefore, anxiety is in line with repression. Similarly, subjectivity in neoliberal neurosis perceives repression as a sign of its demise, positioning itself in a state of infantile helplessness and object obsession. Once repression develops into a death-oriented threat, neurosis remains in perpetual scarcity to siphon more energy

from the life drive, making the ego disregard the potential for uncertainty and ambiguity of pleasure-seeking.

Above all, neurosis can appear in a variety of forms. Horney (1937/1999) points out that a neuroticized subject cannot quickly dispel anxiety because it involves systemic social effects that render certain propositions believable and ordinary while others are false, irrespective of their truthfulness. As the human mind interconnects with society (Horney 1937/1999, 1939/2000), neurosis mirrors people's submission to an order that would restrict their "desire by prescribing certain objects and aims and proscribing many others" (Holland, 2007, p. 57). Coercive forms of authority control individuals by governing through their neurosis, turning them into "neurotic citizens" who willingly "calibrate their conduct to ward off imminent dangers to the economy" (Isin, 2004, p. 227).

Moreover, Brown (2017) underlines that, in the neoliberal context, people are expected to act as "responsibilized citizens" for "self-invest in a context of macroeconomic vicissitudes and needs" (p. 84); the investment in self becomes a source of self-satisfaction. In such a situation, responsibility becomes distant from ethical self-governance, making the body authoritative and regulatory while valuing the prolonged ends of economic pursuits. As a result, the subject that neoliberal instrumental rationality would appreciate is an egotist devoted to eternal self-proliferation. This fantasy about economic eternity can work through beliefs in freedom of exchange, competitive equilibrium, and individual entrepreneurship. In this way, when individuals sustain their insecurities and feelings of inadequacy via egoistic self-interest and management, they breed competitive subjects, neoliberal *homo œconomicus*.

Initially, *homo œconomicus*, an economic subject or the subject of exchange, appeared with trade growth as industrial society advanced agriculture, economics, and commerce (Foucault, 2008). Although class played a pivotal role in defining social status and household economics in the eighteenth century's European barter economy, people were community members and gain seekers, promoting the optimal allocation of scarce resources to the market. Nevertheless, due to the expansion of the global economy accompanied by the flow of liberalism, the international monopolist capitalists' "new techniques, sources, and forms of productivity," together with the "new resources of manpower" (Foucault, 2008, p. 231) brought about fierce competition among both global and domestic traders, interrupting the nationwide private networks built on mutual trust and partnerships. Accordingly, a focus on economic survival disrupted social bonds, reciprocity, and solidarity traditionally shaped by reciprocal trade exchanges. Just as individuals were responsible for their safety without securing a wide range of non-material network ties, they gradually detached themselves from their community members. Advancing the techniques of self-monitoring and promotion emerged as a strategy for individual survival, giving rise to subjectivity that seeks limitless self-improvement.

Notably, neoliberal economic subjectivity has two characteristics. First, as competition is an overriding operational principle of neoliberal society, *being autonomous* becomes a significant mode of individual subjectivity. Neoliberal *homo œconomicus* is devoid of what Dilts (2011) calls "biographical subjectivities," such as the human anthropological nature beyond "a grid of intelligibility of the social order" (p. 135). To this end, they

offer fertile ground for neoliberal educational reforms, “recoded as technologization and privatization” (Pinar, 2019, p. 105). When the body de-codifies its singularities through autonomous self-management, it locks the self into infantile wishes to be safeguarded against uncertainty, preventing the self from drifting from one to the other. The neurotic perception of relying on authority figures as one did in infancy leads individuals to fear punishment and confrontation, which could interrupt their self-advancement. To put it differently, given that neoliberal economic subjectivity primarily seeks to optimize economic utility, the gratification derived from object attachment substitutes the organic body for an automaton. This automaton faces challenges in grasping the consciousness of others and appreciating their differences. As long as homo œconomicus remains entrenched in the persistence of self-preservation, their desires are tethered to an infantile dread of nothingness, perpetuating cycles of chronic punishment and a reluctance to change.

Second, homo œconomic subjectivity, dwelling on a neoliberal neurosis, autonomously governs itself. Mere disciplinary techniques of the established institutional systems, that is, *techniques of dominance*, no longer singularly control neoliberal economic subjects. Direct regulatory mechanisms, such as legality and illegality, do not significantly impact the individual body as a source of discipline and punishment. Instead, neoliberal homo œconomicus can be comparable to “an individual subject of interest within a totality which eludes him and which nevertheless finds the rationality of his egoistic choices” (Foucault, 2008, p. 278). The autonomous subject willingly accepts the relentless calls for self-sacrifice and strives to outperform

others. Han (2017) argues that this unrestricted obsession has a similarity to Protestants’ “searching out sin”; however, the subject now “hunts down negative thoughts” and destabilizes the ego as one’s own “enemy” (p. 30). Ball (2012) contends that performativity constantly encourages individuals to practice self-development “and to feel guilty or inadequate if [they] do not” (p. 31). As a prominent neoliberal technology, performativity facilitates “judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change” (Ball, 2017, p. 57). It thus makes subjects “calculable rather than memorable” (Ball, 2013, p. 136) while erasing the middle or overlapped ground between their desires and structural expectations.

Furthermore, Ball (2013) accentuates that the pedagogical emphasis on ability gives rise to knowledge for population management, linking classroom instruction with expertise in school management. The normalization of observation and power dynamics is especially evident in schooling through methods like measurement and classification. These practices shape individuals to conform and perform according to neoliberal ideals, which insist on curriculum content that promotes profitable knowledge for economic survival. This emphasis on practical knowledge limits exposure to alternative perspectives that could challenge mainstream ideologies and systems. In doing so, the curriculum promotes instrumental conditions for teaching and learning for individual performance and evaluation by streamlining the formative journey of subjectivity. Accordingly, when unrestricted economic expansion becomes the desire of school curricula, “the symbolic character of the curriculum” (Pinar, 2019, p. 107) disappears with draconian comparison and examination. In-

stead, “the technologies of performance” continuously invent criteria-oriented assessments (Ball, 2013, p. 69), causing intense competition between educational institutions and students. In this situation, the government perceives educational reforms foregrounding experiments and imagination as concessions to address calls for alternatives to standardized curricula.

The problem lies in performativity’s role in triggering psychic repression, which is evident in the concept of “performative directionality” (Han, 2017, p. 43), where emotions are directed towards or expected to achieve a specific goal. While differentiating the meaning of feelings and emotions, Han (2017) articulates that “[e]motions are performative in so far as they call forth certain actions,” and “[n]eoliberal psychopolitics” touches the “pre-reflexive level,” “[cutting] and [operating] deep inside” of individuals via emotion (p. 48). It amplifies fleeting emotions that admit a perception of a failure, leading individuals to pre-plan their actions’ consequences rather than grapple with their actions’ meaningfulness. Accordingly, while being guided by taking pleasure in aspiring to improvement, individuals lock themselves into the “velvet cage” (Hayes & Ritzer, 2017, p. 44) so that they can feel safe like docile zoo animals: “Safe and lucrative renditions of individual animals perform a conservative micropolitics that involves repetition” according to “an order of the same” (Lorimer, 2013, p. 73). This entrapped sense of safety does not allow knowledge that is not beneficial for entrepreneurial survival and may even be perceived as dangerous for students. Thus, performativity and its connection with safety link economic accountability with responsible citizenship, encouraging educators and students to check

on themselves continuously and learn from their mistakes (see also Massumi, 2020).

Importantly, students are equally entitled to subject-specialized, prescribed academic knowledge, irrespective of their specific and localized contexts. Nonetheless, examining who constructs knowledge within particular social circumstances and for individual subjectivities is also crucial. In other words, human perception of *meaningfulness* constructs knowledge of meaning. When individuals remain in instrumental neurotic persistence, their “micro-politics of little fears” will eternally neutralize and depoliticize the process of meaning-making, which “presents itself as stasis, but like becoming-other it is in reality, a productive process: a making-the-same” (Massumi, 1992, p. 106). The stifling homogeneity imposed by neoliberalism poses challenges for education participants—curriculum designers, teachers, administrators, and students—who refuse to conform to normative constraints of performative safety within the mainstream order. In this regard, transitioning from safety-conscious human capital to danger-unconscious human beings may afford education participants more freedom of thought and consciousness.

The Death Drive Facing Neurotic Subjectivity

By seeking their pleasure through dangerous losing, neoliberal homo oeconomicus would be able to reverse their subjectivity attuned to neoliberal performativity. Obsessive and entrepreneurial subjectivity could be released by “the fatality of one’s incompleteness,” “helplessness,” and “finitude” (Becker, 1973, p. 41). Freud (1924/2001) proposes that human instincts, geared towards turning “the

restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state” (p. 160), a state of no excessive feeling compelled to turn into the economic subject and a tendency to retrocede to the original non-possession status, are the death drive. Ironically, the idea of the death drive implies individuals’ destructive capacity to transform themselves via others’ deaths in the past, notifying them of their deaths in the future. The subject that follows the flow of the death drive differs from a neoliberal homo œconomicus that rejects the past. The past should not be better than the present, as any regression of the economically autonomous self is not allowed.

Most importantly, the death drive guides the subject to secure a distance from its persistency, as it functions as a suspension of self-sacrifice “at which point the way to counter destruction is through deliberate forms of self-restraint” (Butler, 2019, p. 27). The death drive regulates the persistence of the self, preventing the subject from being inundated by the need for defence and a yearning for recognition. Put differently, the masochistic nature of the death drive engenders the economy of abeyance, enabling the subject to work with the interruption of the self. In reality, the neoliberal subject cannot be consciously aware of the alternative potential of self-destruction. The normalcy of neoliberal neurosis encourages the subject to seek refuge from mortality by prescribing what should be desired and avoided for survival. In this situation, the death drive is inextricably situated in the unconscious realm of subjectivity.

Notably, neoliberal homo œconomicus accommodates neurotic subjectivity, given that their pleasure-seeking drives cannot pass through masochistic self-defeating. However, as the death drive is associated with “de-cathexis or disinvestment,” it has the potential to be “a progressive process” acting as “preludes

to the replacement of older objects or aims with the new” (Brunet, 2018, p. 115). The *unbinding* character of the death drive can develop a counter-conductive force against which repressed subjectivity becomes a symptom. Britzman (2011) notes that symptoms express the subject’s unconscious wishes and the ways in which the desire is repressed. Then, symptoms stimulate the unconscious sense of *homo* to see their persistence in the *œconomic* state. In practice, the œconomicus’s mortality remains outside conscious awareness; therefore, it is existential suffering derived from neurotic symptoms, wherein homo œconomic agents encounter their alternative potentials.

Taubman (2012) suggests that knowledge from the unconscious guides us to make sense of “what we do not know, and how we are always already implicated in what we do know and what we resist knowing” (p. 20). As an unconscious symptom, knowledge can be both alive and dead, allowing individuals to interpret the present through their historically layered bodies. As Pinar’s (1975/1994) explanation of the regressive phase of *currere* illustrates, “to the extent one dwells in a conceptual present, and in the subjective present, is the extent to which one dwells in the past” (p. 22). Knowledge thus does not lie in their presence but in their absence, not being found in the present life when it haunts as meanings of the memorable past. In this regard, knowledge can shift instrumental hyper-visibility into the shade of history, turning the past into the present, whereby individuals grapple with their conditions and modes of subjectivity. The unconscious knowledge moves the atrophied subjectivity out of neurosis. By moving ahead of repression, psychoanalysis allows individuals to discover knowledge through their *revelation*

about failures of the self: “Failure is something endlessly repeated and relieved moment by moment throughout our individual histories” (Rose, 1987, as cited in Butler, 1997, p. 97).

Freedom, therefore, is not transcendent or external to the body; instead, it begins with revelation and regeneration from the habitual body-subjectivity relationships. Here, revelation is an educational journey “in which outer events provoke inner transformations one cannot easily perceive, certainly not initially” (Pinar, 2004, p. 131). Pinar (2019) argues, citing Stéphane Mosès (1992/2009), that although social forms may seek to determine individual subjectivity, revelation helps to sense our “original reality of a personal subject” (p. 124). The original reality represents the relationalities of each person, namely, all beings sharing their destination towards death (Pinar, 2015), unconsciously hidden beneath the constraints of society operated by neurotic rationality. In this way, revelation helps us grasp how we hide what we could become through which “we midwife what is not yet born, in ourselves, generated by others” (Pinar, 2004, p. 55). It provides space for reflecting on its own mastery from within and yet without being entirely co-opted by neurotic repression. The revelation of neurotic struggles may shape how we relate to ourselves and others, with symptoms that signal the dominance of the neurotic and authoritative self-regime.

In light of this, revelation generates “lived spaces” where individuals are capable of losing and reshaping the entrepreneurial world around them, which is, in turn, subject to variation through their “presence there” (Pinar, 2004, p. 56). By understanding the loss of power over the self, individuals become the “self [that] appears as activity” (Pinar, 2019, p. 109), able to express themselves, moving

away from self-absorption and towards a more profound connection with others. This process of embracing relates to the exploration of impossible immortality and vulnerabilities. In other words, understanding one’s psychic distress provides *homo* with primary human relationality that ushers into the realm of otherness where the neurotic self can study its “open wound” through the revelation of “the fear that emerges at a threat to life” (Freud, 1917/1995, pp. 588–589). Through understanding and studying, revelation aligns with “lived time” (Pinar, 2011, p. 143), “the temporally structured—and structuring—expression of subjectivity” (Pinar, 2011, p. 14), wherein death appears as the drive for the continuity of life. In the context of education, the curriculum embedded in this lived space and lived time can be symptoms of the current world when it does not deny neurotic sufferings and “feelings” that have a durable, relational, “constative,” and “different temporality,” which brings about life consistency (Han, 2017, pp. 42–43).

Heterophonic Curriculum Improvising the Consciousness of Neurotic Subjectivity

Psychoanalytic perspectives illuminate the influence of social pressures under neoliberal neurosis on individual subjectivity. Creating a palpable distance from these pressures may involve the curriculum providing lived spaces where educational journeys take place. This helps move societal and neurotic struggles into the public domain, supporting more relational and experiential perspectives. In this context, the potential of the death drive lies in its “bringing the living organism back to a quiet state” while “[working] silently outside consciousness” (Mazza et al., 2019, p. 9).

This unconscious urge to return to a state of calmness offers educators and students a tool to engage differently in their current situations and reflect on how neoliberal economic subjectivity can hinder their bodies from moving into a silent and serene space and time in which they can mingle with their absence.

Nevertheless, as the death drive operates beneath one's conscious awareness, its unconscious dynamics would only be glimpsed through "consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense-organs" (Freud, 1915/1995, p. 576). Therefore, consciousness beyond the status quo requires a quest for "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 2004, p. 144), which is essential for transcending "socially prescribed knowledge" (Greene, 2004, p. 135). Greene (2004) maintains that a childlike but not solipsistic "primordial consciousness" (p. 145) allows the body to perceive an original world, moving beyond habitual patterns of thoughts and behaviours. As Greene (2004) insists, this process, what Merleau-Ponty terms "bracketing out," enables individuals to unearth underlying layers of subjectivity and "the origin of the self," which Freud calls "primal scenes" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 332), the foundational experiences that weave our sense of self and others.

The primordial mode of the body bears the weight of the death drive, as "a state of serenity preceding life" (Nardone & Salvini, 2019, p. 436), contrasting with the neurotic normalcy ingrained within the body. Pinar (1975/1994) posits that the body represents "a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated into its meaningfulness" (p. 15). Hence, mastery of knowledge and skills cannot solely define the body's capacity. In

this regard, Moore (2015) particularly introduces Holland's jazz metaphor, illustrating the potential for an "(r)evolutionary" curriculum, diverging from a "reproductive" curriculum (p. 41) centred around "Mastery" (p. 54). The connection of the two elements creates "curriculum dynamism" (Moore, 2015, p. 38), facilitating a balance of creativity. By permitting risky instances "in the field of play," there is an opportunity to harness the potential of "nomadic" (Holland, 2004, p. 25) improvisation, potentially bracketing neoliberal instrumental subjectivity. Without prearranged structures and cadences, nomadic improvisation's fluid temporal nature prompts each sound to recommence from its ending (death), symbolizing a moment of silence for the contributions of others' sounds (life).

In this sense, nomadic improvisation spawns heterophony, which is "a way of affirming the identity of the group while acknowledging variants, even individual 'deviances' [of music]" (Boulez, 2005, as cited in Campbell, 2013, p. 21). Since heterophony embraces long silence and dissonance, it also appreciably refers to the players' revelation reflecting their awareness of a prevailing sound and duration of feelings. This condition enables both players and audiences to bridge their inner experiences, promoting interconnected consciousness. The interchangeable and collective experiences encompass moments of attentive listening as well as periods of silence, bringing about harmonious—or sometimes dissonant—interludes. Sharing one's pleasure with oneself and others through the creation of transferable sounds serves as a catalyst to develop knowledge of abeyance, delving into the realm of the unconscious and weaning oneself off recurrent practices. Through heterophonic play, participants can realize that what appears to be sensibly real or

immediately apparent carries considerably less psychic significance than the underlying depths of the unconscious it conceals.

Just as creators of nomad improvisation navigate without fixating on mastering subjectivity, curriculum designers may neither strive to follow the mastery of neurotic subjectivity nor deviate from it. They can bring attention to the *episteme of self-formation* rather than *techniques of the self* by attending to the ethos of a non-autonomous subjectivity that navigates life's inherent complexities, including pleasure, failures, wounds, grief, and mortality, guiding individuals distant from a neurotic pursuit of self-persistence. Specifically, encountering the divergences inherent in collective improvisation and its heterophony can act as an unrehearsed refusal of the neoliberal neurosis and instrumental rationality imposed upon subjectivity. When a curriculum plays a conduit for embracing life through the lines of rest, pause, and loss, it may challenge the illusion of politics of necessity and immortality, opening up a journey of shared narratives driving the distance and closeness of "universal consciousness," which is, according to Jung (1969), is contradictory and "logically identical with unconsciousness," as consciousness flows with "an infinite number of things [merging] into an indefinite whole" (p. 288).

For the Continuity of Subjectivity

Exclusive calculation and mundane adherence to neoliberal economic ideals should not be given credence as the only elements shaping subjectivity, nor should they be seen as the sole causes for curriculum development. Curricular models emphasizing self-sacrifice and merit-based performance tend to

pursue the immediate advancement of economic life rather than questioning the reasons behind prearranged problems and solutions. Alternatively, a curriculum that recognizes the improvisational possibilities of subjectivity could offer different approaches to how individuals understand and study what is deemed safe and predictable within the personal and societal spheres. On the one hand, neurosis, as a relentless form of social and self-control, exerts insistent pressure on the human mind. On the other hand, as a struggling symptom, this destabilizing force can lead to tensions between the familiar and the unfamiliar, along with neurotic excitation and elusive serenity, thereby creating a "lived" space in the middle of "'inter'—often midst vibrant ambivalent metonymic figurations" (Aoki, 2004, p. 457).

Overall, curriculum designers, aware of the interplay between life and death, may see how participants in education can become more than performative agents in relation to neoliberal homo oeconomic subjectivity. To be distant from the instrumentalization of the human body, they would advocate for individuals to engage diversely in society, guiding them to echo one great whole as an unharmonized and yet combined symbolic collocation. This would involve transforming the curriculum from monophonic to homophonic, through which subjectivity becomes more than homophonic and polyphonic when navigating beyond the algorithmic restructuring of society by valuing playful dissonances arising from non-harmonic silences, tones, and feelings. The transference of subjectivity into the collective unconscious allows individuals to surpass their entrenched knowledge and micro habits. As a result, "a whole new series of desires, movements and relations" can emerge from the educational places where the old version of the self faces "encounters outside of

the ordered conception of existence” through not only “new differences and paths for thinking” (Roffe, 2010, p. 191) but also conventional similarities and detours for thinking towards the past.

Ball (2019) articulates that teaching and learning are inherently complex processes; they are a continual cycle of “crises, disruptions and impasses” (p. 139). Ironically, this unpredictability allows education participants to expand into seamless becomings. Shifts in perspective can align with embracing the inherent uncertainty of our understanding and studying, which creates a moment of suspended egocentric consciousness. The suspension here is an unconscious departure from neurotic subjectivity for a deeper sense of universal human experiences. This suspension of conventional boundaries makes life aware of plurality (pleasure) and regularity (death). In this context, the curriculum is a lived space for exploring the unknown others of self under the shadow and light of societal neurosis. By acknowledging and engaging with the complexities of subjectivity within and beyond the confines of *techniques of the self*, the curriculum may become a heterophonic force building a co-extensive bridge between inner and outer encounters.

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