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DEFINING TERMS USED IN FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

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I INTRODUCTION

Before we begin an attempt to analyze what Freire has to say we must determine what he is talking about. That is, we must determine the definitions of his terms. Without completely understanding what he means when he uses a given word or phrase we cannot follow his line of reasoning.

This first session, therefore, shall be devoted exclusively to defining Freire's terms.

There are two types of terms/words/phrases that Freire presents for our consideration. The first are those words that are not common and for which we need a dictionary definition, i.e. praxis, ontological, anthropocentric, axiological and so on. The second type can be broken into two groups - there are those words that are familiar but because of their overuse have become somewhat clouded in their meaning, i.e. dehumanization, freedom, liberation, and there are phrases that utilize familiar words whose combined meaning is unfamiliar and phrases that utilize familiar combinations of words but have a special meaning to Freire, i.e. culture of silence, circle of certainty, fear of freedom...

To reiterate, Freire's work cannot be analyzed until we agree on common definitions for his terms. This first class on Pedagogy of the Oppressed will deal with an analysis of terms. As a natural consequence of this analysis, however, we will look at and define some theoretical constructs that anchor this work; they will be the basic perceptions that the author projects and on which he bases his argument. Perhaps one of the most important areas that we will explore during this semester is the area of perception and how people are socialized to accept a given view. The study of perception shall be a basic theme of the Chicano Urban Semester.

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II UNCOMMON WORDS

In this section we shall look at words of uncommon usage which need dictionary definitions.

- praxis:** exercise or practice of an art, science or skill
Freire's definition: reflection and action upon concrete reality in order to transform it
- pedagogy:** the art, science or profession of teaching
- ontological:** any theory about the nature of being or the kinds of existence
Freire's definition: man's being "is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world"
- dialogical:** of, relating to, or characterized by dialogue
- sectarianism:** limited in character or scope; relating to a sect
sect: a group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or a certain leader
- axiological:**
axiological: the study of the nature, types, and criteria of values and of value judgments (esp. in ethics)
Freire: "from an axiological point of view"; from the point of view of the study of values and value judgments
- prescription:** to dictate a rule; the process of making claim to something by long use and enjoyment; the action of laying down authoritative rules and directions; a claim founded upon ancient custom or long continued usage
Freire's definition: "the imposition of one man's choice upon another transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness"
- dialectic:** discussion and reasoning by dialogue as a method of intellectual investigation; the Hegelian process of change in which an entity passes over into and is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite - or its critical investigation; development through stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in accordance with laws of dialectical materialism; having to do with opposites and the relationship of those opposites leading to resolution of conflict (Eastern philosophy generally does not deal with dialectic, rather it deals with dualities)
Freire: "the oppressed...exist in dialectical relationship to the oppressor, as his antithesis - that without them the oppressor could not exist"

solidary: having to do with being in solidarity with

anthropocentric: considering man to be the most significant entity of the universe; interpreting the world in terms of human values and experiences

anthropological: relating to the science of man

III AMPLIFICATION OF TERMS

This section shall be devoted to terms that need amplification.

Richard Shaull, in the Forward to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, makes the following statement referring to Freire's method of education:

"...those who, in learning to read and to write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive activity." (p. 9)

see (completo, inters)

This statement is perhaps the key to the entire work, certainly it is to the first chapter. Let us explore this statement in depth to see where it shall take us.

The word "opportunity" in the statement refers to "a new awareness of selfhood" and to "look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves", and the indication of the statement is that the opportunity to do so has been denied. These two items, "awareness of selfhood" and "critical analysis", ^{& "Acting to transform the society"} can be considered a major portion of Freire's definition of humanization.

Humanization

Subject: To begin, let us look at a word that Freire uses. The word is Subject. This word refers to a person being conscious of his true relationship to the living situation in which he finds himself. He is a person who, instead of being dependant and allowing actions to happen to him as an in-animate object, acts upon and transforms his world. He is the subject instead of the object of decision and action. "The term 'Subjects' denotes those who

know and act, in contrast to 'objects', which are known and acted upon." (p. 26)

An uncompleted being: Now let us look at a phrase that Freire uses, "an uncompleted being conscious of his incompleteness." (p. 27)

What is an uncomplete being? The answer to this question may be reflected in man's quest "for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of man as persons" fully capable of participating in decision making and of initiating actions that have a direct bearing on their living condition (p. 28). A consciousness of this order would indicate that such a person would understand that he must be a Subject, transforming his condition and changing the status-quo through the praxis of action and reflection, in order to begin to achieve his completion. Thus he enters into the process of completion of the incomplete man, or the process of becoming more fully human.

This process of becoming more fully human is, then, the question at hand. This process is marked by a consciousness of becoming a Subject rather than remaining an object of decisions and actions. It is the process of learning to express oneself fully as a human being, of developing all the capabilities and potentialities that exist within a person, of being aware of the limitations that are placed upon him - limitations that tend to make him less fully human - and of struggling to overcome the injustice, exploitation and oppression that he encounters. It is a conscious self-affirmation. It is both the knowledge that a person can transform his situation⁴ the act of transforming that situation. It is the conscious break with the dependence to the "system". It is a process of "awareness of selfhood", of "critical analysis" and of action that will transform his situation. Humanization, therefore, is the process of becoming more fully human.

Dehumanization

If humanization is a process of relating affirmatively to reality and of struggling to regain and/or maintain that process - the process of becoming more fully human - then dehumanization is the negative of that process. Dehumanization is the denial by a society to an individual or to a group of the opportunity to "come to a new awareness of selfhood", to "look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves", and to pursue a course of transforming action upon that social situation. Dehumanization reflects a process counter to that of humanization which, "rather than encourage and equip people to know and to respond to the concrete realities of their world, (keeps them)...in a situation in ^{which} ~~which~~ such critical ^C awareness and response (is) practically impossible." (p. 11)

Humanization is a ^b ~~liberating~~ process; dehumanization is an oppressing process.

Liberation or, its synonym, freedom, "is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion". (p. 31) It is the right to participate in an on-going process leading to self-affirmation and independence (as opposed to self-depreciation and dependence).

Oppression is the conscious or unconscious effort to prevent the basic process of becoming more fully human. Oppression is carried out through socialization of people to a distorted reality which caters to the interests of the oppressing society, through political and economic ^{satisfy} ~~maneuvers~~ ^{no more, or and} that maintain control, and through physical force that negatively intervenes in attempts at transforming action by the oppressed.

Fear of Freedom

The process of dehumanization creates systems within the structure of the oppressed class that work to keep oppressed people in their condition of oppression. These systems are part of the dehumanizing process and strengthen that process by their nature.

Freire ^{ay} says that "the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have ^{ve}come resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires." (p. 32)

What are the risks involved? They are, of course, those things that society has decreed to be "success" - security, status, position, peer recognition, etc. And this applies to the middle-class as well as to the oppressed class (if we can make a differentiation). The professional, the clerk, the tecato and the local gunsel are all, to one degree or another, victims of "the fear of freedom". This situation can be explained in the following way.

Prescription: The oppressing society imposes upon the oppressed a system of logic which rationalizes a given situation in favor of that society. Injustice, hunger, and psychological violence is justified or explained away. Oppressed people are objectified - they have no voice in decisions or actions which effect them directly - the logic decrees that they are not capable - only the controlling forces have the qualifications to make such decisions, furthermore, they "know what is best for the people". If the people decide to begin making decisions, it is called violence against the state - it is sedition, treason or subversion (America: Love it or Leave It!) and armed force is used to arrest it. In this system of logic, violence, both psychological and physical, perpetrated upon people is condoned by identifying (as qualified identifiers) groups of ^{desculpado}

people as "lazy", "ignorant" and "they don't work hard" thereby rationalizing that they deserve what they get. This system of logic gives credence to the acquisitive and consumptive nature of our social system and, through laws and traditions, supports the methods used to gain this "wealth". Since the oppressor controls information sources, the logic is internalized within both oppressor and oppressed, but it is the logic of the oppressor supporting his self-interests. "Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. The oppressed having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom." (p. 31)

The Sub-oppressor: Since the consciousness of the oppressor is internalized by the oppressed, his consciousness will conform to that of the oppressor; the behaviour of the oppressed will then be prescribed behavior following the guidelines of the oppressor. Thus, for an oppressed person to "make it" he must strive to be like the oppressor; the oppressed see freedom as being like the oppressor and their first steps toward liberation oftentimes will be to become a "sub-oppressor". The oppressed are aware of their situation as oppressed but are not aware of the conditions of that situation. "At this level their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction." (p. 30)

Duality: "The oppressed suffer from a duality that has established itself in the innermost being." The oppressed, "discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at the same time themselves and the oppressor..." (p. 32) They must choose between being Subjects or being objects of the oppressors; between making their own decisions and initiating their own action or having

others make decisions to which they shall react; "between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to creat and re-create, in their power to transform the world". (p. 33) The fear of freedom stems from several areas:

- 1) The oppressed fear the rejection of the oppressor's image of reality which they have internalized. "Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility." (p. 31)
- 2) They fear the further repression that would ensue from mounting a struggle of liberation.
- 3) In some cases, "they confuse freedom with the mainenance of the status quo; so that if conscientizacão threatens to place that status quo in question it thereby constitutes a threat to freedom". (p.)

Culture of Silence

Freire says that "their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression". (p. 30) He means, on the one hand, that since the oppressed have internalized the oppressor's logic - that he is submerged in that false reality - they cannot percieve that the 'order' that serves the oppressor is not a "natural one", rather, that it is one contrived by the laws, traditions and myths of the oppressor for the express purpose of serving him. The natural response of the oppressed, given these conditions, is to become as much like the oppressor as possible so that they too can be served by that internalized logic. On the other hand, "once a situation of violence has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those saught up in it - oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation and both bear the marks of op-

ppression". (p. 44) This situation of domination produces a master-slave relation in which the oppressed - until they begin to gain awareness - do a "song and dance routine". That is, they learn what posture to take before the oppressor in order to obtain needed goods or to accomplish a necessary action; they "shine the man on" or they "lay a trip on his head". These actions, however successful they are in achieving the expected results, nevertheless, are not self-initiated actions based on the concrete reality of a given situation, rather, they are reactions based on reflection upon the internalized false logic of the oppressor. The oppressed may not respect the oppressor's logic but it is the only logic he has and he lives within its rules. Oppressed people may rob banks instead of "working hard to get ahead", but the act of robbing the bank is generally not in order to change a given situation, i.e. to buy weapons to begin a revolution, rather, it is obtain the power to consume - *in equal a* to be up to par with the oppressor. The act of robbing a bank may be the only path toward the oppressor's image of success that is open; it is taken because of the duality of oppressed/oppressor found within the character of the oppressed.

This game, that must be learned in order to exist, is a manifestation of the submersion of the oppressed in the system of logic of the oppressor. It is a dehumanizing system that keeps people in their culture of silence. In order to liberate themselves, the oppressed must confront reality critically and act upon that reality. This type of intervention, however, would explode the myths that the oppressor has built in order to rationalize his behavior and existence. His logic dictates that conditions whose results may be prejudicial to him be not precisely denied, but that they be seen differently. "The oppressor knows full well that this intervention would not be in his best interest. What is to his interest is for people to continue in a state of submersion, impotent in the face of oppressive society." (p. 37)

Conscientizacão

The terms humanization and conscientizacão must be considered to mean "the process of becoming more fully human" yet do they mean exactly the same thing?

The two concepts cannot be separated - they mean the same thing, however, they reflect two different levels of the concept. The following are tentative definitions:

humanization refers to the resultant (a continuing action or a way of life) of the process of becoming more fully human

conscientizacão refers to the consciousness of that process and is also a continuing process

One could describe humanization as a process that goes on without conscientizacão, that is, through action and reflection on action a person could transform his reality for his betterment, yet not be conscious of the relationship between himself and his reality. This would be difficult to accept, however, since the person would not understand what he was trying to transform. He would be fighting isolated battles not making the fundamental distinction between oppressor and oppressed; he would not understand that the given reality is the rationalization and justification by the oppressor for the fulfillment of HIS interests. Thus it could be said that a person involved in this process is immersed in the reality of the oppressor. He cannot be involved in the process of becoming more fully human, rather he is involved in the process of becoming more like the oppressor.

Conscientizacão is the awareness of the humanizing and dehumanizing process and the conscious struggle to transform the present concrete reality. A person who has achieved conscientizacão is aware of the rationale for the present reality; he can see through and understand that it caters to the controlling groups in the social order. He is also aware that the only way to transform the given situation is through the praxis of action and reflection. If he is simply aware of the situation but no action is taken to transform

the social order, there can be no conscientizacao and no humanizing process. If he is aware of the situation and action is initiated ~~but~~ there is not reflection upon that action, there is no praxis, no real transformation, thus no conscientizacao. Humanization are two sides of one coin, different, but unable to exist without one another. *moeda.*

Education and Subversion

Let us now get back to Shaul's statements ~~on~~ which we began this section. The last sentence of his statement is "Education is once again subversive".

Is education indeed subversive? Should education be subversive? What is subversion?

If we agree that man's proper role is to be involved in the process of becoming more fully human, that is, that he must be aware of his selfhood, must analyze critically his concrete reality, and must act to transform that reality, then we must agree that that which interfere's with that process is dehumanizing and oppressive and a negative of man's existence.

If we agree that today man is involved in an oppressor-oppressed relationship in which one group of people keeps another group of people in a "situation in which...critical awareness and response (is) practically impossible" - keeps them submerged in a "culture of silence" and if we agree, as Shaul further states, that "...it became clear to him (Freire) that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence," (p. 11) then we must agree that education, as it is today, is not a subversive activity, insofar as the controlling society is concerned. To be subversive in the eyes of the oppressor society, education must advocate radical change to the status quo which maintains the oppressor-oppressed reality. However, present education, in actuality, advances and reinforces the dehumanizing

process - it keeps people from becoming aware of their selfhood, critically analyzing their concrete reality and acting to transform that reality, and since this is in the interest of the oppressor society, it is not subversive, rather, it is quite "patriotic".

In order to continue along this line we must look closely at the word subversion and understand that for an act to be subversive it must also be revolutionary. That is, the word subversion has its opposite which maintains it and identifies it. If an act is neutral, insofar as subversion is concerned, then the concept of subversion does not exist within the context of the act, however, if the act is subversive, it indicates that to a given group of people identifying the act as such, it poses a threat - thus there must be a group of people involved in an act that threatens the first group. How is this act, then, defined by this second group?

If the act threatens the first group, the act must advocate radical change - perhaps to the point of completely destroying the foundations that support the reality espoused by that group:

subversive: tending or seeking to subvert, overthrow, or destroy (an established government, institution, belief, etc.)

If subversive is defined as overthrowing a government, institution or belief, what does revolution mean?

revolution: a sudden, radical or complete change in political organization, especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed...

Thus what is subversive, by its very nature is revolutionary. Shuall's statement indicates that Freire's pedagogy is a subversive/revolutionary one, which, by creating people with conscientizacao - people in the process of becoming more fully human - would threaten today's status quo and be considered subversive by the social order upholding that status quo. Therefore, if we

agree that man's present condition is a negative one, we must agree that education should strive to allow man to enter that process of becoming more fully human. That is, that education, in its essence, should be subversive - or revolutionary, depending the word you choose to define the process.

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