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**Giroux, H. (2007) *University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*. Paradigm Publishers**

For Henry Giroux, in an era of atrophying publics, higher education has become increasingly burdened by the collective threats of militarization, corporate globalization and a resurgent “ideological fundamentalism” which have undermined the inherited democratic institutions and traditions of Western culture (209). Towards this end, Giroux’s *University in Chains* serves as a compelling reminder of the daunting challenges facing the contemporary university in an age of neoliberal profiteering dominated by a proselytizing gospel of state terror.

For Giroux, the university has a crucial democratic function as a public sphere in which civic education can provide the opportunity for critical, reflexive dialogue regarding the responsibilities, ethics and moral obligations of citizens and educators. Yet, increasingly, this civic obligation has been displaced by a conception of education as a commodity, and the university as a producer of skilled workers for the burgeoning military-industrial-surveillance apparatus (209). The possibility of reasserting a critical, civically minded university culture is frequently preempted by power hungry neo-conservatives and crusading free market neo-liberals for whom education is either a waste of public funds or an opportunity to promulgate militant, xenophobic values (184).

According to Giroux, the seemingly indomitable, many headed hydra of media propagandizing, militant capital and the corporatization of popular culture have all contributed to the marginalization of critical democracy. Giroux notes that public education has become equated with technical vocational training as opposed to meeting the needs of an informed critical citizenry. And yet, at the same time as the neoliberal ascendancy has led to this crisis of confidence, both liberals and the left remain reluctant to see culture as a productive site of struggle (210).

Likewise, Giroux emphasizes the prevailing apathy within the Academy and the public at large which has frustrated the possibility for collective resistance to corporate and militaristic agendas. Here, he finds parallels with the ideological intolerance of the McCarthy era and reminds us of the need to protect democratic institutions as cultural mooring lines securing us from the wholesale destruction of democratic life. Giroux situates these issues within a perfect storm of authoritarian values and hegemonic realignment as such ideological currents find expression within the university in a number of ways including: the erosion of tenure; the proliferation of sessional contracts; the decline of the traditional humanities along with other critical disciplines; the oppressive conservatism of funding regimes; the growing influence of corporate managerial ethic; spiraling tuition fees; the disproportionate influence of corporate and military funding; and, waning democratic values.

Giroux believes that to combat the growing power of neo conservative and neo liberal discourses, requires that we recognize the importance of education as a dialogical activity engaged in by public intellectuals and critical citizens appraised of the dangers of neglecting the civic implications of education as a public good. Consequently, Giroux urges the end of hierarchical and exploitative labour practices which have reproduced glaring social inequalities and created a fragmented, polarized professorate. Moreover, he also notes the importance of combating growing threats to tenure and academic freedom through intolerant conservative public discourses and opportunistic administrative cultures (204)

Instead, given the inevitably political and public nature of higher education, Giroux advocates a resurgent political activism grounded in broad alliances between student groups, faculty and community associations which may collectively challenge the powerful corporate military industrial complex which has infiltrated university culture. Critical pedagogy, consequently, must offer a telling critique of the rapidly changing nature of university education in an increasingly commercialized, authoritarian culture. As such, it represents the need for a radical realignment of the left in response to recent efforts by neoconservatives to colonize public institutions and dramatically alter the landscape of democratic politics.

Unfortunately, then, a culture of myopic individualism, proliferating corporate power and commodified culture, have all made the contemporary practice of emancipatory pedagogy increasingly difficult. Disempowerment, inequality, marginalization and oppression, are all connected to the struggle to make critical cultural literacy a key stratagem for a revitalized emancipatory politics. Rather than a dichotomous conception of the public and private spheres, Giroux argues for a public pedagogy augmented by the theoretical framework of cultural studies which is sensitive to the myriad challenges of everyday life. Indeed, although all of these cultural factors threaten a perilously positioned university at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, critical pedagogy offers great promise in the ongoing fight to reclaim public spheres as a border crossing discipline orientated towards examining the pedagogical importance of culture.

Unmistakably, then, the intellectual discipline which Giroux describes is at heart radical and transgressive. The question, however, is whether the pendulum has swung too far. Indeed, the earth shattering, socio-political changes of recent decades have limited the possibilities for concerted democratic action to such an extent that the necessity of collaboration across public spaces must be acknowledged if the university is to move outward from a position dominated by technical rationality, bureaucratic myopicism and crippling cynicism. Certainly, given Giroux's description of recent history, this is a question which is anything but rhetorical. Undeniably for educators concerned with the rising tide of unfettered authoritarianism, Giroux's work, rather than being disengaged or myopically cerebral, challenges the reader on political, moral and ethical grounds to transform indignation into an active, praxis-orientated, critique. More than anything perhaps, Giroux's book emphasizes the increasingly high stakes of academic politics and the danger—even the irresponsibility—inherent in continued complacency or blinkered, careerism.