

Democracy's Promise and the Politics of Worldliness in the Age of Terror

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**Abstract:** In his article, "Democracy's Promise and the Politics of Worldliness in the Age of Terror," Henry A. Giroux draws attention to how the crisis in US-American democracy has been heralded and exacerbated by the nation's increasing skepticism -- or even overt hostility -- toward the educational system. Part of such a challenge means that educators, artists, students, and others need to rethink and affirm the important presupposition that higher education is integral to fostering the imperatives of an inclusive democracy and that the crisis of higher education must be understood as part of the wider crisis of politics, power, and culture. In an effort to rescue the possibility of political engagement and to emphasize the civic role of academia, Giroux examines the work of two major public intellectuals: Jacques Derrida and Edward Said. Giroux then connects Derrida's project of addressing the promise of democracy to Said's notion of worldliness. Focusing on Said's linkage of worldliness and wakefulness, Giroux argues that at the heart of opposing the new authoritarianism is making pedagogy and education central to the political tasks of reclaiming public space, rekindling the importance of public connectedness, and infusing civic life with the importance of a democratic worldly vision.

**Henry A. GIROUX**

### **Democracy's Promise and the Politics of Worldliness in the Age of Terror**

It has become commonplace to acknowledge that post-civil rights America is characterized by a declining interest in and misgiving about mainstream national politics. In a society in which the public sphere is largely characterized by a culture of fear and the public realm is largely accredited through the discourse of consumerism, politics is largely emptied of any substance (see Bauman *Consuming Life*). Similarly, the space of official politics increasingly appears utterly corrupt and inhabited by right-wing ideologues who in their Taliban-like orthodoxy exhibit a deep disdain for debate, dialogue, and democracy itself. What is much less discussed is the way this crisis in American democracy has been heralded and exacerbated by the nation's increasing skepticism -- or even overt hostility -- toward the educational system, if not critical thought itself (see Giroux and Searls Giroux). Prepackaged knowledge produced by the dominant media along with reified representations of government Orwellian newspeak work aggressively to usurp critical consciousness and impede democratic critique and social engagement. Cynicism about politics and skepticism about education have become mutually reinforcing tendencies that to be understood must be analyzed in tandem. Emptied of any appreciable content, democracy is imperiled as individuals are unable to translate their privately suffered misery into broadly shared public concerns and collective action. As the structures of public space and the sites for producing engaged citizens are mutated, commercialized, and militarized, the crushing effects of domination spread out to all aspects of society and war and violence increasingly become the primary organizing principle of politics (see Hardt and Negri).

The promise of democracy in the United States appears to be receding as the dark clouds of authoritarianism increasingly spread through every facet of state and civil society (see Giroux, *Against the New Authoritarianism*). Under such circumstances, the prevalence of war and violence is evident not only in the ongoing and ill-fated wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the increasing assault being waged at home on democratic values, social provisions, and increasingly on all of those populations considered either unpatriotic because they do not conform to the dictates of an imperial presidency or disposable because they have been relegated to the human waste of global neoliberalism. The war at home has given rise not only to a crushing attack on civil liberties -- most evident in the passing of the Military Commissions Act of 2006, which conveniently allows the Bush administration to detain indefinitely anyone deemed an enemy combatant while denying them recourse to the traditional right to challenge his or her detention through legal means -- but also to an assault on those populations now considered disposable and redundant under the logic of a ruthless market fundamentalism.

While the United States has never been free of repression, there is a special viciousness that marks the current regime. War, violence, and an attack on human rights coupled with the assault on the social state and the rise of an all-encompassing militarism make this government stand out for its anti-democratic policies. The varied populations made disposable under a militarized neoliberalism occupy a globalized space of ruthless politics in which the categories of "citizen" and "democratic representation," once integral to national politics, are no longer recognized. In the past, people who were marginalized by class and race could at least expect a modicum of support from the government, either through an array of limited social provisions or because they still had some value as part of a reserve army of unemployed labor. That is no longer true. With social dynamics now organized according to a remorseless neoliberal ideology, there has been a shift away from working toward getting

ahead to the much more deadly task of struggling to stay alive. Many now argue that this new form of biopolitics is conditioned by a permanent state of class and racial exception in which, as Achille Mbembe asserts, "vast populations are subject to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (40).

Disposable populations are less visible, relegated to the frontier zones of relative invisibility and removed from public view. Such populations are often warehoused in schools that resemble boot camps, dispersed to dank and dangerous work places far from the enclaves of the tourist industries, incarcerated in prisons that privilege punishment over rehabilitation, or consigned to a life of permanent unemployment. Rendered redundant as a result of the collapse of the social state, a pervasive racism, growing disparities in income and wealth, and a take-no-prisoners neoliberalism, increasing numbers of individuals and groups are being demonized and criminalized.

In the United States, a war is not only being waged abroad, but also at home. This is largely a silent war against poor young people, who are increasingly being treated as a generation of suspects and warehoused in substandard schools, and people of color and immigrants, whose civil rights are not only being abused on an unprecedented level, but who are also being incarcerated at alarming rates. These groups are not the only targets. Universities are accused of being soft on terrorism; dissident artists are increasingly branded as un-American because of their critiques of the Bush administration; homophobia has become the poster-ideology of the Republican Party; and a full-fledged assault on women's reproductive rights is being championed by Bush's evangelical supporters -- most evident in Bush's Supreme Court appointments. While the legal rights and support services of people of color, the poor, youth, the middle class, the elderly, gays, and women are being attacked, the current administration is supporting a campaign to collapse the boundaries between the church and state to the extent that even liberal critics such as Frank Rich believe that the United States has teetered on the verge of becoming a fundamentalist theocracy (8).

Under the spectre of an emerging authoritarianism, civic engagement appears impotent and public values are rendered invisible in light of the growing power of the government and multinational corporations not only to shape the content of most mainstream media, but also increasingly to privatize and commercialize non-commodified public spaces. For many people today, citizenship has become reduced to the act of buying and selling commodities rather than increasing the scope of their freedoms and rights in order to expand the operations of a substantive democracy. An incessant assault on critical thinking itself and a rising bigotry have undercut the possibility for providing a language in which vital social institutions can be defended as a public good. Moreover, as social visions of equity recede from public memory, unfettered brutal self-interest and greed combine with retrograde social policies to make security and safety a top domestic priority. Unfortunately, the university offers no escape and little resistance. Instead, the humanistic knowledge and values of the university are being excised as higher education becomes increasingly corporatized, militarized, and stripped of its democratic functions. The appeal to excellence by university CEOs functions like a corporate logo hyping efficiency while denuding critical thought and scholarship of any intellectual and political substance. In the corporate university, academics are now expected to be academic entrepreneurs whose value largely depends on the grant money they attract, rather than the quality of education they offer to students (see Giroux and Searls Giroux). As the university is annexed by defense, corporate, and national security interests, critical scholarship is replaced by knowledge for either weapons research or commercial profits, just as the private intellectual now replaces the public intellectual and the public relations intellectual supplants the engaged intellectual in the wider culture. In addition, faculty are increasingly downsized, turned into an army of part-time workers who are overworked and underpaid,

just as graduate students are reduced to wage slavery as they take over many undergraduate teaching functions. It is important to note that such attacks on higher education in the U.S. come not only from a market-based ideology that would reduce education to training and redefine schools as investment opportunities, they also come from conservative Christian organizations such as the American Family Association, conservative politicians, and right-wing think tanks, all of whom have launched an insidious attack on peace studies, women's studies, Middle Eastern Studies, critical pedagogy, and any field "which generates critical inquiry and thought often in opposition to the aims of the U.S. State" and the Bush regime (Paik 38). These are the same groups who believe that gay married couples are terrorists, while saying nothing about U.S. involvement in the torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib prison (or any of the other secret prisons run by the CIA) or the U.S. policy of Extraordinary Rendition that allows the CIA to kidnap people and send them to authoritarian countries to be tortured.

The frontal nature of such attacks against both dissent and critical education can also be seen in attempts by conservative legislators in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and a number of other states to pass bills such as the Academic Bill of Rights which argues that academics should be hired on the basis of their conservative ideology in order not only to balance out faculties dominated by left-wing professors, but also to control what conservative students are taught, allegedly immunizing them against ideas that might challenge or offend their ideological comfort zones. Professors who address critical issues in their classrooms that unsettle and hold accountable any commonsense assumption that favors right-wing ideology are condemned for teaching propaganda. For instance, the governor of Colorado called for the firing of Professor Ward Churchill because of an essay he wrote shortly after 9/11 in which he condemned U.S. foreign policy. Ward was formally fired in August 2007. Additionally, U.S. congressman Anthony Weiner from New York called for the firing of Joseph Massad, a Columbia University professor, who has been critical of Israeli policies against Palestinians. Norman Finklestein was denied tenure at DePaul University because of his criticism of the Israeli state. Professor Nadia Abu El-Haj, an anthropologist who is up for tenure at Barnard College, and Wadie Said (son of Edward Said), also up for tenure, are under attack by a number of pro-Israel groups for their scholarship on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and have mobilized campaigns in an effort to have tenure denied to both scholars. In spite of such fierce attacks on Professor El-Haj, Barnard College recently granted her tenure. Of course, such attacks are not limited to academics. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman called upon the State Department to draw up a blacklist of those critics he calls "excuse makers," which includes those who believe that U.S. actions are the root cause of violence. According to Friedman, "These excuse makers are just one notch less despicable than the terrorists and also deserve to be exposed"

(<<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/22/opinion/22friedman.html?ex=1279684800&en=17fb5beb19b09d86&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss>>). This kind of McCarthyite babble has become so commonplace in the United States that it is championed by a famous columnist in one of the world's leading newspapers. Challenging the current conservative wisdom -- that is, holding views at odds with official orthodoxy -- has now become the grounds for either being labeled as un-American, dismissed from one's job, or being put on a government blacklist.

Higher education has also been attacked by right-wing ideologues such as David Horowitz and Lynne Cheney who view it as the "weak link" in the war against terror and a potential fifth column. (This charge comes from a report issued by the conservative group, American Council of Trustees and Alumni ACTA), founded by Lynne Cheney (spouse of Vice-President Dick Cheney) and Joseph Lieberman (Independent Democratic senator) (see Martin and Neal <<http://www.goacta.org/publications/Reports/defciv.pdf>>; ACTA also posted on its website a list of

115 statements made by allegedly "un-American Professors"). Horowitz, in particular, acts as the figurehead for various well-funded and orchestrated conservative student groups such as the Young Americans and College Republicans, which perform the groundwork for his "Academic Bill of Rights" policy efforts that seek out juicy but rare instances of "political bias" -- whatever that is or however it might be defined -- in college classrooms (Horowitz's books trade in racist accusations, the ongoing claim that almost anyone who criticizes the Bush administration hates the U.S., and accuses critics of the Iraq war of getting US citizens killed in Iraq. His highly publicized book, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, purports to name and expose those left-wing professors who hate the U.S., the military, and give comfort to terrorists). These efforts have resulted in considerable sums of public money being devoted to hearings in multiple state legislatures, most recently in Pennsylvania, in addition to helping impose, as the Chronicle of Higher Education put it, a "chilly climate" of self-policing of academic freedom and pedagogy (see "Forum"). At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Bruin Alumni Association posted on its website an article called "The Dirty Thirty" which targets what it calls the university's "most radical professors" ("The Dirty Thirty" <<http://www.uclaprofs.com/articles/dirtythirty.html>>). The group is headed by right-wing ideologue Andrew Jones, an ex-student and former chairperson of UCLA's Bruin Republicans student group and has as its mission the task of exposing and combating "an exploding crisis of political radicalism on campus" ("The Dirty Thirty" <<http://www.uclaprofs.com/articles/dirtythirty.html>>). Jones's extremism is even too much for his old boss, Horowitz, who once fired Jones for pressuring "students to file false reports about leftists" (Fogg <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2006/01/2006011904n.htm>>). The Bruin Alumni Association does more than promote "McCarthy-like smears," intolerance, and anti-intellectualism through a vapid appeal for "balance," it also offered initially hundred dollar prizes to any students willing to provide information on their teacher's political views. Of course, such practices have less to do with protesting genuine demagoguery than with attacking any professor who might raise critical questions about the status quo or hold the narratives of power accountable (for a much more detailed account of this type of attack on higher education, see Giroux, *The University in Chains*). Illegal and unethical spying at the national level rather than being condemned by right-wing students such as Jones now seems to offer yet another strategy to harass professors, insult students by treating them as if they are mindless, and provide a model for student participation in the classroom that mimics tactics used by fascist and Nazi plants in the 1930s.

In spite of their present embattled status and the inroads made by corporate power, the defense industries, and the neoconservative Right, universities and colleges remain uniquely placed to prepare students to both understand and influence the larger educational forces that shape their lives. As Edward Said observes, "It is still very fortunately the case, however, that the American university remains the one public space available to real alternative intellectual practices: no institution like it on such a scale exists anywhere else in the world today" (Said, *Humanism* 72-73). Such institutions by virtue of their privileged position, division of labor, and alleged dedication to freedom and democracy also have an obligation to draw upon those traditions and resources capable of providing a critical, liberal, and humanistic education to all students in order to prepare them not only for a society in which information and power have taken on new and potent dimensions, but also for confronting the rise of a disturbing number of anti-democratic tendencies in the most powerful country in the world and elsewhere across the globe. Part of a such a challenge means that educators, artists, students, and others need to rethink and affirm the important presupposition that higher education is integral to fostering the imperatives of an inclusive democracy and that the crisis of higher education must be understood as part of the wider crisis of politics, power, and culture.



Jacques Derrida has argued that democracy contains a promise of what is to come and that it is precisely in the tension between the dream and the reality of democracy that a space of agency, critique, and education opens up and signals both the normative and political character of democracy (253). For Derrida, "the inherited concept of democracy is the only one that welcomes the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself" (qtd. in Borradori 121). But, as Derrida was well aware, if democracy contains a promise and is to open on to a future, it necessitates both intellectually and politically pedagogical practices and interventions creating the conditions for educating citizens who have the knowledge and skills to participate in public life, question institutional authority, and engage the contradiction between the reality and promise of a global democracy. For Derrida, democracy must not only contain the structure of a promise, it must also be nurtured in those public spaces in which "the unconditional freedom to question" becomes central to any viable definition of individual and social agency (233). At stake here is the recognition that if democracy is to become vital, it needs to create citizens who are critical, interrogate authority, hold existing institutions accountable for their actions, and are able to assume public responsibility through the very process of governing (Castoriadis, "Democracy" 10). Hence, for Derrida, higher education is one of the few public spaces left where unconditional resistance can be both produced and subjected to critical analysis. In Derrida's perspective, the university "should thus be a place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the current and determined figure of democracy, and not even the traditional idea of critique" (253). The role of the university in this instance, and particularly the humanities, should be to create a culture of questioning and resistance aimed at those ideologies, institutions, social practices and "powers that limit democracy to come" (253). Derrida's views on higher education and democracy raise important questions about not only the purpose of higher education but also what it means for academics to address what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls "taking responsibility for our responsibility" (qtd. in Bunting, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4640858,00.html>>).

Part of the struggle for viewing the university as a democratic public sphere and a site of struggle against the growing forces of militarism, corporatism, neoconservatism, and the religious fundamentalism of the Christian right demands a new understanding of what it means to be a public intellectual which, in turn, suggests a new language for politics itself. Central to such a challenge is the necessity to define intellectual practice "as part of an intricate web of morality, rigor and responsibility" that enables academics to speak with conviction, enter the public sphere in order to address important social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for what it means to bridge the gap between higher education and the broader society (Roy 6). This is a notion of intellectual practice that refuses both the instrumentality and privileged isolation of the academy, while affirming a broader vision of learning that links knowledge to the power of self-definition and the capacities of administrators, academics, students, and artists to expand the scope of democratic freedoms, particularly as they address the crisis of the social as part and parcel of the crisis of democracy itself. This is the kind of intellectual practice that is attentive to the suffering of others and "will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep" (Said, *Humanism* 143). Cornel West has argued that we need to analyze those dark forces shutting down democracy but "we also need to be very clear about the vision that lures us toward hope and the sources of that vision" (18). In taking up this challenge, Said is particularly relevant because his work embodied both a particular kind of politics and a specific notion of how intellectuals should engage public life. For Said, worldliness connects texts, knowledge, representations, and intellectual practice to the world. He writes: "Worldliness -- by which I mean at a more precise cultural level that all texts and all representations were in the world and subject to its numerous heterogene-

ous realities -- assured contamination and involvement, since in all cases the history and presence of various other groups and individuals made it impossible for anyone to be free of the conditions of material existence" (Said, *Humanism* 48-49). Few intellectuals have done more within the last four decades to offer a politics of worldliness designed to confront the crisis of democracy under the reign of neoliberalism, neo-colonialism, and the emerging fundamentalisms throughout the world than Said, one of the most widely known, influential, and controversial public intellectuals of the latter part of the twentieth century. While known primarily as a critic of Western imperialism and a fierce advocate for the liberation of the Palestinian people, he is also widely recognized for his important contributions as a scholar whose work has had an enormous impact on a variety of individuals, groups, and social movements. His importance as a cultural theorist and engaged intellectual is evident in his path-breaking work on culture, power, history, literary theory, and imperialism. Not only is Said allegedly responsible for the founding of such academic genres as postcolonial studies and colonial discourse analysis, his work has also had an enormous influence on a wide range of other disciplines as well as on an array of academics and cultural workers, including visual artists, museum curators, film-makers, anthropologists, and historians. He is one of the few academics whose voice and work addressed with equal ease a variety of specialized and general audiences within a global public sphere. While he was always clear, he was never simplistic, and he managed throughout the course of his forty-year career to provide theoretical discourses and critical vocabularies that enabled a range of academics and activists within a variety of disciplines and public spaces not only to speak truth to power and write against the historical narratives fashioned by ruling classes and groups, but also to reclaim a politics in which matters of power, agency, resistance, and collective struggle became paramount.

A controversial and courageous public intellectual, Said provided an important model for what it meant to combine scholarship and commitment. And in doing so, he did not shy away from the difficult theoretical and political task of trying to understand how the current elements of authoritarianism in changing historical contexts could be addressed and resisted. Said recognized that the newer models of authoritarianism, with their drive towards absolute power and the relentless repression of dissent, were taking different forms from those twentieth-century regimes of terror that marked the former Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and fascist Italy. Proto-fascism in the new millennium was now emerging under the banner of free-market fundamentalism, a reckless unilateralism in foreign affairs, an embrace of right-wing Christian evangelicalism, a neoliberal assault on the welfare state, and the corporate control of a mass media, now reduced largely to a benign, if not sometimes cranky, adjunct of corporate and government interests. The war on terrorism, Said rightly recognized, had become a rationale for a war on democracy, unleashing both material and symbolic violence at home and abroad on any movement fighting for the right to justice, liberty, and equality, and especially for the rights of the Palestinians to an independent state. Attentive to how the university and other dominant sites of power constructed historical narratives, Said urged generations of students to take seriously the narrativizing of political culture as a central feature of modern politics. His now legendary works *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* probed deeply into questions concerning who controls the economic, political, and pedagogical conditions for telling historical narratives, which agents produce such stories, how such stories become part of the fabric of commonsense, and what it might mean for scholars/activists to seriously engage the recognition that struggles over culture are also struggles over meaning, identity, power, inclusion, and the future. Of course, such interventions reap no rewards from established powers, and his own work was constantly policed and dismissed as either anti-American or anti-Semitic.

In what follows, I connect Derrida's project of addressing the promise of democracy to Said's no-



tion of worldliness, particularly as he develops it through his concept of wakefulness, and how it both shapes his important consideration of academics as oppositional public intellectuals and his related emphasis on cultural pedagogy and cultural politics (see Giroux, *Against the New Authoritarianism*). I begin with a passage that I think offers a key to the ethical and political force of much of his writing. This selection is taken from his 1999 memoir, *Out of Place*, which describes the last few months of his mother's life in a New York hospital and the difficult time she had falling to sleep because of the cancer that was ravaging her body. Recalling this traumatic and pivotal life experience, Said's meditation moves between the existential and the insurgent, between private suffering and worldly commitment, between the seductions of a "solid self" and the reality of a contradictory, questioning, restless, and at times, uneasy sense of identity. He writes:

Help me to sleep, Edward,' she once said to me with a piteous trembling in her voice that I can still hear as I write. But then the disease spread into her brain -- and for the last six weeks she slept all the time -- my own inability to sleep may be her last legacy to me, a counter to her struggle for sleep. For me sleep is something to be gotten over as quickly as possible. I can only go to bed very late, but I am literally up at dawn. Like her I don't possess the secret of long sleep, though unlike her I have reached the point where I do not want it. For me, sleep is death, as is any diminishment in awareness. ... Sleeplessness for me is a cherished state to be desired at almost any cost; there is nothing for me as invigorating as immediately shedding the shadowy half-consciousness of a night's loss, than the early morning, reacquainting myself with or resuming what I might have lost completely a few hours earlier. I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are 'off' and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place. (Said, *Out of Place* 294-95)

It is this sense of being awake, displaced, caught in a combination of diverse circumstances that suggests a particular notion of worldliness -- a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. As an ethical and political stance, worldliness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters of injury and injustice. In commenting on his own investment in worldliness, Said writes: "I guess what moves me mostly is anger at injustice, an intolerance of oppression, and some fairly unoriginal ideas about freedom and knowledge" (Howe <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/articles/ViewPopUpArticle.jsp?id=10&articleId=1561>>). For Said, being awake becomes a central metaphor for defining the role of academics as oppositional public intellectuals, defending the university as a crucial public sphere, engaging how culture deploys power, and taking seriously the idea of human interdependence while at the same time always living on the border -- one foot in and one foot out, an exile and an insider for whom home is always a form of homelessness. As a relentless border crosser, Said embraced the idea of the "traveler" as an important metaphor for engaged intellectuals. As Stephen Howe, referencing Said, points out, "It was an image which depended not on power, but on motion, on daring to go into different worlds, use different languages, and 'understand a multiplicity of disguises, masks, and rhetorics. Travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals ... the traveler crosses over, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions all the time'" (Howe <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/articles/ViewPopUpArticle.jsp?id=10&articleId=1561>>). And as a border intellectual and traveler, Said embodied the notion of always "being quite not right," evident by his principled critique of all forms of certainties and dogmas and his refusal to be silent in the face of

human suffering at home and abroad.

Being awake meant accepting the demands of worldliness, which implied giving voice to complex and controversial ideas in the public sphere, recognizing human injury beyond the privileged space of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to redress injustice (Scarry 21-31). Worldliness required not being afraid of controversy, making connections that are otherwise hidden, deflating the claims of triumphalism, bridging intellectual work and the operation of politics. Worldliness meant refusing the now popular sport of academic bashing or embracing a crude call for action at the expense of rigorous intellectual and theoretical work. On the contrary, it meant combining rigor and clarity, on the one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other. Worldliness as a pedagogical construct meant using theory as a resource, recognizing the worldly space of criticism as the democratic underpinning of publicness, defining critical literacy not merely as a competency, but as an act of interpretation linked to the possibility of intervention in the world. Worldliness pointed to a kind of border literacy in the plural in which people learned to read and write from multiple positions of agency; it also was indebted to the recognition forcibly stated by Hannah Arendt that "Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance" (Arendt, *Between* 149).

From the time of his own political awakening after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Said became increasingly a border crosser, moving between his Arab past and his New York present, mediating his fierce defense of Palestinian rights and the demands of a university position that gave him the freedom to write and teach, but which, at the same time, used its institutional power to depoliticize the politics of knowledge or, to use Said's terms, "impose silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power" (Said, "Public" 31). Said has inspired generations of intellectuals, artists, and other cultural workers to link their work with broader social issues, to connect various forms of cultural production with courage and commitment in the service of lessening human suffering and challenging the imposed silence of dominant ideas, social relations, and power. His view of the engaged public intellectual, particularly his admonition to intellectuals to function within institutions, in part, as exiles, "whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to refuse to be easily co-opted by governments or corporations" (Said, *Representations* 11), offered models of social engagement that redefined the role of the oppositional and public intellectual. This politically charged notion of the oppositional intellectual as homeless -- in exile, and living on the border, occupying an unsutured, shifting, and fractured social space in which critique, difference, and a utopian potentiality can endure -- provided the conceptual framework for generations of educators fighting against the deadly instrumentalism and reactionary ideologies that shaped dominant educational models at the time (see Giroux, *Border Crossings*). Said provided many of us both in and out of the academy with a critical vocabulary for extending the meaning of politics and critical awareness. In part, he did this by illuminating the seductions of what he called the cult of professionalism with its specialized languages, its neutralizing of ideology and politics through a bogus claim to objectivism, and its sham elitism and expertise rooted in all the obvious gendered, racial, and class-specific hierarchies. He was almost ruthless in his critique of a narrow ethic of professionalism with its "quasi religious quietism" and its self-inflicted amnesia about serious socio-political issues (Hussein 302).

For Said, the cult of professionalism separated culture, language, and knowledge from power and in doing so avoided the vocabulary for understanding and questioning how dominant authority worked through and on institutions, social relations, and individuals. Rooted in narrow specializations and thoroughly secure in their professed status as experts, many full-time academics retreated into nar-

row modes of scholarship that displayed little interest in how power was used in institutions and social life to include and exclude, provide the narratives of the past and present, and secure the authority to define the future (Aronowitz 53). Said was particularly critical of those intellectuals who denied the possibility of linking understanding and critique to the ability to intervene in public life. He was insistent that many intellectuals had become prisoners of their own disciplines, insulated from public life and adhering to a distorted sense of professionalism. As such, they not only undermined the space of the university as a democratic public sphere but exhibited a slightly disguised disdain for those oppositional intellectuals dedicated to locating the energy of resistance in their own teaching and cultural work. Said argued, instead, against the insularity of such positions, one that has a tendency to ignore questions of intervention and degenerate into scholasticism, formalism, or career opportunism. We can get a glimpse of how this discourse plays out politically in a New York Times op-ed article in which Stanley Fish urged academics "to just do their jobs, to keep their intellectual work within the ivory tower, and to avoid crossing," as he put it, "the boundary between academic work and partisan advocacy" so that outsiders would be less tempted to interfere. Oddly reversing one of Marx's most important ideas, Fish argues, "Our job is not to change the world, but to interpret it" (4). This is also a far cry from John Dewey's call to link education to the creation of an articulate public. In opposition to Fish's retreat from understanding education as a moral and political practice, rather than a merely contemplative one, Said's view of critical education links knowledge and learning to the performative and worldly space of action and engagement, energizing people to not only think critically about the world around them but also use their capacities as social agents to intervene in the larger social order and confront the myriad forms of symbolic, institutional, and material relations of power that shape their lives. In my view, it is precisely this connection between pedagogy and agency, knowledge and power, thought and action that must be mobilized in order to confront the current crisis of authoritarianism looming so large in the United States and elsewhere around the globe today.

Said was especially critical of those intellectuals who slipped into a kind of professional somnambulism in which matters of theory have less to do with a conscious challenge to politics, power, and injustice than with either a deadening scholasticism or a kind of arcane cleverness -- a sort of narcotic performance in fashionable irony -- that as he put it, neither threatens anyone nor opposes anything. He was especially ill at ease with what he called the "special private languages of criticism and professionalism" and thought "it was much more important ... that people write in order to be understood than write in order to be misunderstood" (Viswanathan 176). He was extremely disheartened by the academic turn in literary theory and cultural studies towards a depoliticized postmodernism in the 1980s and he viewed such a turn as an unacceptable retreat from one of the primary obligations of politics and intellectuals, as Grant Kester explains: "to reduce the violence and hatred that have so often marked human social interaction" (Kester 152). He was extremely critical of a kind of religious model of criticism, which amounted to an "elaboration on elaboration" on sacred texts rather than a critical commentary on the power and authority that make such texts possible. But he did more than supply a language of critique; he also illustrated what it meant to link text to context, knowledge to social change, culture to power, and commitment to courage. He gave us a language for politicizing culture, theorizing politics, thinking about what it means to lead a "nonfascist" life, and recognizing ways to make the pedagogical more political. Not only did his pioneering work give us a deeper understanding of how power is deployed through culture, but he laid the foundation for making culture a central element of politics and politics a crucial feature of pedagogy, thus providing an invaluable connection between pedagogy and cultural politics. More specifically, Said made it clear that pedagogy resided not merely in schools but in the force of the wider culture and in doing so he not only expand-

ed the sites of pedagogy but the possible terrains of struggle within a vast number of public spheres. Moreover, he insisted that critical intellectuals pluralize the sites of resistance and social change. Refusing to separate learning from social change, he constantly insisted that we fail theory when we do not firmly grasp what we mean by the political, and that theorizing a politics of and for the twenty-first century was one of the most challenging issues facing the academy. He urged us to enter into a dialogue with ourselves, colleagues, and students about politics and the knowledge we seek to produce together, and to connect such knowledge to broader public spheres and issues. He argued that the role of engaged intellectuals was not to consolidate authority but to understand, interpret, and question it (Said, *Representations* 11). Said believed that social criticism had to be coupled with a vibrant self-criticism, a rejection of the seductive appeal of certainty, and a willingness to take up critical positions without becoming dogmatic or intractable. While he recognized the importance of identity politics, he was equally concerned with how to connect particularized notions of justice with more generalized notions of freedom. What is especially important about Said's work is his recognition that intellectuals have a special responsibility to promote a state of wakefulness by moving beyond the language of pointless denunciations. As such, he refused to view the oppressed as doomed actors or power as simply a crushing form of oppression. For Said, individuals and collectivities had to be regarded as potential agents and not simply as victims or ineffectual dreamers. It is this legacy of critique and possibility, of resistance and agency that infuses his work with concrete hope, and offers a wealth of resources to people in and out of the academy who struggle on multiple fronts against the rising forces of authoritarianism both at home and abroad.

At a time when domination comes not only from the New Right and neoconservatives, but also from the religious right, Said's emphasis on secularism -- the observation that human beings make their own history -- not only reminds us of the need to fight against all those forces that relegate reason to the dustbin of history, but also to recognize the multiple sites in which a mindless appeal to scripture, divine authority, and other extra-social forms of dogmatism undermine the possibility of human agency (Said, *Reflections* 501). For Said, new sites of pedagogy had to be developed and old ones used to educate existing and future generations to the value of critical thought and social engagement. Said believed that discourses of critique and crisis were always intertwined with public life and, rather than lift the activity of the contemporary critic out of the world, they firmly placed him or her in the material and political concerns of the global public sphere, one that could never be removed from the considerations of history, power, politics, and justice. And it is this linking of a healthy skepticism for what authorities say and Said's insistence on the need for human beings to make their own history that gives his notion of secular criticism such force. Of course, Said was against all fundamentalisms, religious and political, and he believed that secular criticism should always come before solidarity. Priestly fundamentalists occupy churches, mosques, synagogues, corporations, and the university, and their quasi-religious quietism -- with its appeal to either extra-social forces (such as the hidden hand of history or the market) or complex, theoretical discourses that drown out the worldliness of the text, language, and public life -- must be rejected at all costs. That Said's view of the public intellectual and secular criticism informed each other is clear in his claim that "even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for" (Said, *The World* 28).

Near the end of his life, Said argued that the United States government was in the hands of a cabal, a junta "dominated by a group of military-minded neoconservatives" who pose a grave threat to world peace and global democracy (Said, *Culture* 167). Seymour Hersh, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, repeated this claim when he wrote that the United States "has been taken over by a cult of

8 or nine neo conservatives who have somehow grabbed the government" (Hersch <<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/01/26/1450204>>). Former President Jimmy Carter added to such criticisms by recently calling the Bush administration "one of the worst in history" (Carter

<[http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/05/19/politics/main2828207.shtml?source=mostpop\\_story](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/05/19/politics/main2828207.shtml?source=mostpop_story)>). For Said, the battle over democracy was in part a struggle over the very status of politics as a critical engagement, agency as an act of intervention geared at shaping public life, and resistance as the ability to think critically and act with civic courage. He believed that every vestige of culture as a site of political struggle and civic courage was being effaced from the American landscape. He argued that such acts of symbolic violence could be seen in Laura Bush's attempt to organize a national conference of poets in ways that gave art "a decorative rather than engaged status;" it was also obvious in former Attorney General John Ashcroft's ordering that the "Spirit of Justice" statue be covered up so as to hide the view of her naked breasts, or the United Nations' willingness to cover up a reproduction of Picasso's famous anti-war painting *Guernica* during former Secretary of Defense Colin Powell's visit to the Security Council (Said, *Culture* 166). Said believed such acts of censorship provided further evidence of the fact that Americans live in a culture increasingly ruled by fear and repression, a society that has stopped questioning itself, a culture where the gap between the rich and the poor has become obscene, and where the stranglehold of the far right on government does not bode well for the environment, youth, labor, people of color, gays, or the reproductive rights of women.

So much of what Said wrote and did with his life offers both a model and inspiration for what it means to take back politics, social agency, collective struggle, and the ability to define the future. Said recognized with great insight that academics, students, and other cultural workers had important roles to play in arousing and educating the public to think and act as active citizens in an inclusive democratic society. Most importantly, he called upon such groups to put aside their petty squabbling over identities and differences and to join together collectively in order to become part of what he called a fully awakened, worldly coalition that would be actively opposed to those forces at home and abroad who are pushing us into the age of totalitarianism lite, without anyone even complaining or, for that matter, even noticing (Said, *Culture* 166). Said's call for new forms of intellectual solidarity, along with his insistence that academics play a crucial role in creating new social movements, raises a host of challenges for engaging in modes of scholarship and committed struggles that cut across national boundaries and take seriously what it means to relate learning to social change and intellectual work to a fearsome sense of social responsibility. Said strongly believed that intellectuals can struggle on many fronts. This suggests not only that committed intellectuals move beyond the logocentric nature of their own research and projects, extending their concerns to more global issues, but also that they develop research centers, new scholarly methods of exchange, international foundations, and global think tanks which provide the opportunity for dialogue, scholarly traffic across national boundaries, and global institutions that can address those dominant global structures that have been put into place by neoliberalism and its attendant public relations intellectuals. Such a challenge suggests that intellectuals, artists, and other cultural workers must go beyond close analyses of historical, academic, and popular texts and engage the diachronic, economic, and political conditions through which they are produced and sustained. Said was very clear in his claim that matters of control are closely linked to issues of culture and ideology and such analyses offer an important tool in unsettling consensus and troubling dominant representations of power and everyday life.

There is a long history of intellectuals from Antonio Gramsci to Raymond Williams to Edward Said who have understood that the forces of culture, ideology, and communication have become increas-



ingly influential in shaping the history, space, knowledge, social practices, relations of power, and institutional structures that make up much of the global public sphere. No longer confined to narrow empirical issues, technical production, or to simply matters of taste, cultural politics has become central to understanding struggles over meaning, identity, power, and democracy itself. With the rise of new media technologies and the global reach of the highly concentrated culture industries, the breadth, scope, and impact of the educational force of culture and new modes of discursive production in shaping and prefiguring all aspects of daily life appear unprecedented. Yet, many critical intellectuals and scholars have generally ignored the larger political, cultural, and pedagogical issues that have become so central to the new media, public pedagogy, and cultural politics as they increasingly reshape information networks, policy, and politics globally. Cultural politics offers engaged academics, artists, cultural workers, and public intellectuals within the larger global sphere the opportunity to promote the development of a theory and practice of communications that examines the artistic, humanistic, scientific, technological, cultural, discursive, and political principles of culture within a loosely defined project of expanding and deepening democratic public life. This means encouraging intellectual work that views communication and the wider sphere of cultural politics as crucial terrains for understanding the relationship among democracy, media practices, and cultural production. More specifically, such work can play a vital role in arguing that matters of communication, culture, and public pedagogy are central to any notion of agency that aims to educate students to be critical thinkers, cultural producers, skilled artisans, and engaged citizens in a complex and rapidly changing global world. Rather than embracing texts or other modes of representation as either a technical or highly specialized process, the related areas of communication, culture, and public pedagogy should be approached as a moral and political practice. At stake here for public intellectuals is the important task of reigning control over the conditions of intellectual production in a variety of venues and forms in which the educational force of the culture takes root and holds a powerful grip over the stories, images, and sounds that shape people's lives throughout the globe. Such sites constitute what I call "new spheres of public pedagogy" and represent crucial locations for a cultural politics designed to wrest the arena of public debate within the field of global power away from those market forces that endlessly commodify intellectual autonomy and critical thought while appropriating or undercutting any viable work done through the collective action of critical intellectuals. Intellectuals, artists, and other cultural workers must come together from all over the world through a shared recognition that global democracy is only made possible by genuinely oppositional critical powers nourished by critical forms of education in the broadest sense.

Said's challenge to academics, artists, and others to become oppositional intellectuals includes the demand to collectively produce scholarship across national lines that raises serious questions about what knowledges are of most worth, and what it means to claim authority in a world where the borders of knowledge, values, identities, and meaning are constantly shifting. What responsibilities do engaged academics have to young people as they develop a sense of agency, particularly in relation to the obligations of critical citizenship and public life in a radically transformed cultural and global landscape -- one marked by largely unidirectional flows of information, massive economic inequalities, and an ongoing assault on democratic public spheres? Said's legacy gains its current relevance, if not urgency, through his willingness to explore the relationship between the changing nature of culture -- both as a condition for the production of knowledge and in the development of new forms of communication and knowledge -- and its value for rethinking the role of pedagogy and the importance of defining cultural workers, including artists and academics, as intellectuals willing to address some of the most urgent problems facing a broader public sphere. As many people increasingly face a world of



growing poverty, unemployment, and diminished social opportunities, it is imperative for educators, students, and other cultural workers around the globe to develop knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address some of the most urgent questions of our time. Such a task also suggests redefining their role as border crossers who can come together to explore interdisciplinary work as a resource for better understanding the expansive role that culture plays politically and pedagogically in revising and strengthening the fabric of those institutions, values, and identities crucial to a global democracy. Derrida also insisted that intellectuals exercise courage and responsibility in standing up to violence waged against reason, freedom, and tolerance. Derrida was insistent that intellectuals engage in acts of resistance that are both intellectual and political. As he put it, "We must join forces to exert pressure and organize ripostes, and we must do so on an international scale and according to new modalities, though always by analyzing and discussing the very foundations of our responsibility, its discourses, its heritage, and its axioms" (qtd. in Borradori 126).

Both Derrida and Said have insisted rightly that democracy demands the most concrete urgency. Of course, urgency is not only a response to the crisis of the present, increasingly shaped by the footprint of an emerging authoritarianism wielded through the anonymous presence of neoliberal capitalism and a number of other anti-democratic tendencies, but also connected to the future that we make available to the next generation of young people. How much longer can we allow the promise of democracy to be tainted by its reality? Making pedagogy and education central to the political tasks of reclaiming public space, rekindling the importance of public connectedness, and infusing civic life with the importance of a democratic worldly vision is at the heart of opposing the new authoritarianism. Hannah Arendt recognized that any viable democratic politics must address the totality of public life, refusing to withdraw from such a challenge in the face of totalitarian violence and state terrorism that are legitimated through appeals to safety, fear, and the threat of terrorism. She writes: "Terror becomes total when it becomes independent of all opposition; it rules supreme when nobody any longer stands in its way. If lawfulness is the essence of non-tyrannical government and lawlessness is the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination" (Arendt, *Totalitarianism* 162). The promise of a better world cannot be found in modes of authority that lack a vision of social justice, renounce the promise of democracy, and reject the dream of a better world, offering instead of dreams the pale assurance of protection from the nightmare of an all-embracing terrorism. Against this stripped down legitimation of authority is the promise of public spheres that in their diverse forms, sites, and content offer pedagogical and political possibilities for strengthening the social bonds of democracy, new spaces from which to cultivate the capacities for critical modes of individual and social agency, and crucial opportunities to form alliances to collectively struggle for a biopolitics that expands the scope of vision, operations of democracy, and the range of democratic institutions -- that is, a biopolitics that fights against the terrors of totalitarianism. Such spheres are about more than legal rights guaranteeing freedom of speech; they are also sites that demand a certain kind of citizen informed by particular forms of education, a citizen whose education provides the essential conditions for democratic public spheres to flourish. Cornelius Castoriadis, the great philosopher of democracy, argues that if public space is not to be experienced as a private affair, but as a vibrant sphere in which people experience and learn how to participate in and shape public life, it must be shaped through an education that provides the decisive traits of critical reflection, courage, and responsibility, all of which connect the fate of each individual to the fate of others, the planet, and global democracy (see Castoriadis, "The Greek Polis"). To confront the "dark times" in which we live, artists, cultural workers, youth, and educators need to create new discourses of understanding and criticism, but also offer up a vision of hope that creates the conditions for multiple collective and global struggles that refuse to use

politics as an act of war and markets as the measure of democracy. Making human beings superfluous is the essence of totalitarianism, and democracy is the antidote in urgent need of being reclaimed. Democracy's promise demands more justice, more hospitality, more struggle, not less. Democracy is more than an event and ritual, it is a site of struggle whose outcome is always uncertain but whose future should never remain in doubt.

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