

Striving against the Eclipse of Democracy

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Striving against the Eclipse of Democracy Henry A. Giroux's Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the work of Henry Giroux and attempts to provide a coherent overview and critical analysis of his extremely large output spanning almost thirty years. It traces the evolution of his thought throughout this period and discusses such aspects of his work and themes as his engagement with Freire's work, his treatment of social class and race, his contribution to cultural studies, his trenchant critique of the Bush Jr years as well as of the corporatisation of various aspects of the public sphere including schooling and higher education, his notion and analysis of different forms of 'public pedagogy,' his contribution to a politics of Educated Hope and to the development of a substantive democracy, and his treatment of the recurring theme of the war being waged on different fronts against youth and children.

Key-words: cultural politics, public pedagogy, educated hope, substantive democracy

When focusing on contemporary critical pedagogy, reference to the work of Henry Giroux is de rigueur. He is, after all, a founding figure in the critical pedagogy movement. A most prolific writer, one of whose works is recently being translated into Italian,² Giroux explores resources of hope when, as indicated in a book title of his, democracy is being 'eclipsed' by a new

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'authoritarianism.' This sense of hope is enhanced by the promise surrounding Obama's election to the U.S. presidency, though the bulk of Giroux's recent work, which I will discuss in this essay, surrounds the years of G.W. Bush's terms in office.

Giroux has, however, already expressed deep concerns about the contradictions characterising Obama's first months in power, most trenchantly in 'op. ed.' columns on topics such as the politics of lying (Giroux, 2009a), violence in schools (2009b, 2010b) and the disruptive proto-fascist practices meant to undermine social reforms that the new President seeks to introduce (Giroux, 2009d). Most of these criticisms are captured in *Politics After Hope: Obama and the Crisis of Youth, Race, and Democracy* (Giroux, 2010a), where Obama is shown to be continuing many of Bush's educational policies (see also Giroux, 2009a). The US President is also criticized in another work (Giroux, 2010b) for promoting many of the illegal legalities the Bush administration adopted to subvert the Geneva Accords and other international laws forbidding torture and the violation of human rights.

The new authoritarianism which Giroux writes about, certainly in his 2004 book, *The Terrors of Neoliberalism* (Giroux, 2004), and its revised version, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics Beyond the Age of Greed* (Giroux, 2008), makes its presence felt not only through figures in military uniform, visible though these may be in an age of increasing militarisation, but also through the all engulfing images of corporate power that characterise several aspects of our lives, comprising entertainment, youth culture, public schooling and universities. It is an authoritarianism that is or was mediated by number of developments (see Ch. 1 in Giroux, 2005a, pp 30-108). These include:

- Neoliberalism - the state changes its traditional role, in this context, to one which provides the infrastructure for capital mobility and the

² His *University in Chains* (Giroux, 2007) is being translated into Italian for inclusion in Carlo Delfino Editore's series on education, and primarily critical education, edited by Professor Fausto Telleri of the University of Sassari. The series includes works of such critical pedagogues as Paolo Vittoria (on Paulo Freire), Peter McLaren (on Che Guevara and Freire), Fausto Telleri (on Globalisation) and the undersigned (on Antonio Gramsci and Freire).

repressive mechanisms to control those who react to their increasing marginalisation in a system in which the market holds sway);

- the constant generation of a culture of fear, especially in the wake of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks;
- a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism - the creation of what Benedict Anderson calls an 'imagined community,' in this case an imagined community of 'Americans' which often results in a culture of suspicion and a crackdown on dissent and anti-war activities and attitudes;
- an all pervasive presence of militarism, both abroad and at home, through a massive increase in incarceration of victims of neo-liberal policies, policing of schools and a glut of images, including popular cultural images, which render militarisation palatable and military enrolment attractive;
- a constant blurring of the traditional dividing line between religion (see Ch.5 of Giroux, 2006f) and state.

With respect to the last point, the war on the home front (authoritarian polices) and abroad was justified by a language that not only smacks of Orwellian 'doublespeak' (see Ch.7 in Giroux, 2006f) but was also couched in religious fundamentalist terms. In the recent G.W. Bush years, the situation was most pronounced even though such terms always formed part of the discourse pertaining to the Conservative-Neoliberal two pronged strategy characterising New Right politics – Neoliberal economic approaches and conservative values.

This new authoritarianism is marked by a process of corporate encroachment on every day life, very much a feature of the first mediation referred to earlier, the one concerning Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism renders persons simply producers and consumers and not social actors who can engage in and help develop the public sphere and publicly and collectively challenge the forms of authoritarianism taking root³.

³ Toni Morrison, in a conversation, on the subject of 9/11, with Cornel West, notices how leading US government and municipal personalities exhorted Americans to indulge in consumerist activities in the immediate aftermath of September 11 without any pleas for them to go home and see to the needs of families and neighbours. People were urged to go to the malls

Culture matters in this age of corporate encroachment, including the encroachment of the military-industrial complex, on our lives. I suppose it always mattered, as Antonio Gramsci underlined well over 70 years ago, emphasising this dimension, alongside a political economic one, in his analysis of power and class politics in particular. Giroux, for his part, has been consistent in regarding the cultural sphere a key source of power, and he does this without eschewing important political economic considerations (although he is less remembered for this aspect of his analysis), and while perusing a variety of texts ranging from the print media to film. They all constitute forms of what he calls 'public pedagogy' (Giroux, 1999, p. 4). This concept best captures his attempt to extend the notion of pedagogy well beyond the important though very limited context of schooling. Every relationship of hegemony is an educational relationship, Gramsci would tell us, and, in this respect, Giroux engages a tradition that comprises the work of not only Antonio Gramsci (Giroux, 1980a; Giroux, 1980b; Giroux, 1988) but also Theodor Adorno, Raymond Williams, Walter Benjamin, and more recently Stuart Hall, Paulo Freire, Michelle Foucault, Maxine Greene, Homi Bhabha, Noam Chomsky, Roger I Simon, bell hooks, Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben, to name but a few.

Giroux has always viewed the cultural terrain as a vehicle for the shaping of subjectivities and the cultivation of desires through a "pedagogical" process, the structuring principles of which are political (Giroux & Simon, cited in Giroux, 1992, p. 188; Giroux & Simon, 1989, p.10). It is also a vehicle for the production, enactment and circulation of social practices, to echo Stuart Hall (Giroux, 2000a, p. 9). As Gramsci had indicated, it is through culture that much, though not all, of the present hegemonic arrangements are developed and contested, given the incompleteness of these arrangements that allow spaces in which counter-hegemonic action can be waged (Giroux & Simon, cited in Giroux, 1992, p. 186; Giroux & Simon, 1989, p.8).

Gramsci's importance in Giroux's thinking on the relationship between culture and power is reflected in the latter's early and later works. One of

and fly on planes (to defy the terrorists). They were called upon to act as consumers and not citizens. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMgNYsFi3Mg>

Giroux's earliest piece is an article on Gramsci in *Telos*. The Sardinian Marxist politician and social theorist is the subject of illuminating essays by Giroux in later works such as *Stealing Innocence. Corporate Culture's War on Children* (Giroux, 2000b) and a paper that appears in both *Educational Theory* and an anthology of essays on Gramsci (Giroux, 2002). Giroux uses Gramsci and others to go beyond 'ideology critique,' a situation which is a characteristic of contemporary German Marxist debates where Gramsci's ideas concerning hegemony are juxtaposed against the 'ideology critique' of the Frankfurt School.

Giroux draws on critical insights by Gramsci and others to help map out terrains in which people can act as social agents and 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1988) engaging "in a commitment to a form of solidarity that addresses the many instances of suffering that are a growing and threatening part of life in America and abroad." (Giroux, 1997a, p.104). It is a form of solidarity that highlights the *collective* dimensions of knowledge, one that "emerges from an affirmative view of liberation that underscores the necessity of working collectively alongside the oppressed." (Ibid.)

It is for this reason that he is critical of the position of certain academics who limit themselves to questions of textuality, ideology critique, and signification. (Giroux, 2000a, pp. 131-132) In his view, they would refrain from linking this work to the greater task of furnishing us with the anticipatory utopian vision of a radical democracy, characterised by equity and social justice.

These concerns emerge quite clearly in such later works as *The Mouse that Roared. Disney and the End of Innocence* (1999), *Impure Acts* (Giroux, 2000a), *Stealing Innocence. Corporate Culture's War on Children* (Giroux, 2000b), *Public Spaces/Private Lives. Beyond the Culture of Cynicism* (Giroux, 2001), *The Terrors of Neoliberalism* (Giroux, 2004), *Against the New Authoritarianism. Politics after Abu Ghraib* (Giroux, 2005a), *Take Back Higher Education* (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004) and *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics Beyond the Age of Greed* (Giroux, 2008), to which I will devote the bulk of the attention in this chapter.

These books will together provide the springboard for a discussion of related themes broached in such works as *Disturbing Pleasures* (Giroux,

1994a), *Fugitive Cultures* (1996), *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope* (1997a), the co-edited anthology, *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice* (Giroux & Shannon, 1997), *Channel Surfing: Race Talk and the Destruction of Today's Youth* (Giroux, 1997b), besides the most recent *Stormy Weather. Katrina and the Politics of Disposability* (Giroux, 2006c) and *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism* (Giroux, 2006e).

As I had occasion to remark in a review essay on some of them (Mayo, 2002), these books mark the latest phase of Henry Giroux's work. The corpus of his work is indeed massive, with other works being completed at the time of my writing this piece (articles concerning torture and articles on Obama's initial years as US President and the neo-conservative and new-authoritarian legacies he is expected to confront). Giroux's early works include a review of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in *Interchange* (an academic journal that comes out of Canada), that led to a long-standing collaborative relationship between him and the Brazilian educator.

Giroux states that, when a high school teacher in the early seventies, he discovered, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the language he required to justify his classroom pedagogical approach.

This approach was intended as an antidote to the "barren", "regimented", "militaristic" schooling of the times; Giroux's alternative approach had been questioned by the school's Vice-Principal (Giroux, 2006b). Giroux's tremendous respect for Paulo's work is pretty obvious given that essays on the Brazilian educator feature regularly throughout the American writer's oeuvre including an essay in *Stealing Innocence* and another on Freire and postcolonialism, in *Disturbing Pleasures*, that had originally appeared in an anthology of essays on Freire (McLaren and Leonard, 1993) and is reproduced in a recently published Giroux reader (Giroux, 2006a). Giroux found, in Freire's work, "an attempt to take seriously the relationship between education and social change, to dignify the subject of learning, to be attentive to questions of contextualisation, to link education to particular forms of individual and social empowerment." (Giroux, 2006b, Ch.4).

According to Giroux, Freire's pedagogy that was "forged in a kind of struggle to link education to justice," remains relevant in this day and age. It provides the antithesis to the dominant education policy that characterises the

new ‘authoritarianism’ in the US with its “militarism,” “market fundamentalism,” and a “horrible religious fundamentalism that has nothing to do with genuine religious compassion and insight” (Ibid.).

Giroux sees, as many do, this religious fundamentalism (Ch.5 in Giroux, 2006f) as co-existing, almost naturally, with the kind of authoritarianism that he inveighs against. It must be said that Freire’s pedagogy too has religious overtones but which are mostly linked to the social justice oriented ‘Prophetic Church’, the church that is linked to grassroots struggles against Empire, in Hardt and Negri’s (2000) sense, and which is closely linked to Liberation Theology. The Prophetic Church’s option is for the oppressed. It stands in marked contrast to the Constantinian Church – the church of Empire⁴ – with its many variants including that which mediates the present American Empire’s ‘new fascist’ authoritarian policies. Freire’s pedagogy is one in which, according to Giroux, “the subject is confirmed” and “learning is linked to questions of critical engagement”.

Giroux regards it as a pedagogy that does not “see schools as merely testing centres” (Ibid.). One notices shades of Don Milani and the boys of Barbiana here with their denunciation, in the *Lettera*, of the public school, the school that promotes the rich and ‘figli di papa`’ (daddy’s children), in short the Pierini, and fails the children of the working and peasant classes, the ‘Gianni bocciati,’ the failed boys given the typical name of Gianni (Scuola di Barbiana, 1996). Giroux considered Freire a model to “link the political and the personal” (Ibid.), which goes against the grain of contemporary hegemonic thinking through which issues are reduced to a matter of individual concerns and

⁴ See Cornel West in an exchange with Toni Morrison, focusing on Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ where he draws the important distinction between the Constantinian Church, of which the dominant American church is the legatee, and the Prophetic Church. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjifj_PZONo&mode=related&search=

On the subject of the Prophetic Church, as opposed to the Traditional and Modernizing churches, see Paulo Freire’s discussion in *The Politics of Education* (Freire, 1985) for which Giroux wrote the Introduction (Giroux, 1985, also reproduced in Giroux 1988) highlighting the liberation theology underpinnings of Freire’s pedagogical politics characterized by the ‘language of critique’ and the ‘language of possibility.’ See the section in the Introduction with the title: ‘Liberation Theology and the Language of Possibility.’

deficiencies while citizenship is, once again, defined in production and consumption terms (Giroux, 2006c; 2006d).

Giroux recognises that Freire continues to serve as a resource that has consistently nourished his work as an educationist from the very beginning. Giroux's early works comprise writings that engaged the then dominant sociological theories of social/ cultural reproduction and resistance in education, very much inspired by Neo-Marxist writings (Giroux, 1981a⁵ and Giroux, 1983). *Theory and Resistance* (Giroux, 1983) was regarded as a key text in critical pedagogy. As a matter of fact, there are those who continue to associate Giroux's name and style of writing exclusively with this text. In doing so, they fail to do justice to Giroux's large oeuvre, thus overlooking the evolution of his thinking and writing style over a twenty six year period.

Giroux later collaborated with sociologist Stanley Aronowitz in roughly the same area (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Giroux drew a lot from the reproduction /production/ resistance paradigm and, in his own words, engaged and continues to "engage the Marxist tradition" (Giroux, 1992, p. 13). A la` Gramsci, he also strove to add a "critical cultural politics" (Giroux, cited in Torres, 1998, p. 136) dimension to the neo-Marxist educational paradigm, mining, in the process, such resources as Paul Willis' classic ethnographic work (*Learning to labour*) and many others, notably the writings of key Frankfurt School figures, especially, as in the case of Adorno, work relating to the emancipatory phase rather than that belonging to the later 'negative dialectics' period. Adorno continued to remain a source of reference even in Giroux's recent work (Giroux, 2005a) that includes reflections on human rights violations in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Reference is made, in this Canadian text, to Adorno's celebrated essay: 'Education after Auschwitz'⁶.

⁵ See also Giroux, 1981b and Chapter 1 of the most recent Giroux anthology (Giroux, 2006a).

⁶ As always, there is no substitute for reading the original sources. However, anyone seeking a comprehensive review of Henry Giroux's early work should refer to Ronald G. Sultana (1985). For two excellent detailed analyses that comprise Giroux's later work, see Kellner (2001) and Robbins (2006).

Giroux continues to engage the historical materialist tradition even in his most recent work, eschewing any kind of theoretical prescription and seeing it as a tradition that constantly requires extension and revitalisation (Giroux, in Torres, 1998, p. 153) rather than a body of work to be regarded as some kind of ‘ideological church.’ It is a theme to which he returns in recent work as he expresses his concern that the Left requires a new language in these troubled authoritarian times:

As the Right wages a frontal assault against all remnants of the democratic state and its welfare provisions, the progressive Left is in disarray. Theoretical and political impoverishment feed off each other as hope of a revolutionary project capable of challenging the existing forces of domination appears remote. (Giroux, 2005b)

Earlier, he had found the work of the reproduction theorists to be instructive but limited in its explanatory power and this led him to mine and draw critical insights from the area of cultural studies. German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch was an important source of influence, through his three-volume *Principle of Hope* (cf. Bloch, 1995). Certain strands of postmodern literature also made their presence felt in a number of works in which popular culture was conceived of as an important area of enquiry (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Giroux & Simon, 1989).

In addition to these areas, one notices the influence of feminist literature (Giroux, 1991), postcolonial studies (1992), and post-structuralism, the last mentioned comprising the work of Michel Foucault. These influences continue to inform his work, though at no stage is the emancipatory element and the struggle for social justice missing from Giroux’s writings.

Giroux’s dissatisfaction with some of the excesses of certain postmodernist strands - their nihilistic, ludic and de-politicized posturing – drew him even closer to Cultural Studies, which enabled him to “recover the primacy of the political” (Giroux, in Torres, 1998, p. 137) In many of Giroux’s writings, the engagement with cultural studies is intensified (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004):

Culture not only mediates history, it shapes it. We argue that culture is the primary terrain for realizing the political as an act of social intervention, a space in which politics is pluralized, recognized as contingent, and open to many formations. (p. 95)

Giroux sought to bring a strong cultural studies dimension into the discourse on education and provide a pedagogical dimension to cultural studies itself. He feels that this approach is important to help revitalise the democratic public sphere. This emerges most clearly in a number of writings (see Giroux & Shannon, 1997). He has also been editing, for a number of years, an academic refereed journal intended to combine educational and pedagogical matters with Cultural Studies - *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*. He shares this task with his wife, Susan Searls Giroux.

What renders cultural studies so important to education, in Giroux's eyes, is the fact that it deals with a whole range of pedagogical agencies. Quite evident here is Gramsci's influence, reflecting the Sardinian's influence on the now defunct Birmingham School of Contemporary Cultural Studies, recently given as much importance by the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* as Gramsci's influence on the relevant areas of Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Studies⁷.

These 'public pedagogical' agencies constitute the terrain where hegemony is both shaped and challenged. It can be challenged by virtue of an oppositional discourse, a discourse of transgression (a form of "living dangerously," see Giroux, 1993) occurring 'in and against' institutions such as universities (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004) and the film industry (Giroux, 2002), none of which are monolithic. Educators can avail themselves of these sites of struggle, in the shaping of desires, sensibilities and subjectivities, to act as cultural workers, transformative intellectuals and oppositional public intellectuals. These intellectuals act not alone but in solidarity with others. Their collective knowledge and actions presuppose specific visions of public life, community, and moral accountability. (Giroux, 2000a: 141)

⁷ See the panels dedicated to these areas in the 2007 international conference on Gramsci held by the Fondazione in Rome to mark the 40th anniversary of his death (Schirru, 2009).

How can educators respond to the challenge posed by Giroux when advocating the adoption of a cultural studies approach to teaching/learning in various settings (see for instance Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004)? One way of ensuring that the Cultural Studies area becomes a meaningful political pedagogical practice, and not a 'radical chic' enclave, is by extending it to adult and community education/action. As Raymond Williams reminds us (Williams, 1993: 260), adult education provided the setting for Cultural Studies to emerge in its British versions.

For Giroux, adult education would be just one among many other settings for Cultural Studies and education, the latter conceived of in its widest sense.

The terrain in which education takes place is broad enough to comprise a variety of pedagogical sites, sites that extend beyond the system of formal education. As a result, educational activity is engaged in by not only professional teachers and academics but a broader array of cultural workers that includes journalists and op-ed columnists, community activists and animators, architects, advertisers, photographers, artists, actors, film directors, social activists, religious ministers, musicians and so forth.

This partly explains why Giroux gradually moved from writing about public schooling to engaging in lengthy discussions of broader social issues, such as war and corporate power, and various forms of cultural production such as film, cartoons and media news packages. This represents a marked contrast with Giroux's early work around schooling. Public pedagogy occurs through a plethora of sites and means. The shift in Giroux's focus is also represented biographically by his move from a graduate school of education to the English and Cultural Studies Department at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, where he holds a chair in Communication Studies.

Many of Giroux's works provide critical analyses of the broader pedagogical function of several important cultural sites, characterized by an increasing degree of corporate encroachment. In *Stealing Innocence*, he targets, as object of criticism and analysis, corporations such as Calvin Klein (Giroux, 2000b, pp. 74-81), a corporation that had already featured in *Channel Surfing* (Giroux, 1997b). In the same book, where some of the analysis of corporations echoes the earlier work focusing on Benetton adverts (Giroux, 1994a, Giroux, 2006a), and Chapter 9 of *America on the Edge* (2006f), he provides an incisive

analysis of the loss of innocence occurring through such forms of ‘anticipated adulthood’ and thwarted childhood as child beauty pageants (Giroux, 2000b, pp. 39-64). These pageants also occur in our part of the world, as I have discovered from my ‘teaching practice’ supervisory duties in Malta.

Giroux’s later work is also well known for its trenchant analyses of one of America’s ‘sacred cows’, the Disney Empire (*The Mouse that Roared*).

This and related texts by Giroux (a synoptic version of the book’s argument in a chapter in *Impure Acts*) aroused mixed feelings among some of the graduate students at my home university with whom I discussed the work. Many of the students made it clear that they consider Disney as one of their childhood’s key sources of ‘innocent pleasure’. Giroux’s exposure of the insidiousness of the corporate, imperialist and hegemonic agenda, veiled by the spectacle of innocence and make-believe⁸, must have come down on these learners, gripped by childhood nostalgia, as a cold shower. In this book, Giroux reveals the extent of Disney’s corporate empire. The study combines cultural criticism with a dose of political economic analysis. This constitutes an interesting feature of this and other works by Giroux, given that he and other critical pedagogues and cultural theorists have often been accused of cultural reductionism. In Giroux’s Disney analysis, we come across insightful and revealing episodes such as those exposing ruthless, asymmetrical management–labour relations in the Disney theme parks.

Giroux has written extensively on the film industry, which, as a piece, entitled ‘Breaking into the Movies. Film as Cultural Politics,’ indicates, has provided a lifelong fascination (Giroux, 2006f). In fact his books are replete with chapters involving film criticism that constitutes an important feature of his oeuvre. The films covered include not only the numerous Disney blockbuster cartoons (that naturally figure prominently in *The Mouse that Roared*) but also, to name but a few, such films as:

⁸ It provides a stark contrast to the other form of spectacle dealt with by Giroux, that of war and terrorism (Giroux, 2006e). These occur through alternative uses of the media (including the replaying of the planes’ dramatic crashing into the Twin Towers and bestial beheading scenes shown on the internet) indicating the vulnerability of the West and the bio-politics of its sovereignty (Giroux, 2006e: 55).

- *Dirty Dancing* in a co edited compendium of writings (with Roger I Simon) on education and cultural studies (Giroux & Simon, 1989);
- *Dead Poets Society* (Giroux, 1993);
- *Boys 'n the Hood* and *Juice* (Giroux, 1994b and Giroux, 2006a);
- Two Disney-Touchstone films, *Good Morning Vietnam* and *Pretty Woman*, in the *Mouse that Roared* (Giroux, 1999: 129-130) and earlier work (1994a);
- *Fight club* in *Public Spaces/Private Lives* (Giroux, 2001).

Giroux demonstrates how some of the images projected in these films serve, as with other images projected by different cultural products (e.g. adverts), as public pedagogies (Giroux, 2001, p. 75). These pedagogies resonate with broader social and political issues. This resonance has a bearing on the construction of our subjectivities, sensibilities and political dispositions. They would include such elements as:

- the racist misrepresentations of Arabs and the Orient (in Said's terms) in *Aladdin*;
- degenerate images of youth in 'heroin chic' adverts and such films as *Dangerous Minds*, *The Substitute I* and *High School High* (Giroux, 2000b; 2006a);
- racially-discriminating overtones in the language of *The Jungle Book*;
- sexism in *Pretty Woman*;
- violence and machismo in *Fight Club*;
- the complex set of representations in black films of the 90s, such as *Boys 'n the Hood* and *Juice*.

While revealing the sense of hopelessness and self-destructiveness that characterises black neighbourhoods, *Boys 'n the Hood* and *Juice* feed into what Giroux regards as the US's national stereotypical obsession with nihilism as

being endemic to black youth culture. This set of representations provides little indication of the structuring forces at play, of which white middle class American audiences are an integral part (Giroux, 2006a, 105-108).

Henry Giroux's comprehensive analysis comprises the scouring of different sources of pleasure and public pedagogy to drive home his central thesis: a war is being waged against children and youth (especially marginalized and 'disposable' youth such as blacks, indigenous, and working class youth). The war is being waged against precisely those people who, in Giroux's view, should hold out the promise of a better future. Youths and children are made the subject of relentless attacks that take several forms, including coercion, demonisation, militarization and commodification (through corporatist encroachment) within a New Right scenario. These themes feature prominently in his later works notably his latest *Youth in a Suspect Society. Democracy or Disposability?* (Giroux, 2009c)

Among the hardest hit, in Giroux's view, are undoubtedly the children and youth of those countries that are the victims of senseless wars waged by the USA and its allies targeting civilians (notably in Afghanistan and Iraq) and who die in their thousands, or are permanently maimed, through what is perversely dubbed 'collateral damage,' a term which returned to haunt Americans in the trial connected with the Oklahoma bombing. Giroux's numerous writings on the subject are overwhelming in terms of the presentation of data indicating the deaths and injuries suffered by youth and children as a result of not only bombardments by US forces and their allies but also the indirect effects of the destruction of public infrastructure in Iraq, in the 1991 Gulf War, which led to malnutrition and deadly diseases (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 70):

As globalisation and militarization mutually reinforce each other as an economic policy and a means to settle conflicts, wars are no longer forced between soldiers but are now visited upon civilians, and appear to have the most detrimental effects on children. Within the last decade, 2 million children have died in military conflicts. Another 4 million have been disabled, 12 million have been left homeless, and millions more have been orphaned. (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 75, 76)

This recalls Don Milani and his students' denunciation of the use of poisonous gas by the Italian fascist army on Ethiopians, a denunciation which occurred in the midst of the students' search for a 'just war' which, they concluded, never existed (Milani, 1991). The above quote, from Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, refers to a situation brought about by the military-industrial complex that has rendered militarism the solution to world disputes caused, in part, by unequal access to the world's resources.

These wars, particularly those couched as 'wars on terror,' provide legitimacy to stringent social measures and Orwellian 'Big Brother' surveillance strategies on the home front. This is all in the interest of pushing through Neo-liberal policies. Market relations, deregulation, consumerism and privatisation are privileged at the expense of state interventions to safeguard social inclusion and solidarity. These latter elements become dirty words and those who cannot produce and consume are left to flounder by the wayside in a manner that was shockingly revealed to the world at large in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Defined primarily through a discourse of "lack" in the face of the social imperatives of good character, personal responsibility, and hyper-individualism, entire populations are expelled from the index of moral concerns.(Giroux, 2006d)

The situation, as Giroux drives home time and time again, is compounded by the emergence of a carceral state, an elaboration on Foucault's notion of a 'carceral society,' that spends more on prisons, to discipline or 'weed out' the victims of such Neo-liberal policies,' than on public education. Giroux shows, in common with such writers as Chomsky and Macedo, how there are more black youths in prisons than in public education institutions – a shocking revelation that attests to a war on children and youth being waged not only in Afghanistan and Iraq but also on the home front.

Punishment, incarceration, and surveillance have come to represent the role of the new state. One consequence is that the implied contract between the state and citizens is broken, and social guarantees for youth as well as civic

obligations to the future vanish from the public agenda. (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 74)

One ought to remark that carceral states await the victims of Neo-liberal policies worldwide, notably countries that are serving as ‘first port of call’ for immigrants from Africa and Asia fleeing poverty, starvation (exacerbated by structural adjustment programmes) and internal wars fuelled by a potent western based arms industry (the US is the major exporter of arms, Giroux reminds us). The carceral settings awaiting such hapless victims include detention centres, euphemistically called, in Italy, centres of temporary ‘hospitality,’ where immigrants are kept for long periods as they await decisions regarding whether they should be allowed in as refugees or repatriated. Neo-liberal policies make their presence felt in these contexts since the provision of a grossly underpaid ‘reserve army’ of immigrants, including illegal immigrants, serves to depress local wages.

With regard to the link between Iraq and the USA, Giroux demonstrates how the massive cost of financing the war in Iraq is borne by the USA people themselves since this is partly made good by cutbacks on the social wage that results in lack of funding for social programmes, including public education programmes, public health schemes and so forth. The brunt is thus borne by the poor who, once again, are treated as disposable beings: the ‘human waste disposal’ segment of American society, to use Zygmunt Bauman’s words (Bauman, 2006). What renders the burden heavier is the fact that the Bush administration unabashedly provided the wealthiest segment of US society with huge tax cuts as part of its ‘economic stimulus’ policies (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 80).

While \$723 billion dollars are allocated for tax cuts for the rich, state governments are cutting a total of \$75 billion in health care, welfare benefits, and education. (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 59)

Giroux therefore demonstrates, throughout numerous works (Giroux, 2004, 2008; Giroux, 2005a; Giroux, 2006a; Giroux & Searls Giroux 2004), that a war on the poor and disenfranchised is being fought on two fronts, the foreign and

home front. In the latter case, it takes the form of "...the silent war at home" in that:

...the Iraq war and the war against terrorism are being financed from cuts in domestic funding on health care, children's education, and other public services. (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 57)

The Slovenian cultural critic, Slavoj Žižek is quoted as having asserted that the "true target of the 'war on terror' is American society itself – the disciplining of its emancipatory excesses" (in Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004: 57).

The post Katrina images provide testimony to the "silent" war being waged on the home front, in which youth and children feature among the greatest casualties (Giroux, 2006c,d). The places that were hardest hit later became the target of militarization, for the prevention of looting, and social engineering. They also began to serve as laboratories for market reforms (Giroux, 2006 c: 59). These reforms generally lead to gentrification, as a number of international experiences have shown. This situation is, according to Giroux, symptomatic of a new *biopolitics* devoid of "democratic principles, practices and values and scornful of the social contract"(Giroux, 2006c: 63), the kind of contract one expects Obama to begin to observe, especially given his pledges in this regard.

Sites of public pedagogy continued to provide legitimacy for such nefarious policies, especially through the politics of representation of destitute youth underlying the unsavoury images referred to earlier (see Kellner, 2001, p. 143). These demonisation strategies justify cuts in spending on youth welfare and other social programs.

The war on children occurs, however, not only through the "dismantling of the welfare state, but also through the pervasive glut of images that cast them as the principal incitements to adult desire." This is the case of the child beauty pageants, the commodification of young female bodies, referred to earlier, which, in certain cases, can result in tragic deaths at the hands of paedophiles (Giroux, 2000b: 63). The war is waged on several other fronts.

For instance, the war on black youth, who feature among the greatest casualties of this onslaught, is discussed in several places, notably *Fugitive*

Cultures (1996) and, as indicated, more recent work (Giroux, 2006a, Ch. 6). The operative phrase in this context is ‘zero tolerance’ (Giroux, 2001, ch.2). The whole theme of the carceral state relates to this notion, and what makes the situation worse is that black youth are often the target of a whole range of recruitment strategies, also involving popular culture devices, to swell the ranks of the military waging war both at home and abroad. Joining the military represents for such youth a way out of poverty, a way out which alas often leads to a similar dead end, a literally ‘dead’ end as the frequent images of body-bags, being returned from Iraq, reveal.

The situation of repression is compounded by the advent of a new McCarthyism having made its presence felt throughout US society (see Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004, Ch. 1) and which spread to the universities, with professors being named in lists such as “the dirty dozen” list and represented as people posing a threat to national security. Giroux’s one time close colleague at Oxford-Ohio, Peter McLaren, featured prominently in this list. So did other collaborators such as Douglas Kellner. Even a revered deceased intellectual, Edward Said, was not spared such treatment given his influence on the suddenly ‘dangerous’ areas of Middle-eastern and Postcolonial studies.

Giroux’s discussions concerning the war (in many cases, class-based, sexist, homophobic, and racist) being waged on youth and children, have a strong international relevance. Racism, to provide an example, is undoubtedly a global reality (see Macedo & Gounari, 2006). Immigrants and their offspring are constantly being “otherised” in a variety of countries that are increasingly becoming multi-ethnic. Malta, my home country, can be included among these. Like other Southern European countries, it has turned from being a net exporter to a net importer of labour power (see Borg & Mayo, 2006; Mayo, 2004).

The war on children and youth is often rendered palpable through acts of violence meted out to students in schools. I refer, in this context, to Giroux’s recent ‘op-ed’ on the brutalisation of kids in schools. Special reference is made to the alleged beating of a 15 year old disabled African American schoolboy, by a police officer, for not having tucked in his shirt (Giroux, 2009b).

The war is even more subtle and takes on a less blatant form. As Giroux indicates time and time again, it also comprises corporate culture’s encroachment on all spheres of life. Capitalism constantly extends its reach in

the quest for new markets and to draw more aspects of our existence into capitalist social relations of production. Public goods are converted to consumer goods, with citizenship being, once again, reduced to a two-dimensional aspect of our lives. From potentially social actors (see Martin, 2001, p. 5) engaging in the public sphere and availing ourselves of 'public time,' the slowing down of time "in order to question what Jacques Derrida calls the powers that limit 'a democracy to come,' " we are constantly reduced to being persons engaged in 'corporate time', that is "...a notion of accelerated time in which the principle of self-interest replaces politics and consumerism replaces a broader notion of social agency." (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004: 227). In the latter case, everything is carried out at speed and with technical efficiency, allowing little time for deep reflection and therefore praxis.

While Giroux has extended his areas of analysis beyond schooling, he has not ignored the ongoing corporatisation of schools and universities. On the contrary, Higher Education has become one of Giroux's favourite themes in his recent writings. This is understandable given the massive changes being brought about in these institutions. It is common knowledge that these changes are shaking the European university context (see Mayo, 2009) as a result of such developments as the so-called Bologna process intended for European qualifications harmonisation purposes (Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and Association of European Universities, 2000; EC, 2007)

Many of Giroux's later works provide ample space to the issue of corporate encroachment in formal education⁹. Henry Giroux expresses concerns regarding the way corporations (including Disney) trade advertising rights in the schools' rest places and corridors for funds. These concerns should be heeded by educators and school principals/heads in other countries. They might be willing to adopt 'quick fix' solutions in order to make up for cash shortages caused by Neo-liberal policies. Giroux's discussions concerning the university's corporatisation are also instructive. The marketplace ideology and a technical rationality are taking precedence, in these institutions, over

⁹ The phenomenon of corporate involvement in education is occurring in various parts of the world. Mary Darmanin (2002), for instance, provides a detailed analysis of HSBC's involvement in education in my home country.

concerns with providing the tools for active citizenship in a participatory democracy in which people learn and develop the knowledge to exercise their 'right to govern' – to become sovereign citizens, in Don Milani's terms.

The commodification of higher education (see also Ch. 6 of Giroux, 2006 f) is manifest in a variety of ways:

- through increasing bureaucratisation;
- the erosion of the humanities;
- the transformation of schools of education into places where one learns 'what works' rather than places where one engages in critical reflection;
- the transformation of the role of University Presidents and Deans from that of academic leader to that of a CEO;
- the exaltation of the notion of 'entrepreneurship', one of the major buzz words in recent University parlance;
- rendering university research dependent on corporate funding with ramifications for intellectual property and dissemination of results;
- instrumental knowledge gaining preference over other forms of knowledge that promote critical thinking.

Universities are increasingly becoming glorified training agencies evaluated for their contributions to the economy rather than for their contribution to the creation and revitalisation of democracy (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004, Giroux, 2007). Giroux also underlines that they are increasingly becoming an important component of the 'military-industrial-academic' complex' (Giroux, 2007).

Universities and other institutions of higher education have been undergoing changes that reflect the corporate world's preference for accelerated time in lieu of that sense of 'public time' that was once associated with schools and universities as public spaces that provided the right setting for reflection and assimilation - echoes of Don Milani's 'pedagogia della lumaca' (the pedagogy of the snail). These are some of the many issues raised by Giroux and his co-authors/editors in a number of works (e.g. Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004).

Given the increasing corporatisation and commodification of what were once important public spaces, it is heartening to see that there are public and specific intellectuals who seek ways and means of extending their roles as educators outside the university. They forge alliances with activists and popular educators in different social sectors. In doing so, they face the risk of missing out on opportunities for career advancement since community involvement is rarely rewarded in department reviews or research assessment exercises. Quite laudable are the initiatives by academics to engage the academy in popular education, in such projects as the Ontario-based project, WALL (Work and Lifelong Learning) or the Edinburgh-coordinated Popular Education Network, to select two examples from a number of initiatives (see the various contributions to Thompson, 2000). These initiatives allow educators, in and outside the academy, to become, in Giroux's terms, "border crossers." (Giroux, 1992)

As border crossers, academics act beyond the traditional contours of their work to join forces with others to help generate a substantive democracy, regarded by Giroux, Freire, and others, as a *dynamic* and an *ongoing* process. Giroux's own predilection for writing about the themes of his books in the accessible media, from newspapers in Canada such as *The Toronto Star* to the online *In these Times* or *Truthout. Org* (he is a regular contributor)¹, as well as his provision of video interviews accessible on such widely diffused internet sites as YouTube, is an indication of his efforts to walk the talk in engaging as a public intellectual. Following Pierre Bourdieu and others, he recommends this role, for university based academics and other intellectuals, in many of his works.

One also ought to highlight the very accessible and almost journalistic language in which most of his works are written, in contrast to his very early *Theory and Resistance* book. This strikes me as an important point to make given that critical pedagogy is often criticised, indiscriminately, for its obscure and 'esoteric' language that renders it far removed from the language of social activists, teachers and other cultural workers operating 'in the trenches'. Giroux is wary of romanticising 'the trenches,' so to speak, where one can easily lapse into the kind of 'tried and tested' routine activities without opportunities for reflection for transformative action. This brings to mind

Socrates' well known dictum, from the *Apologia*, that an unexamined life is a life not worth living, a dictum that is echoed throughout various undergraduate education classes.

As far as academics are concerned, they too are not to be romanticised, according to Giroux, who is well aware of the presence of several intellectuals adopting positions that ultimately do not challenge the status quo. Much has been written on this aspect of academic life where the lure of prestigious and lucrative 'technicist' career opportunities can easily lead academics to go with the flow of corporatisation and academic entrepreneurship, buying into the dominant ideology that renders industry the panacea for the survival and relevance of the university. One need therefore not rehearse the literature. One ought, however, to refer to two types of intellectuals, among the many targeted by Giroux in his writings. There are those who appropriate left wing revolutionary figures by providing domesticating (mis) readings of their works to reinforce conservative or at best non threatening liberal positions regarding schooling and other social aspects. In chapter 4 of *Stealing Innocence*, Giroux engages in a damning criticism of E.D Hirsch's (mis)use of Antonio Gramsci's views with regard to schooling. Mario Alighero Manacorda had regarded these views as constituting an epitaph by Gramsci for a school that was but cannot be any longer since the social context has changed. The problem, according to the Sardinian intellectual, was that the new reforms introduced by the Fascist Minister Giovanni Gentile, at the time, represented a retrograde step and not an improvement with regard to the 'old' school. (Manacorda, in Gramsci, 1972: XX1X)

Joseph A. Buttigieg (1999, 2002) has produced a similar criticism of Hirsch for the latter's reading of Gramsci's notes on the Unitarian school. Both Giroux and Buttigieg provide a non-liberal reading of Gramsci, highlighting the many aspects of the Sardinian's oeuvre that provide signposts for a radical pedagogy that does not overlook Gramsci's Marxist underpinnings and social justice concerns. Like the essays on Freire and Hall, in the same book, Giroux's essay on Gramsci that builds on his earlier criticism of Harold Entwistle's position regarding Gramsci's Unitarian School, offers us some very important theoretical insights intended to enhance the analysis of the very context-bound chapters in the book's first section.

Giroux is also scathing in his criticism of the type of intellectual who, in Foucault's terms, confines his or her leftist posturing to "trading in polemics," a form of what Giroux regards, echoing a favourite phrase from Marcuse, as "scholarshit":

Lost here is any attempt to persuade or convince, to produce a serious dialogue. All that remains are arguments buttressed by an air of privileged insularity that appear beyond interrogation, coupled with forms of rhetorical cleverness built upon the model of war and unconditional surrender, designed primarily to eliminate one's opponent but having little to say about what it means to offer alternative discourses to conservative and neo-liberal efforts to prevent the democratic principles of liberty, equality, and freedom from being put into practice in our schools and other crucial spheres of society. (Giroux, 2000a:14)

Cynicism and nihilism are rife in today's world and often generate a culture of derision directed at any attempt to drive home the point, stressed throughout the World Social Forum, that another world is possible. This nihilism and cynicism reflect a politics devoid of hope. Giroux argues for a politics of hope in the manner of such other radical intellectuals as Paulo Freire and Zygmunt Bauman.

Giroux advocates not a messianic hope but an "educated hope" based on a critique of the present. This 'Educated Hope' should, according to Giroux, be characterised by ongoing critique and renewal. In Freire's words, it should involve a process of "annunciation" and "denunciation" for a more radically democratic public sphere, where democracy, pedagogy, and human agency are connected (Giroux, 2001: 125). Viewed this way, Giroux's vision is utopian. His is an anticipatory utopia, prefigured not only by critique of the present, in which he illustrates how the public sphere is being eroded through various means, including corporate and TV induced mass hysteria and a general critical illiteracy (Giroux, 2009d, 2009e), but also by an alternative pedagogical/cultural politics underscoring "issues of value, ethics, meaning, and affect" (p.139).

He further goes on to echo his colleague and former co-author, Stanley Aronowitz, in calling for the emergence of a third party, a radical party, in the US that promotes a new bio-politics, and a multifaceted politics at that, which “must not only address the concerns of the middle classes but must also join with ‘rank and file’ activists of trade unions, women’s organisations, environmental and ecology movements, various factions of the freedom movements for Blacks, Latino/as, Asians, and other oppressed peoples, and the anti-war and global justice movements’ to expose the illusion of democracy in the United States” (Giroux, 2006c: 67). Freire’s insights on the nature of the relationship between party and movements – the party should approach them without trying to take them over (Freire, in Escobar et al., 1994: 40) - strike me as being most pertinent and instructive in this context.

Giroux calls for more than this. He calls for an “Oppositional Global Politics” based on an assessment of the emergence of the different forms of oppositional movements emerging in various parts of the world not least the emerging centre-left governments in Latin America (Giroux, 2000e: 81).

As I have shown, the sources mined by Giroux are many. This is what one expects from such a prolific writer. Popular culture features prominently in his analyses. As I stated once before (Mayo, 2002), however, it would be great, in future, to see such an analyses of popular culture complemented by work focusing on the way cultural production, associated with dominant social groups, impinges on popular sensibilities and offers spaces for critical appropriation. This would be truly gramscian. Pierre Bourdieu’s work on distinction, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*, becomes most relevant here.

I also indicated that, when analysing such corporate institutions as Disney, in books on the lines of *The Mouse that Roared*, readers should be provided with a sense of the way the institution is not monolithic. It is not sufficient, in my view, to reserve just one or possibly two paragraphs, in a book containing almost 200 pages, to acknowledging that this institution has its contradictions and “progressive” and “enterprising elements” (Giroux, 1999: 26, 27). One expects a longer discussion on these contradictions and enterprising elements, with illustrative examples. This would enable us to see how these institutions can really be conceptualised as sites of struggle in a process of hegemony that,

as Gramsci and others, notably Stuart Hall, have underlined, is never complete. In tennis parlance, one should therefore avoid trying to win games '6- love, 6- love.'

Henry Giroux's corpus is vast and varied and is characterised by different stages in the evolution of his thought. The amount of writing is overwhelming and one develops the sense that similar issues are constantly being developed, expanded, and revised across a number of books that represent a specific stage in the development of his oeuvre. His works no doubt represent a bleak picture of the times in which he wrote much of his later work, in which a 'new fascism,' predicated on religious fundamentalism and the 'passion of the Right', and the formulation of global military and local surveillance strategies, were no longer nascent but firmly entrenched. This is an integral part of the scenario which Obama has to face in his tenure of office.

This notwithstanding, Giroux's writings are, like those of Paulo Freire and Zygmunt Bauman, governed by a sense of hope. It is the hope of one whose work is motivated by the belief that another world is possible. Like Bourdieu, Giroux conveys the view that the purpose of the intellectual is to move beyond merely interpreting the world and raising different questions about it, to joining forces with others to help generate the right climate, through a long social, political, and cultural struggle, to bring this other world about. In this regard, his work provides a welcome reprieve from the cynicism and nihilism that characterise a lot of the contemporary literature. These cynics and nihilists frequently pour scorn on any attempt to engage the emancipatory tradition in social theorising, the tradition to which Giroux clings steadfast and which he attempts to revitalise.

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