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**Henry Giroux—Urgently Necessary and Necessarily Urgent:
An Essay Review**

Scott Morris
Eastern New Mexico University

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“...future disasters...if we simply stay the current course...will keep coming with ever more ferocious intensity.”

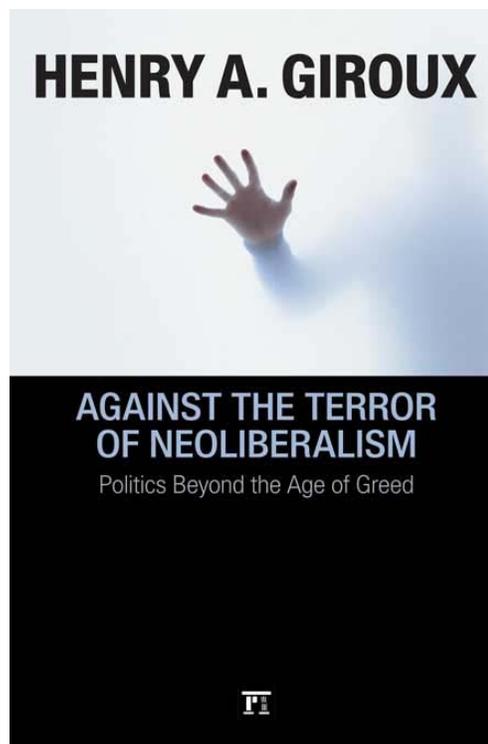
—Naomi Klein, 2007

“Meet me in the land of hope and dreams.”

—Bruce Springsteen, 1999

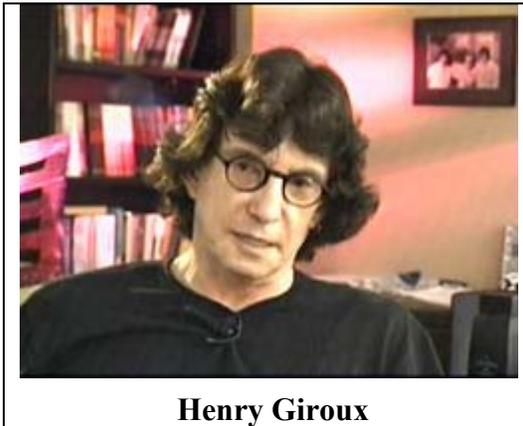
At the core of Henry Giroux’s latest, and perhaps most incisive, encompassing and challenging book, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*, are urgent questions and concerns about youth, education, responsibility, the future, and democracy, all rigorously examined and captured brilliantly in Chapter 3, “Disabling the Future.” Current economic, political and education policies in the US threaten the future in multiple ways by undermining our

opportunities for realizing the promise of a critically educated and socially active youth as it is linked to the promise of a substantive and participatory democratic culture and society grounded in forms of critical inquiry that combine with acts of empowered social intervention. Envisioning and providing the conditions and experiences for the realization of these promises of youth and democracy is crucially linked to the possibilities and hopes for, and actions toward, a better future, a future currently being disabled by: increasing war, militarism and violence; the ever-expanding pursuit of neoliberal markets and the concomitant exploitation of labor and resources; threats to environmental security and sustainability; the criminalization of large parts of the population, especially young people of color; a creeping political authoritarianism; and, ever widening gaps in economic and social inequality. Given these multiple crises and challenges that we now face across a broad range of national and global realities, expanding in the absence of a sufficiently well-organized opposition to the policies and institutions apparently dedicated to exacerbating most, if not all, of the crises, one must ponder, at a very serious level, whether we as a culture really care about youth and the future. If it is true, to paraphrase Giroux, that “how a society views its responsibility toward future generations,” is reflected in how that society thinks about, educates toward and acts in the direction of living into, living through and living out of a social contract grounded in substantive and vibrant democratic values, visions and structures, we must sadly conclude that US culture’s responsibility toward youth and the future is sorely lacking (p. 88).



In a society and culture dominated by profit-driven markets and the market’s iron-fisted shadows, war, militarism and violence, not only do the promises of youth and democracy disappear, but social programs are eviscerated; schools are modeled on boot camps, prisons or malls while teachers play the role of drill-instructor, guard or sales clerk; workers are exploited, down-sized or disappeared; notions of citizenship are swallowed in a sea of commercialism and over-consumption; corporations capitalize on children’s vulnerabilities; increasing numbers of people on a global scale are “relegated to the human waste of global neoliberalism;” and “young people [all too often are] portrayed as a generation of suspects [against whom the death penalty applies]...rather than as a resource for investing in the future (pp. 84-85). Under such conditions, accompanied by the deadening neoliberal mantra

“there is no alternative,” a cruel set of zero tolerance policies in schools, and an increasing criminalization of young people’s behavior, a culture of fatalism, resignation and cynicism appear. “The ongoing attacks on children’s rights, the endless commercialization of youth, the downsizing of children’s services, and the increasing incarceration of young people suggest [that] adult society no longer cares about children” (p. 86).¹



Henry Giroux

Giroux paraphrases Frederic Jameson who suggests we live in a time when “it has become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (p. 130). The harsh truth of this statement is, of course, harrowing, and it points to the large-scale failure of education at all levels to develop concepts and mechanisms directed toward creating egalitarian, peaceful and needs-fulfilling alternatives to the dominant ideologies and institutions founded in commercialism, militarism and profiteering.

Without pedagogical projects rigorously devoted to the hard work necessary for developing alternative pathways grounded in substantive and solidaristic forms of democracy that promote popular participation and civic engagement, we are doomed to suffer, in the face of every new crisis under neoliberalism, restructurings in the interests of wealth and power, and that promises the already marginalized and dispossessed (not to mention most of us outside the arenas of wealth and power) will suffer more exclusion, oppression and despair. Because public education, at the primary, secondary and university levels, offers one of the few remaining sites in the culture in which the skills, knowledge and abilities for individual and social agency can be engaged, developed and applied, it is critical for public educators, functioning as public intellectuals, to provide the conditions and experiences in which young people can learn that the relationship between knowledge, power and authority is not necessarily one of domination, but potentially one of emancipation (p. 104) . As part of a project to recognize the liberatory potential of this relationship, students and teachers must learn the importance of their own knowledge, histories and experiences in education, how those relationships interpenetrate with work and life inside and outside the classroom, and how these multiple relationships can become meaningful in ways that open up opportunities for critical (analytical, reflective, urgent) interrogations, reflections and interventions on a

¹ As a consequence of this profits over people market fundamentalism, we are losing our ability to see ourselves as in relationship with other humans with whom we share a desire to have our needs met, our abilities developed and our futures protected under conditions of recognized interdependence because our lives are increasingly reduced to knowledge of price and relationships with commodities within a greed-drenched social Darwinist culture that teaches “survival of the most ruthless.”

path toward social and individual transformation, to paraphrase an earlier Giroux formulation. It is in and through such projects that students and teachers, at all levels, can become a “force for challenging false prophets, deflating the claims of triumphalism, and critically engaging all those social relations that promote material and symbolic violence” (p. 145).

In an age of “top-down class warfare” (Krugman, 2005), increasing social and economic inequality and its concomitant poverty, homelessness, job eradication and despair; the growing commodification of all aspects of life that reduces citizenship to consumption practices while social engagement is engulfed in hyper-competitive media spectacles; and the creeping and foreboding militarization of the globe, it is essential that critical pedagogical projects reexamine and take seriously the moral and political potential of a social contract rooted in notions and realities of mutual support, social justice, concern for the collective good and international solidarity. “Taking the social contract seriously,” demands “a willingness to fight for the rights of children, enact reforms that invest in their future, and provide the educational conditions necessary for [youth] to be critical citizens.” (p. 88). Addressing ideas of a social contract in the midst of growing crises and challenges on a domestic and international scale, requires probing and difficult questions about what kinds of pedagogical conditions and experiences are required to ensure we save rather than lose the future. Just as “the Federal Budget...reflects our nation’s deepest priorities,” in other words, “[priorities that express] far less regard for our nation’s children than for the richest most powerful Americans, and far more interest in waging war than in waging peace” (Edelman, 2008), it is also true that our dreams, visions and ideas about, and commitments to, the future reflect “society’s obligations” to investments in, and concerns for young people (p. 89). In short, we are on a dangerous path in which the greater evil is working to cancel out the possibilities for expressions and manifestations of the greater good.

Present trends suggest an undermining of both youth and the future reflected in the promotion of policies and the passing of legislation that eliminate crucial health, social and education programs for young people. The current Federal Budget “reveals...a failure [to] protect the well-being of children” (Edelman, 2008) by reducing vital health, juvenile justice, and education programs (including a request to eliminate 47 programs from the US Department of Education) that serve the needs and interests of young people (primarily those who need assistance most), while at the same time calling for huge increases (again) for military spending and extensions of tax cuts for the wealthy and privileged (\$2 trillion in lost revenue over the next ten years). Nearly 13 million children live in poverty in the US (according to the “Official Poverty Line,” significantly more using a more honest assessment of poverty), 9.4 million children lack health insurance, and 14 million children attend deteriorating schools everyday. In addition, children are immersed in a culture in

which notions of masculinity are produced through gruesome reveling in gun culture, constant bombardments of hyper-competitive sports, US commitments to military aggression and massive Pentagon spending, and blood filled spectacles of militarism and violence that regularly circulate through the various forms of corporate public pedagogy (p. 98).

How we live into the future, and whether there are possibilities for meaningful forms of democracy in that future, are vitally linked to how we educate youth in the present, and present trends suggest that youth are now submerged in material and ideological pedagogical spheres that have “less to do with improving the future than with denying it” (p. 90). Giroux urges that we must view education as a public rather than a private sphere if we are going to educate toward a meaningful democratic future. Public education must engage in practices and projects dedicated to promoting the public good and public well-being, i.e. the greater good, as well as public participation in shaping policies and managing how we live with one another in society. If education is surrendered to private power, schools will be reduced to training factories in which people will learn what is necessary to enable them to serve and service the interests and imperatives of society’s dominant institutions, i.e., the neoliberal imperatives of wealth, power, privilege, domination and violence. Schools must instead be “valued as a public good,” and their legitimacy measured “on their capacity to educate students according to the demands of critical citizenship,” where teachers and learners develop a language and culture that relates “the self to public life, social responsibility, [and] the imperatives of democracy” (p. 102).

Education, under the guise of “accountability schemes,” is presently being reduced to domesticating factories of high-stakes testing linked to standardized assessment and curriculum that undermines possibilities for producing a substantive democratic culture and society in numerous ways. For example, it “deskills teachers” by eliminating their abilities to creatively participate in the process and project of education and to engage in the radical contextualization that links what, why and how educators teach to the knowledge, histories and experiences teachers and learners bring to pedagogical space. In short, teachers (and students) lose their critical voice while they are distanced from the political and moral process and project of pedagogy, and democratic forms that serve and represent public interests and concerns suffer. High stakes testing regimes “reduce learning to the lowest common denominator,” and consequently stifle students’ ability to develop as critically informed citizens capable of making sense of the world outside and inside the self, essential for a functioning democracy. At best students learn to follow rules and instructions but do not develop the interrogative tools to evaluate whether the rules and instructions are useful, employable or legitimate (Shannon, 2007). Furthermore, it undermines the development of the sort of critical mentality necessary for a burgeoning democracy where dissent, critique and a culture of questioning is fundamental. In addition, it trains students to be docile

whereas an operational democracy demands involved, active and vibrant citizens capable of meaningful engagement and effective participation in managing the society and shaping the future. Beyond that, high stakes programs also prepare a domesticated population of obedient consumers trained in what is necessary to maximize their consumption potential in an increasingly commercialized culture. A critical pedagogy would educate people to maximize their citizenship potential in an increasingly democratized culture and society geared to a future dedicated to visions of security reflective of human well-being, fulfillment and flourishing emerging not from a culture of fear, incarceration and a flood of high tech weaponry, but from a society organized around decent health, universal healthcare, sustainable nutrition, creative opportunities, solidarity, and an empowered citizenry. (p. 103)

Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Virulence and Brutality

Neoliberal guru Milton Friedman, in his influential tome, *Capitalism and Freedom*, advised that “only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.” That we currently face a growing number of monumental crises and foreboding challenges, ranging from global climate change, to US sponsored global militarism, to growing economic and social inequality, to creeping authoritarianism in the political sphere, is hardly in dispute; the most visible ideas “lying around” are unfortunately not designed for addressing and overcoming these crises and challenges (in fact, they are at the core of the crises), and more substantive ideas and visions for alternatives to the current dominant ideologies and structures are sadly in short supply in the wider culture. Giroux, in the introduction to *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*, makes clear how the last thirty years of neoliberal assault has demolished “discourses, social forms, public institutions, and noncommercial values” vital for developing a language, ideas and culture directed toward alternatives growing out of a dedication to “the common good, public commitment, and democratically charged politics.” Absent concepts and motivations emerging from solidarity, civic responsibility, and critical thought, the political sphere is robbed of its public functions and becomes at best a formal mechanism for re-entrenching current private power structures, and at worst a commercial and militarized sphere in which the public is “reduced to obedient recipients of power [and] content to follow orders,” while power rapaciously pursues profits and hegemony at the expense of a common good centered and sustainable future (pp. 9-10).

Giroux makes evident, however, that the global public has not surrendered to the neoliberal assault on public space, the public mind, public oriented legislation and the public good. Across the globe, workers, intellectuals, students, artists, musicians, community organizers, the World Social Forum, and others unwilling to allow all aspects of existence to be bought and sold in the capitalist market have resisted “multinational corporations, corporate

swindlers, international political institutions, and those government politicians who willingly align themselves with corporate interests and profits” (p. 2). At a time when democratic processes are in danger of annihilation by institutions dedicated to empire building, maximizing profits, transferring wealth from the poor to the rich, and imposing fundamentalisms of various sorts (political, economic and religious), these groups, working across international borders, have extended the struggle to reclaim public space and collective life beyond control over economic resources to include forms of resistance that “address the discourses of political agency, civic education, and cultural politics” (p. 3). These new international mobilizations emerge from an understanding of the necessity of critical popular education, inside and outside schools committed to expanding public well-being by extending provisions and support networks in education, health, health care, nutrition, housing, safe air and water, public transit, etc. These groups are dedicated to an imagining of “democracy as a public good” and as a foundational source in “the transformative power of collective action” (p. 9) that shares knowledge of the character of neoliberalism by elucidating how “poverty is not the fault of the poor, that exclusion is not the fault of the excluded, and wealth is the result of the chain of human activity” (Lebowitz, 2005). And, these groups work to constitute a social contract that makes possible the construction and realization of meaningful democratic public spheres.

Still, the terrors of neoliberalism march on as evidenced in the continuing US aggression in Iraq, the tens of billions of dollars in profits accrued by the major oil companies, the bloated military budget (estimated at over \$1 trillion by Robert Dreyfus, 2007), the housing collapse, rising unemployment and downsizing, tax breaks for the wealthy, legalized torture, the Katrina catastrophe, growing prison populations, evisceration of civil liberties, racist exclusion and oppression, schools made over in the image of corporate culture, bought and sold elections, rendition, and the overall disappearance of both a sense of solidarity with future generations and a set of obligations that might ensure the future will arrive in better shape than the present.

Because public space under neoliberal terrors has been increasingly privatized, the public mind persistently commercialized, public memory de-historicized, and public spheres underfunded, abolished or corporatized, “the art of democratic politics” has been subordinated on the one hand “to the rapacious laws of the market economy,” and on the other hand suppressed by the fear inducing militarism that rears its ugliness in both the growing presence of police-state tactics accompanied by “barbaric notions of authoritarianism,” and also through the violent, aggressive and often grotesque spectacles that dominate corporate controlled media space, in films, television, tabloidized news, and video games. The effect, in short, is an undermining of meaningful forms of democracy, civil rights and human dignity (pp. 9-10), all necessary, yet not sufficient, means for saving the future. Therefore, Giroux argues, it is necessary to understand and challenge

neoliberalism (and its terrors) “as both an economic theory and a powerful public pedagogy and cultural politics,” a position that calls for “institutional and economic struggles,” supplemented with educational practices and projects that both “connect [neoliberalism’s] symbolic power and its pedagogical practices with material relations of power” and engage “democracy as a site of intense struggle over matters of representation, participation and shared power (pp. 11-12). In addition, it seems absolutely vital that public education engage in the work of learning and teaching about substantively democratic alternatives to the present authoritarian neoliberal juggernaut. That project requires not only new visions, goals, plans and actions, but a commitment to deepen, expand and support alternatives already under way (whether local or global), and to make them more visible in order to both tap into the hope that other possibilities provide and also to demonstrate the lie of the deadening neoliberal mantra, “there is no alternative.”

Authoritarianism Threats

Giroux warns that the United States “is moving rapidly toward a form of authoritarianism that undermines any claim to being a liberal democracy.” The evidence to support this claim unfolds over the course of 44 breathtaking pages of rigorous scholarship, searing insights and impassioned critique in Chapter One “The Emerging Authoritarianism in the United States.” The evidence includes, an imperial presidency, aggressive and illegal military interventions, an enormous trade deficit (nearly \$70 billion for January 2008 alone), a national debt surpassing \$9 trillion, a growing concentration of wealth in the midst of increasing poverty, expanding power of the military-industrial-congressional complex over life in the US (and world), evaporating civil liberties, attacks on human rights, subversion of international law, aggravated assaultment of people of color and immigrants (p. 16), and US “Crimes Against Peace,” in Iraq.²

The terrors and dangers accumulating from the “real and symbolic violence” revealed through this “roadmap to totalitarianism” (Herbert, 2006) reduce entire populations of people to the category of expendable -- “unpeople,” in Mark Curtis’s formulation (2004), i.e. those considered irrelevant or disposable by the institutions of power -- as the state (a nexus of corporate and governmental power) “is no longer organized around the struggle for life” (p. 17) that evolves from a solidaristic social contract, but is concentrated on the acquisition of capital at the expense of human life and the future. The state, through both

² “Crimes Against Peace” were called by US prosecutor Robert Jackson at the Nuremberg Tribunals “the Supreme International Crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole” (see Cohn, 2004). In Iraq it is an “accumulated evil” that involves sectarian violence; ethnic cleansing; torture; rendition; ghost detainees; disappearances; rape; hunger; devastated infrastructure; Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo; destruction of Iraqi culture; indiscriminate killing; use of cluster bombs that often kill children, etc.

corporate and government policies and prerogatives, and through its ability to regulate, construct and control people's opinions, attitudes and conduct, thus pursues "the ability to condemn entire populations of [people] as disposable" while making "life and death the most crucial and relevant object of political control" (p. 159-160).

This totalitarian roadmap is reflective of "proto-fascist" tendencies in the US that should not be confused with, but in some ways related to, historical forms of fascism. "Fascism," we should understand, as Giroux elucidates, should not be consigned to "an ideological apparatus frozen in a particular historical period," but should be seen as "a theoretical and political signpost for understanding how democracy can be subverted" (p. 18). Democracy withers not only when dissent is suppressed and police state tactics are employed, but also when people lack the means, ideological and material, (as well as the time and space resources), to collectively exercise their rights in meaningful and effective ways to make vital popular forms of democracy possible. In other words, when people lack the tools and knowledge for individual and social agency, and when the material realities of life exist under harsh conditions of inequality and deprivation, democratic visions, values and practices desperately sink in a sea of "hopelessness and cynicism" (p. 20).

The emerging form of proto-fascism in the US that threatens democracy and the future is in some ways reflective of historical forms of fascism as well as distinctive in character, especially as it circulates within a set of ruinous neoliberal conditions through which it is reproduced and legitimated. Giroux examines in detail seven major, and often interpenetrating, characteristics of proto-fascism in the US. The first is a "cult of traditionalism" dedicated to producing a repressive and restrictive social order partially modeled on the era of the robber barons and working to ensure service and subservience to the prerogatives of US imperialism and corporate hegemony. Inflated and ubiquitous commercialism, deceit and corruption in the political arena, the pursuit of profits at the expense of human interests and environmental sustainability, oppressively iniquitous inequality, and "an utter disdain for economic and political democracy," are the predictable and increasingly visible consequences of this "cult of traditionalism" (p. 21).

The second proto-fascist tendency is the "corporatization of civil society" and the colonization of public space, including the space of the public mind. Because of "the relentless dynamic of privatization and commercialization," public spheres through which norms for establishing democratic cultures and mechanisms could be established are reduced to consumer production facilities through which ruthless market values are inculcated. In the absence of public spaces in which and out of which the kinds of dialogue, debate and discussion essential to the cultivation of democratic citizenship are engaged and developed, individual and social agency (along with institutions dedicated to promoting and expanding civil society) shrink both as an idea and as a reality (pp. 21-22).

The third direction involved the construction and proliferation of a culture of fear exacerbated by US power's "war of terrorism" where "all citizens and non-citizens are viewed as potential terrorists." It is an anti-intellectualizing culture of fear grounded in simplified moral absolutes around "good and evil" used to legitimate violations of international law both through the threat and the use of force and through the undermining of "the taxing business of trying to grasp what is actually going on [in the world]" (Eagleton, 2003). It is accompanied by notions of jingoistic "patriotic correctness," and the turgid belief that the United States must have unchallengeable global power and a monopoly of military might, to paraphrase Dick Cheney (pp. 22-24).

The fourth inclination toward fascism is the concentrated corporate control of the media and the concomitant forms of corporate public pedagogy through which dissent is suppressed, consent is mobilized, agendas are established, narratives are shaped, notions of the past, present and future are defined, and public values, allegiances, identities and beliefs are formed and directed. The agenda setting and discourse debasing power of concentrated ownership is partially reflected in a radio survey conducted by *NOW with Bill Moyers* (2004) in which it was discovered that for every five hours of non-right-wing talk radio aired everyday on the top-rated talk radio stations, there were 310 hours of conservative talk. We should consider "what is crucial for citizens to know in order to be active participants in shaping and sustaining a vibrant democracy" (p. 25), and what forms of citizen-based public pedagogy would open up rather than close down these possibilities. At issue, among other things, is the horizontal organization of society emerging from notions and realities of solidarity and support as opposed to the vertical dismembering of society that reflects modes of self-interest, privatization, militarism, destructive competition and rapacious greed characteristic of a totalitarian roadmap (pp. 24-27).

A fifth trait of proto-fascism is the attack on critical thought, reasoning and inquiry through "the rise of an Orwellian version of Newspeak" (pp. 27-31) evidenced in the trivialization of vital public issues and the "misnaming [of] government policies" to obscure their reality, not to mention the flood of deceptions, distortions and prevarications. Giroux advises that we should not conflate Bush's individual perversions of the language with the broader use of deceptions and manipulations to redirect public understanding, stultify the public mind, and protect and expand the interests of power. An over focusing on Bush's challenges with and corruptions of the language serves as another form of collapsing the social into the individual and the institutional into the private and sometimes leads people to conclude that the problems with US policies are rooted only in individual decisions, or corruption in the executive branch, rather than reflective of historically systemic policies and institutional demands. Comprehending US foreign policy, for example, can only be accomplished adequately within larger historical patterns and frameworks. If we fail to place events and

individuals within the context of organizational prerogatives, historical patterns, and systemic arrangements, we face an ever growing risk of allowing the perpetuation of destructive policies, calamitous conditions, and cataclysm producing institutions while they continue down their path oriented toward “an appreciable risk of ultimate doom” (Gallagher, 2004).

Bush calls himself a “reformer,” while extending corporate welfare programs and providing tax breaks worth hundreds of billions of dollars to the wealthy. His “compassionate conservatism” is reflected in the gutting of crucial health, education and public service programs that assist children and the poor. Destruction of the environment programs are sold with the friendly language of “Clear Skies” and the “Healthy Forest Initiative” that conceal the legislation’s evisceration of restrictions on corporate produced pollution and that allow for amplifications in toxic emissions. While global climate change is increasingly seen as one of the gravest crises and challenges we face, the Bush administration “has removed scientific studies offering evidence of global warming from government reports” (p. 30), while spending \$647.5 billion on the military compared to \$7.37 billion on protecting the environment in 2008 (Pemberton, 2008).³ The distortions and lies were most prevalent in the lead up to the US attack on Iraq compelling NYT columnist Paul Krugman to conclude that “misrepresentation and deception are standard operating procedure for the [Bush} administration, which...systematically and brazenly distorts the facts” (p. 30).⁴ While Bush claims to “have done more for human rights” than any other president, the Bush administration has planned and perpetrated wars of aggression, war crimes, carried out programs of torture, abuse and rendition (Kay, 2008),

³ One might consider an intelligent being observing the earth from outer space and noting that the enlargement and expansion of militarism along with growing global climate change represent the deadliest threats facing humanity. If they assumed that US corporate and government leaders were rational they would conclude that they must be doing everything possible to reduce militarism and expand programs to address climate change. US power, however, is doing the opposite, increasing militarism and protecting institutions that exacerbate climate threats. An intelligent being from outer space could only conclude that those in positions of decision making power in the US (at least from this perspective) are utterly insane. The seemingly irrational behavior is explained in the slogan: “hegemony trumps survival.”

⁴ What the massive media coverage of these distortions fail to note is that lies, deception and manipulations to support US acts of military aggression is standard operating procedure (e.g. in US attacks on Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Libya, Grenada, Panama, Iraq 1991, Somalia, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, etc.), and even if the administration was telling the truth about WMD the US attack on Iraq would still have been an illegitimate and illegal act of aggression. The US would have had no more justification in attacking Iraq if Iraq possessed WMD (a hypothetical case) than Iran has for attacking Israel for its possession of WMD (a real case). The overemphasis on the lies leading up to the aggression serves to distract attention from the systemic nature of the use of US military power and the ways in which the attack on Iraq is another expression of military might in the longer term context of US pursuits of global power.

held prisoners illegally at Guantanamo, executed juveniles, refused to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, monitored email and phone calls of millions of citizens, pursued the production of new generations of nuclear weapons thus increasing the likelihood of our achieving the worst human rights abuse of all, i.e. mass death and the elimination of the species, etc.. All of this represents some of the reasons why Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Center for Constitutional Rights, etc. have accused the US of major human rights violations.⁵

The sixth form of creeping fascism is the power of a moralistic and anti-intellectual mode of religious fundamentalism reflected in a merging of bigoted, hateful, jingoistic, and patriarchal religion and politics “insensitive to real social problems such as poverty, racism, the crisis in health care and the increasing impoverishment of America’s children.” With George W. Bush serving as a “de facto leader” of the conservative religious movement, the insertion of right-wing religious fundamentalist (hoping to bring on “the Rapture”) ideas and representatives into matters of US foreign policy has increased not only intolerance of dialogue and dissent inside the US, but also intensified hatred of the United States around the world (especially in the Muslim world), while exacerbating the possibility of calamitous and cataclysmic forms of state and non-state terror. Perhaps worse, these groups have transmogrified standard and potentially transformative Christian values dedicated to universal love, compassion, respect and solidarity into dehumanizing forms of exclusion, self-interest at the expense of others, exploitation, and aggression of the most vile and destructive sorts (pp. 31-38).

The final neo-fascist tendency is the growth of the national security state and the accompanying permeation of militarism into the social, cultural and political landscape of a country (the US) “obsessed with war and the military values, policies and practices that drive it” (p. 39). When public space, including the spaces of public education, is increasingly militarized through its “logic of fear, surveillance, and control” (p. 41), democracy’s already tenuous foundations are further eroded. The pedagogical power of militarism circulates across a wide array of sites in the culture, ranging from films and advertisements to Hummers and recruitment campaigns, from video games and internet sites to sporting events and toys to political spectacles, etc. inculcating values, allegiances, and identities around killing, domination, aggression, superiority and destruction. The merging of entertainment with militarism and violence in the “military-entertainment complex” constantly prepares the population for US military aggression through normalizing the notion that conflicts can only be resolved through the use of force and

⁵ We can add the use of the term “death tax” to refer to the “estate tax” was an attempt to gather public support for a tax that impacts a small group of the population, those who receive over \$2 million in inheritance, as part of the continuing transfer of wealth to the rich and privileged that guarantees increasing inequality.

“repressive state power” (p. 51). Under such conditions that “blur the lines between military and civilian functions” (p. 52), the dialogue, critical patience and compassion necessary for meaningful democratic pursuits and the non-violent resolution of conflicts are suppressed and debased, and the values, spaces and mechanisms required for critical citizenship and global solidarity are obliterated.

The ideological and material ascendance of militarism, and the blindness of US leaders to militarism’s baneful consequences, may be the gravest threat humanity faces, and therefore one of the most urgent pedagogical challenges we must confront. Highly destructive and monstrously expensive weaponry is largely irrelevant (except for feeding the coffers of weapons producers) to addressing the economic, social and political roots of instability, injustice and conflict around the world. Military assaults not only fail to address the root causes of political and cultural discord and precariousness, they tend to exacerbate the problems, and for those committed to addressing conflicts through massive violence, the only choice is an upward spiraling cycle of increasing firepower and destruction. Under these conditions, the obsession with military power and the rule of force can only bode poorly for much, if not all, of humanity. Gabriel Kolko reminds us that “the destructive potential of weaponry has increased exponentially,” it is spreading around the globe, and as a result the “world has reached the most dangerous point in recent, or perhaps all of, history” (Kolko, *Age of War*, 2006)

A crucial point arising from these totalitarian pathways of militarism, fundamentalism and corporatism is that there are multiple nihilistic and destructive tendencies emerging from “neoliberalism [that] create the ideological and economic conditions that can promote a uniquely American version of fascism” (p. 52). It is therefore central, Giroux urges, that public intellectuals working at all levels of education, inside and outside schools, across multiple cultural sites, engage in pedagogical work that develops the critical skills, abilities and knowledge to challenge and overcome neoliberalism’s conventional wisdom that calls for the dismantling of any notion of a social contract, the elimination of the public’s ability to regulate corporate power, and the promotion of market-values at the expense of the public good. It requires that public intellectuals work to counter neoliberalism’s abrading of international law, its support for the criminal use of military force to gain access to resources, labor and global control, and its commercialization and militarization of public spaces, all of which contributes to the surrendering of hope to the neoliberal mantra “there is no alternative.” In addition, evolving from a politics of critical hope, conditions and experiences must be created in order for people to develop the tools and knowledge requisite for exercising our abilities to engage in participatory, humane and protagonistic forms of democratic struggle and living.

The Public Pedagogies of Neoliberalism

Fundamental to Giroux's exacting analysis "is that neoliberalism is more than an economic theory." To truly comprehend corporate power we must understand the educational force of corporate culture, for it is an educational power that has superseded formal education in its ability to condition, form and direct values, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, desires, identities and allegiances. "Corporate public pedagogy," Giroux notes, "has become an all encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values and practices." The public pedagogies of neoliberalism not only cancel out the possibilities of democratic practices and public spheres, and disappear the ugliness of militarism, racism and gender oppression "by absorbing [them...] within narrow economic relations" and submerging them beneath hyper-spectacles of commercialization, but also narrows opportunities for constructing alternative social relations and cultural politics by grossly constraining the available "range of identities, ideologies and subject positions" (p. 113). The constant emphasis on individualism, privatization and market identities narrows the social imagination and thus subverts the possibility of any meaningful democratic politics and social agency.

Corporate public pedagogies circulate across a wide and penetrating variety of social and cultural sites ranging from schools, to college and professional sports, to multiple forms of electronic media including films, television, the Internet, and video games, to political campaigns, public relations, tabloid-style news, advertising, etc. It includes a growing combination of sites reflective of corporate power's "unparalleled meaning-producing capacities" (p. 114) and unrelenting attack on democracy and the public good. The permeating power of corporate public makes the formal sites of education exceedingly more vital because schools and universities stand as some of the only sites in the wider culture in which teachers and students can critically address the commercialization of all corners of life and the attendant disappearance of democratic public spheres (including the sphere of a democratically oriented public mind that imagines beyond the present), but can also create opportunities for linking a critical awareness and reading of the world with meaningful and transformational interventions in the world.

In order to combat the corrupting power of corporate pedagogies, schools and universities must function as political and moral spheres in which people link the crisis of politics to a crisis of citizenship and use the power of pedagogy to engage in the dedicated work to create the economic conditions, educational practices, public spaces, collective agency and social relations to open up possibilities for social justice, peace and equality. It will require devoted pedagogical struggles that develop the necessary time, resources, abilities, knowledge, adventurous desires and motivations to comprehend and overcome the

disappearance of a language of commonality and a culture of solidarity, the undermining of secure social conditions and safety nets, the dismantling of links between education and struggles for social justice and global peace, and, the evisceration of a social contract (Giroux, 2008).

Pedagogies of Denial

The possibilities for producing democracy and fairness in the United States are tightly bound up with “how we name, think about, experience, and transform the interrelated modalities of race, racism, and social justice” (p. 61). In order to overcome the material and symbolic realities of racist oppression, it will be necessary to overcome the tendency to collapse institutional realities of racism into private discourses and individual pathologies. The relevance of race and the brutalities of structural racism cannot be understood outside relations of power and inequality. For example, “almost 80 percent of black kids begin their adult lives with no assets whatsoever.” This is part of “the historical accumulation of inequality and how it continues to structure [and constrain] the lives of African Americans” (Oliver, 2007). Furthermore, “the typical white family enjoys a net worth that is more than seven times that of its black counterpart.” African American families earning less than \$15,000 per year have a net worth of zero. In brief, “equality of opportunity cannot be achieved under unequal conditions (Conley, 2001) because inequality and oppression undermine the kinds of reciprocity required for the mutual fulfillment and flourishing of human well-being in society. In addition, white students with a bachelor’s degree earn \$500,000 more over a lifetime than black students with a bachelor’s degree (Sanders, 2007). Privatized discourses around individual bigotry and hateful dispositions remove iniquitous historical and social relationships from public consciousness around racism and deny public language of its possibilities for linking human agency with economic and social conditions. These denials downgrade the pertinence of race and racism “as a force for discrimination and exclusion,” degrade opportunities for productively engaging difference, distort our understanding of the interpenetrating relationships between public realities and private concerns, as well as between self and other, and devalue language, culture and pedagogy as “sites of contestation and struggle” (p. 64).

Another of the terrors of neoliberalism is the power of its social Darwinist discourses to transmogrify our understanding of politics, history, identity, agency and possibility, a transmutation that has impacted the character of race relations since the 1970s by undermining, through a bloated emphasis on individualism and competition, ideas and realities around mutual responsibility grounded in compassion, concern, solidarity and respect. Under neoliberalism, capital’s hegemony over all corners of life reduces politics to the protection and pursuit of wealth, subverts solidarity by reducing life to an individual struggle to see who will survive in the capitalist battle of all against all, eliminates the

substance of freedom by narrowing it to forms of privatized self-interest separated from the kinds of substantive freedoms that allow for mutually enriching self and social flourishing, and creates liquid conditions of uncertainty and insecurity in daily life.

Giroux introduces two forms of what he calls “the new racism:” “color-blindness and neoliberal racism” (p. 68). Within the discourse of “color-blindness” “racial conflict and discrimination are things of the past.” Race, in the color-blind language, is recognized but disconnected from the political, economic and social structural injustices that produce inequalities around education, health, health care, income, lending, housing, nutrition, criminal justice, and employment. In this case, systemic racism is collapsed into individual determinations, merit and character (even resorting to the language of the civil rights movement’s call to judge by “content of character”), and becomes a convenient mode for ignoring how inequalities of social, economic and political wealth, access and power condition circumstances of advantage and disadvantage in most areas of life. If we are going to seriously explore the relationships between democracy, social justice, equality, and freedom, and overcome the discourse of denial around the role of power and politics in promoting and entrenching racist exclusions and oppression, Giroux entreats, “race is an essential political category,” because of its material and ideological power for shaping “how identities are categorized and power, material privileges and resources distributed” (p. 71).

Following neoliberalism’s tendencies toward privatization and its assailing of the social contract, “neoliberal racism,” in its dismissal of institutional racism and its attacks on social equality as an assault on individual freedom, reflects the pedagogical power of the “privatization of racial discourse.” Under neoliberalism the state is basically reduced to carrying out policing functions and transferring wealth to the privileged sectors while abandoning investments in the public good or in expanding democratic freedoms leading to a severing of ties between individual freedom, moral responsibility and social consequences (p. 72). When neoliberal racism collapses the political into the personal, the social into the individual, the historical into the immediate, and the public into the private, it allows for the reproduction of modes of structural exclusion that symbolically and literally classify and order bodies along discriminatory and marginalizing lines. By rending the relationship between individual rights and the kinds of socially responsible citizenship obligatory for any form of substantive democracy, neoliberal racism not only stifles our ability to understand the repressive power of historical forms of racist injustice rooted in institutional imperatives, but it closes options for engaging in the modes of collective struggle necessary to evolve versions of a social contract that defend the public good and extend democratic values in ways that provide social, economic and racial justice for all citizens.

Why Giroux is Necessarily Urgent and Urgently Necessary – Hoping and Dreaming in Dangerous Times

“...not even the future is safe from those who envisage it as no more than the present stretching all the way to infinity.”

—Terry Eagleton, *Making a Break*

Harvard ecologist Paul Epstein (2007) warns, “Mega-catastrophes [are] what we can expect [...given] the unexpected pace and magnitude of climate change.” Meanwhile, the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report*, “paints a near-apocalyptic vision of Earth’s future,” as noted in the *LA Times*, “[and] even in its softened form [...portends] devastating effects that will strike all regions of the world and all levels of society” (Zarembo and Maugh, 2007). George Monbiot (2007) cautions, “We have a short period – a very short period – in which to prevent the planet from starting to shake us off,” with large-scale non-linear disruptions in the climate system, rising sea-levels, destabilizing of the ocean “conveyor belt,” crop failure, accelerated thawing of permafrost that will release large quantities of methane, spreading hunger, violence, disease and massive displacement, in short, conditions that could quickly lead to a sinking into barbarism. Ross Gelbspan (2007) reports leading climate scientists have “declared that humanity is about to pass or already has passed a ‘tipping point’ in terms of global warming [...and scientists report] it is ‘very unlikely’ that we will avoid the coming era of ‘dangerous climate change.’” And, related to global climate are “three water crises” that Maude Barlow (2008) suggests “pose the greatest threat of our time to the planet and to our survival...dwindling freshwater supplies, inequitable access to water, and the corporate control of water.”

In the face of these crises, one idea that continues “lying around,” (to borrow again from Milton Friedman’s notion of how we address crises), an idea that points to another potentially cataclysmic crisis, is a US commitment to addressing problems through the Pentagon system and spreading violence around the world. Miriam Pemberton (2008), writing for the “Institute for Policy Studies,” even while underestimating Pentagon spending, reports “during the last five years the ratio of military security [i.e. military aggression] to climate security spending has averaged 97 to 1.” Because of the enormous commitment to militarism, Chalmers Johnson (2008) warns, “the time of reckoning is fast approaching.” He estimates that the US will spend over \$1.1 trillion in 2008 on the military, expenditures “larger than all other nations’ military budgets combined.” Not only does this spending increase social and economic inequality by shifting wealth to elite sectors and intensify the likelihood of military aggression, WMD disasters and global violence (the US is also the world’s major arms supplier having cornered roughly 42% of

the market in 2006), but it also moves the US closer to economic collapse. Furthermore, massive military expenditures divert much needed funds from a variety of public sites, including: health care (47 million US citizens lack health care coverage and receive inadequate treatment about half the time reports Lawrence Altman of the *New York Times*); job creation (3 million manufacturing jobs were lost between 1998 and 2003); public and higher education (K-12 Federal spending is roughly \$37 billion, roughly 3% of the real Pentagon budget); environmental protection (spending on environmental protection is less than 1% of real military spending at a time when climate change increases the likelihood of the spread of disease, ocean “dead zones,” crop failure, coral reef destruction, impoverished air, food and water quality, and a decline in sustainable life-support systems); nutrition (one in five low-income households with elderly members are food insecure); and infrastructure repair.⁶

At the same time that trillions of dollars are diverted to military aggression, global military bases, private military contractors, debt on conflicts, etc., the inequality in the US is also staggering. Senator Bernie Sanders reports that the top one percent of the population now earn more than the bottom 150 million people. Chris Hartman notes that between 1979 and 2005, the top five percent of American families saw their real incomes increase 81 percent. Over the same period, the lowest-income fifth saw their real incomes decline one percent, as prices continue to rise. In addition, all of the income gains for 2005 accrued in the top 10% of US households. At the same time, there were income declines in the bottom 90%. The richest 1% of households in the US now own more wealth than that of the combined wealth of the bottom 90%. While a top hedge fund manager earns more in ten minutes than the average US worker earns during an entire year (Shell, 2007), 21% of children in the US live in poverty, and 33 million US citizens live in households that do not have adequate food. William Tabb reports that from 1990 to 2002, for each additional dollar earned by the bottom 90% of the US population, the top 0.01% earned an extra \$18,000.⁷

⁶ In measuring 15 areas of US infrastructure, including drinking water quality, schools, aviation, bridges, and hazardous waste, the *American Society of Civil Engineers* (2005) gave an average grade of D and a highest grade of C+. They estimate the cost of repairs at roughly \$1.5 trillion, a seemingly staggering amount; but, Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes (2008) suggest that the real costs of the US aggression in Iraq will be \$3 trillion (perhaps as high as \$5 trillion, as they argue in *The Guardian*, 2008); it is spending that is bankrupting the future in innumerable ways. To put \$5 trillion in perspective, it could provide 50 million people with \$100,000 dollars each for a college education; or, it could build 250,000 schools on a \$10 million model and still have \$2.5 trillion remaining. If the schools educated 200 students in each school there would be new schools for every K-12 student in the US.

⁷ The gross inequality of wealth distribution is not simply an economic fact but a serious political and social problem. Political influence is bought with wealth and that influence reproduces policies carried out in the interest of the investor class in the US. The bottom line is that any meaningful form of democracy is undermined as spending is increasingly distributed in the interest of wealth,

In the face of these growing challenges and grim crises, Giroux, as one of our foremost public intellectuals, stands firm in his relentless and methodologically rigorous critique of the massive injustices that follow from the terrors of neoliberalism and the horrors that accrue as a consequence of increasing militarism, privatization, fundamentalism, deregulation, inequality, racism, etc; but crucially he does more. He is resolute in his commitments to social justice, critical hope, democracy and freedom, and his belief in the potential for public-centered critical forms of pedagogy (that link critical thought to social intervention and critical dreams to new social realities) to create the conditions, knowledge and experiences for young people (and all citizens) to develop the will and abilities to take responsibility and risks for creating an ever evolving and substantive democratic culture and society that opens the possibility for saving the future. Necessary for taking on these tasks is “the challenge of addressing the politics and pedagogy of neoliberal common sense and...the educational force of [neoliberal]culture in securing widespread consent from the American people” that directs the public to comprehend life “via market mentalities and corporate paradigms” (P. 149).⁸

The result is an abolition of those public goods, social securities and elements of social fairness necessary for the development of individual agency, civic courage and engaged citizenship. In order to address the powerful public pedagogical impacts of an over-production and greed-driven neoliberal culture that “parades as common sense” across a wide-array of cultural sites, and consequently undermines notions and realities of solidarity, peace, liberty and egalitarianism, teachers, students and citizens, dedicated to the public good and a better future, must engage in forms of “politically active citizenship” directed toward fomenting “modes of critical education” that produce “the fundamental conditions” for non-violence “equality, human dignity, racial justice and freedom” (p. 153).

power and short-term profits, and at the expense of public well-being, security, sustenance and the future.

⁸ For example, under neoliberalism, the public is taught to consider government not as a representative vehicle through which the public can express its voice and realize its concerns and interests, i.e. a potentially democratic formation, but as a threat to democracy. The neoliberal goal is to replace democratic values with market-values and only shrink those domains of government that serve the interests of the wider public, for example, programs in health care, education, housing, nutrition, living wages, the arts, etc. (the absence of which leads to various forms of “social death”), and expand the role of government as it is linked to policing and incarcerating functions, military spending and aggression, corporate welfare, and transferring wealth to the affluent.

Sut Jhally (1998), in the film *Advertising and the End of the World*, argues that this generation of students may be the most important in human history because they will largely determine whether we save or lose the future. If that is the case, then this generation of educators, at the public school and university levels (and across a multitude of cultural sites), is arguably the most important generation of educators in human history with an immense responsibility to prepare the young in acquiring the tools, knowledge and will to not only abolish the conditions and transform the institutions that emphasize private power, ruthless competition, and violent domination and as a consequence threaten the future, but also develop rational hopes and realizable dreams grounded in the possibility of ever-improving conditions of social justice, critical inquiry, respect for others, equality, freedom, civic courage and a deep and passionate concern for the collective good (p. 102). In other words, public educators as public intellectuals must “reclaim education [both] as an ethical and political response to the demise of democratic public life” (p. 108), and as a political and moral project in which students, teachers and the public are invested in and committed to “the potential for a better future [...while] vocally and tirelessly challenging [the] nihilistic views” and realities erupting from the ravaging tendencies and nightmarish terrors of neoliberalism (p. 110).

In this direction, Giroux vigorously argues, public and university educators, as well as cultural workers in all domains of public pedagogy, must take on the moral, intellectual and social responsibility to invigorate spheres of education as sites in which adults can work with youth in developing projects dedicated to producing engaged and informed citizens, empowered and involved workers, and social and cultural agents. In short, we must develop and evolve projects dedicated to not only producing courageous and committed citizens empowered to resist “cynical relativism or doctrinaire politics,” (p. 145) but also pedagogies obliged to mobilizing the collective intellectual and imaginative potential of involved, informed and inclusive populations of people. In other words, we need pedagogies directed toward educating hopeful populations who dream differently in order to act differently and who are educated, and willing, to both embrace “the political and pedagogical imperative [...to] engage in rigorous social criticism” (p. 145) and also to pursue the demanding intellectual work required for developing the clarity necessary for transformative democratic actions of the sort that produce institutional restructurings out of which economic and social justice will emerge.

Terry Eagleton (2003) warns, “...unless the United States is able to do some hard thinking about the world, it is not at all certain that the world will be around for that much longer.” The kind of “hard thinking” to which Eagleton refers is the kind of critical interrogation that not only helps us make sense of what is actually happening in the world, but also provides us with hopeful and imaginative insights into both where we want to go and some illumination on what it might take to get there. What Giroux understands is that there are

always contingencies and uncertainties in our understanding of complex issues, whether in history, politics or pedagogy. This uncertainty does not mean that our insights, direction and reflections will always be shown to be incorrect, but rather they will always be incomplete (a necessary component of our unfinished and struggling nature and a source of critical hope). We confront this incompleteness by developing the solidaristic courage and commitment to take an active stand against all forms of injustice, discrimination and oppression, through holding firmly to Paulo Freire's dictum "nothing can justify the degradation of human beings...Nothing" (2001), accompanied by the intellectual fortitude to not stand still, to paraphrase another earlier Giroux formulation.

The courage and fortitude emerges from the belief in and commitment to the possibilities of a better future founded in an alternative set of values in opposition to the nihilistic and hope-destroying neoliberal values that promote self-interest, profiteering, hyper-individualism, domination, rapacious greed and ruthless competition. Those alternative values should include, but are not limited to: sustainability (environmental, agricultural, ontological, epistemological); a critical mentality that educates citizens to challenge assumptions, refuse absolutes, cultivate a culture of doubt, question conventional wisdom, interrogate power, and critique prevailing notions; economic stability dedicated to the fair and equitable distribution of wealth, income and resources as well as full and meaningful employment; a rising standard of living measured not in the accumulation of commodities but in the meeting of human needs and the fulfillment and flourishing of human abilities; concern for the collective good; notions of solidarity locally, nationally and internationally; peace, that works to overcome all forms of structural violence and militarism; and, love, grounded in the understanding that a reciprocity of flourishing and fulfillment requires an absence of oppression and inequality.

One of our crucial tasks then is to pursue the hard thinking that broadens possibilities for developing a comprehension of the boundaries of our knowledge and understanding, a vision of what alternatives might look like, and what will be required to achieve such alternatives. Then we must work to expand those boundaries, while examining carefully the conditions out of which knowledge is produced, constructed, distributed, assimilated and understood, and then engage, with critical hope, the complex and too often horrifying realities we confront on a regular basis. This essentially activist stance arises from the near-truism that although passivity and inaction are always a possible response, in most circumstances, they are the worst option, particularly during this historical period in which a "dark night of despair [threatens to...] overcome humanity" (Kolko, *After Socialism*, 2006).

Engaging Giroux seriously is exhausting and challenging, but only in ways that are invigorating and encouraging. It is at our peril that we avoid the demanding work Giroux offers and inspires. One is reminded of Murray Bookchin's directive that we cannot be

content only to work within the options presented by the dominant system, otherwise we are forced “to choose the lesser evil rather than the greater good” (Bookchin, 1999), and Giroux is vigorously committed to the greater political, moral, social and intellectual good. In confronting the terrors of neoliberalism and the foreboding recurrence of increasingly fierce and destructive disasters, Giroux thinks and writes with an unrelenting urgency, rigor and clarity, necessary now more than ever, that provides us with critical tools for thinking hard about the world, and while he offers no prescriptions or simple roadmaps (there are none), he offers direction rooted in a realistic hope sustained in the democratic possibilities alive in our capacities to act with a combination of civic courage, a collective spirit, critical inquiry, and local and international solidarity, (and, we might add “social love”) so that we do not reproduce a present that cancels our future, and so we do not lose our reality by abandoning our dreams.

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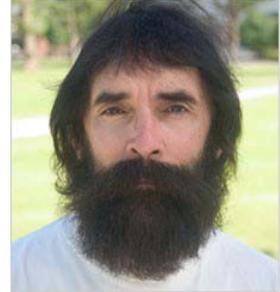
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About the Reviewer

Scott Morris, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Technology, Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, NM, and an outreach coordinator for the Radical Philosophers Association (see: <http://www.radicalphilosophy.org/>). Research interests include critical pedagogy, film, literacy, and the US culture of militarism. He can be reached at: dmorrisscott@yahoo.com





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