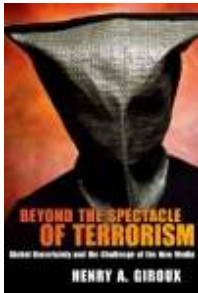


# The “Spectacle of Terrorism” A Review

by

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Henry A. Giroux, 2006. *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism: Global Uncertainty and the Challenge of the New Media*. Paradigm Publishers, Boulder & London.

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The “**spectacle of terrorism**” is a phenomenon that refers to the use of images and language via the new media to generate fear and anxiety in order to manipulate public opinion towards certain ideological interest. This has become increasingly dominant in the post-9/11 world. Henry A. Giroux, a prominent American critic and Global TV Network Chair in Communications professor at McMaster University, Canada, writes:

“In the post-9/11 world, the space of shared responsibility has given way to the space of private fears; the social obligations of citizenship are now reduced to the highly individualized imperatives of consumerism, and militarism has become a central motif of national identity. In this cold new world, the language of politics is increasingly mediated through a spectacle of terrorism in which **fear and violence become central modalities through which to grasp the meaning of self in society.**”  
[emphasis added]

In other words, what we are witnessing is an increasing move towards authoritarianism and a strangling of democratic public space. “The idea of the social,” Giroux writes, “[now] collapses into the private realm of the self and its fears”. In addition,

“[T]he language of the social is devalued as the call for state protection translates into the **suspension of civil liberties, new and expanding networks of government surveillance, and the increasingly accepted view that dissent is un-American and aids terrorism** ...Where the public is not seen as a site of disorder, it is sold off to private interests. All dreams of the future are now modeled around the narcissistic, privatized, and self-indulgent needs of consumer culture and increasingly honed to respond to new markets produced by the omniscient culture of fear.”  
[emphasis added]

Indeed, an authoritarian society, Giroux notes again, is characterized by “its willingness to trade in the rhetoric of fear in order to manipulate the public into a state of **servile, apolitical dependency and unquestioning ideological support.**” One must note the complex ideological connections between neoliberalism, consumer culture and the present heightened rhetoric on terrorism. These are sustained under the ‘spectacle of terrorism’ which, in turn, is linked to the ‘terrorism of the spectacle’.

Today, Giroux opined, public spaces are saturated with “a new order of spectacle that trades in violence in order to either shock or create a desire for, if not a fascination and identification with, practices that reproduce fear and terror....The culture of fear combined with the spectacle of terrorism **substitutes a sense of compassion and caring for the other with a concern for one's personal security and a deep distrust of others,** especially if those others are Arab or a Muslim.” [emphasis added]

This, to Giroux, raises serious questions about our public pedagogy, which needs closer and critical scrutiny:

“The emergence of the spectacle of terrorism as a new form of public pedagogy raises serious questions about **how fear and anxiety can be marketed** , how terrorism can be used to recruit people in support of authoritarian causes, how it is being produced in a vast array of pedagogical sites created by the new media, how the state uses mediated images of violence to justify its monopoly of power over the means of coercion, and how **the spectacle of terrorism works in an age of enormous injustices, deep insecurities, disembodied social relations, fragmented communities, and a growing militarization of everyday life** .” [emphasis added]

Giroux's conceptual theorizing on the present frenzy on terrorism and its connection to the increasingly debased cultural life in a democracy, is indeed a radical and refreshing attempt to go beyond the conventional dominant discourse we often hear or read. It may prove to be crucial in unmasking the ideological underpinnings of certain power-bases; a move that will aid the thinking public from a naive to a more critical consciousness of the predicaments of the present moment.

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