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*Freirean Pedagogy And Higher Education:  
The Challenge Of Postmodernism  
And The Politics Of Race*

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# FREIRIAN PEDAGOGY AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGE OF POSTMODERNISM AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

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I suggest those who have not read Amilcar Cabral's works on the struggle in Guinea Bissau take up the task of reviewing them. I am much impressed by his works, as well as those of Che Guevara. Furthermore, both shared a mutual respect for the other. It was in Guinea Bissau where the two met for the first time. They kept silence, observing one another. I would call it a revolutionary love with clasped hands (even though Amilcar was short and Guevara was an extraordinary specimen of a man). They both shared a love based on the revolution. And what was most interesting of all, they did many similar things - like being eminent pedagogues, great educators of the revolution.

*Paulo Freire*

Paulo Freire on Higher Education, in press

It is a shame - since our North American cousins have unspeakable interests in this regard - that we continue to live in Latin America without knowing each other.

*Paulo Freire*

Paulo Freire on Higher Education, in press

I myself was a university professor for a long time, long before the coup in Brazil. But the professor I have become is not the professor I was. It couldn't be! It would be horrible! Even exile played an important part in my re-education. It taught me that radicalization is a fundamental course and enabled me to go through different experiences as a university professor in different parts of the world: in Latin America, in the United States, in Canada, in Europe, in Africa, and in Asia.

*Paulo Freire*

Paulo Freire on Higher Education, in press

I remember in 1968 young people rebelled all around the world without coordinating themselves. Students in Mexico in 1968 were not telephoning young people in Harvard, or Columbia, or Prague, or Brazil. Nevertheless they carried out more or less the same movement. It was impressive. I also remember that communication between world universities was non-existent, and it was unbelievably easy for dominant classes to repress world wide movements.

*Paulo Freire*

Paulo Freire on Higher Education, in press

We are living the hallucinatory wakefulness of nightmare reason. It is a time in which U.S. culture and history threaten the autonomy of the human spirit rather than exercise it. Henri Lefebvre (1975) warns that during this present historical conjuncture we are suffering from

an alienation from alienation - that is, from a disappearance of our consciousness that we exist in a state of alienation.

Educators and cultural workers in the United States living in this twilight of reason are facing a crisis of democracy. The democratic aspiration of U.S. schooling and social, cultural, and institutional practices in general have been carried forth to an unheralded present moment in what retrospectively appears to have been an act of bad faith. The consequences of such an act for future generations are only faintly visible and are bathed in an ethos eerily reminiscent of earlier swindles of hope. The "democratizing" imperatives of private enterprise, wage labor, free trade and other fundamental axes for the new capitalist world system ushered in by the third industrial revolution of computer technology have shrouded individuals in a web of promotional logic patterned by the conquering dynamism of Eurocentrism. Colonization has gone transnational and corporatist (Miyoshi, 1993). As Jacques Attali (1991, p. 120) warns, "From Santiago to Beijing, from Johannesburg to Moscow, all economic systems will worship at the altar of the market. People will sacrifice for the gods of profit." We live in an age in which desires, formerly-tilted inwards, are now constructed on the surface of bodies like pathologically narcissistic tattoos that reflect lost hope and empty dreams - forfeited identifications turned into grotesqueries, unable to escape the circuit of deceit and despair constructed out of capitalist relations and rationalizations.

Capitalism carries the seeds of its own vulnerability and frailty even though its cunning appears inexhaustible and its mechanisms of production and exchange irreproachable and unchallenged. Its vulnerability is, ironically, the most steadfast and dangerous precondition for its further development. So long as it has bourgeois universal reason and the epistemic privilege of science as its spokesperson and Eurocentrism as its cultural anchor, and whiteness as its foundation of cultural calculability, its very constitution as a discourse of power within an increasingly homogeneous "world culture" needs to be challenged by popular movements of renewal within a polycentric cultural milieu.

Educators in the United States have no special immunity to these conditions but bear a signal responsibility to understand them and, in turn, help their students to do the same. Students are particularly vulnerable in these dangerous times, as they are captured in webs of social and cultural meaning not of their own making, motivated to remember in specific

ways, and silently counseled through advertisements, the media, and religious and political "others" to respond to the logic of commodity fetishism as if it were a natural state of affairs. Teachers and students together face New Right constituencies of all types and stripes in particular, fundamentalist Christians and political interest groups who are exercising an acrimonious appeal to a common culture monolithically unified by a desire for harmony in sameness.

The forms of ethical address which have been constructed by the sentinels of our dominant political, cultural, and educational systems--even under cover of abstract endorsements of diversity--are bent on draining the lifeblood out of difference by installing an invisible ideological grid through which appeals to normalcy, decency, and citizenship may be filtered and differences extorted into reconciliation. They are effectively limiting the range of meanings which are being stockpiled in the name of democracy. E.D. Hirsch wants to reduce culture to ontologically and epistemologically fix the relationship between citizenship and language so that "real Americans" won't be bothered anymore by the babel of foreign tongues; educational reformers under the sway of marketplace logic are implored to get youth off the streets and into the declining job markets where they can then be conscripted into the corporate wars with Germany and Japan.

Insinuated into grand narrative of progress, these contestable sets of assumptions and social practices effectively reproduce the systems of intelligibility that further the interests of the privileged and powerful.

Against the backdrop of the global underclass, the growing influence of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism in political life in general and education in particular, and the struggle for democracy exists the work of Paulo Freire, one of the great revolutionaries of our generation. It is important to make clear that Freire's work cannot be articulated outside the diverse and conflicting registers of indigenist cultural, intellectual, and ideological production in the Third World. The "Third World" is a term that I use most advisedly after Benita Parry and Franz Fanon to mean a "self-chosen phrase to designate a force independent of both capitalism and actually existing socialism, while remaining committed to socialist goals" (Parry, 1993, p. 130). As such, it offers a starting point for a critique of imperialism and "retains its radical edge for interrogating the Western chronicle."

Of course, one of the powerful implications surrounding the distinction between First and Third Worlds involves the politics of underdevelopment. Andrew Ross (1989) describes the classic model of underdevelopment as one that benefits the small, indigenous elites of Western developed nations. Foreign markets such as those in Latin America provide a consumption outlet for the developed nations of the First World for absorbing the effects of a crisis of overproduction in the core economy. According to Ross, the peripheral economy (Latin America) underproduces for its domestic population. He reports that "The Economic surplus which results from peripheral consumption of core products is appropriated either by core companies or by the domestic elites; it is not invested in the domestic economy of the peripheral nation" (1989, p. 129). Of course, what happens as a result is that the domestic economies of Latin America and foreign capital certainly does encourage peripheral economies to develop but such development - if you can call it that - is almost always uneven and consequently such contact forces the peripheral economy to undevelop its own domestic spheres.

When there is economic dependency, cultural dependency often follows in its wake. However, the capitalist culture industry is not simply superstructural but constitutive in that the masses - both in First and Third Worlds - do not simply consume culture passively as mindless dupes. There is often resistance at the level of symbolic meaning that prevents the culture industry from serving simply as a vehicle of repressive homogenization of meaning (Martin-Barbero, 1992; McLaren, 1992). According to Ross (1989), the elites of the peripheral nations are the first to acquire access to Westernized popular culture but because of the limited access of the indigenous population to the media, the media generally serve to encourage affluent groups to adopt the consumer values of the most developed countries. The elites basically serve in a supervisory capacity when it comes to the cultural consumption of the indigenous peasantry. However, the continuing ties of the peasantry to their own ethnic cultures does help them become less dependent on Western information. Foreign mass-produced culture is often interpreted and resisted at the level of popular culture and we must remember that First World cultural values can also be affected by its contact with the cultures of less developed countries. And, further, not everything about contact with Western culture is to be shunned, although the emergence of a new, transnational class appears to have all the ideological trappings of the older, Western bourgeoisie. For instance, my own contact with Brazilian feminists has revealed to me that oppositional feminist critique in the U.S. can be successfully appropriated by Brazilian

women in their struggle against the structures of patriarchal oppression, structures which can permit men to kill their wives if they suspect them of infidelity on the grounds that their "male honor" has been violated.

The image of Freire that is evoked against this recurring narrative of the decline and deceit of Western Democracy and the cultural hegemony of developed nations is a distant voice in a crowd, a disturbing interloper among the privileged and powerful - one who bravely announces that the emperor has no clothes. Ethically and politically Freire remains haunted by the ghosts of history's victims and possessed by the spirits that populate the broken dreams of utopian thinkers and millenarian dreamers--a man whose capacities for nurturing affinities between disparate social, cultural and political groups and for forging a trajectory towards moral, social and political liberation exceeds the disasters that currently befall this world.

Freire's internationally celebrated praxis began in the late 1940s and continued unabated until 1964, when he was arrested in Brazil as a result of a literacy program he designed and implemented in 1962. He was imprisoned by the military government for seventy days, and exiled for his work in the national literacy campaign, of which he had served as director. Freire's sixteen years of exile were tumultuous and productive times: a five-year stay in Chile as a UNESCO consultant with the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation, specifically the Reform Training and Research Institute; an appointment in 1969 to Harvard University's Center for Studies in Development and Social Change; a move to Geneva, Switzerland in 1970 as consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches, where he developed literacy programs for Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau that focused on the reAfricanization of their countries; the development of literacy programs in some postrevolutionary former Portuguese colonies such as Angola and Mozambique; assisting the governments of Peru and Nicaragua with their literacy campaigns; the establishment of the Institute of Cultural Action in Geneva in 1971; a brief return to Chile after Salvador Allende was assassinated in 1973; provoking General Pinochet to declare Freire a subversive; and his eventual return to Brazil in 1980 to teach at the Pontificia Universidade Catolica de Sao Paulo, the Universidade de Sao Paulo, and the Universidade de Campinas. These events were accompanied by numerous works, most notably, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Cultural Action for Freedom and Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau. Little did Freire realize that on November 15, 1988, the Partido dos

Trabalhadores (Workers Party or PT) would win the municipal elections in Sao Paulo, Brazil and he would be appointed Secretary of Education of the city of Sao Paulo by Mayor Luiza Erundina de Sousa.

Relentlessly destabilizing as sui generis and autochthonous mercenary pedagogy - i.e. spontaneous pedagogy wantonly designed to stimulate the curiosity of students yet imposed in such a bourgeois manner so as to "save" those who live in situations of domestication only when they are reinitiated into the conditions of their own oppression - Freire's praxis of solidarity, that is, his critical pedagogy speaks to a new way of being and becoming human. This "way of being and becoming" constitutes a quest for the historical self-realization of the oppressed by the oppressed themselves through the formation of collective agents of insurgency. Against the treason of modern reason, Freire aligns the role of the educator with that of the organic intellectual. It should come as no surprise, then, that against perspectives generated in the metropolitan epicenters of education designed to serve and protect the status quo Freire's work has, even today, been selected for a special disapprobation by the lettered bourgeoisie and epigones of apolitical pedagogy as a literature to be roundly condemned, travestied, traduced, and relegated to the margins of the education debate. That Freire's work has been placed under prohibition, having been judged to be politically inflammatory and subversive and an inadmissible feature of academic criticism, is understandable given the current historical conjunction. But it is not inevitable.

It is not the purpose of this essay to address the often egregious misrepresentations of Freire's work by mainstream educators, nor to simply situate Freire unproblematically within the context of First World efforts to ground liberation struggles in pedagogical practices. I intend merely to elaborate on one of the central themes of Freire's work, which is the role of the educator as an active agent of social change.

### Critical Pedagogy VS. The Academy

While their political strategies vary considerably, critical educators of various stripe (many of whom have been directly influenced by Freire's work) generally hold certain presuppositions in common which can be summarized as follows: pedagogies constitute a form of social and cultural criticism; all knowledge is fundamentally mediated by linguistic relations that inescapably are socially and historically constituted; individuals are



synechochically related to the wider society through traditions of mediation (family, friends, religion, formal schooling, popular culture, etc.); social facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from forms of ideological production as inscription; the relationship between concept and object and signifier and signified is neither inherently stable nor transcendently fixed and is often mediated by circuits of capitalist production, consumption, and social relations; language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); certain groups in any society are unnecessarily and often unjustly privileged over others and while the reason for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully secured when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, inevitable or bequeathed to them as an exercise of historical chance; oppression has many faces and focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression vs. racism) often elides or occults the interconnection among them; an unforeseen world of social relations awaits us and that power and oppression cannot be understood simply in terms of an irrefutable calculus of meaning linked to cause and effect conditions and this means that an unforeseen world of social relations awaits as; domination and oppression are implicated in the radical contingency of social development and our responses to it; and mainstream research practices are generally and unwittingly implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Kincheloe and McLaren, in press).

Freire's work certainly reflects this list of assumptions to different degrees and while his corpus of writing does not easily fall under the rubric of poststructuralism, his emphasis on the relationship among language, experience, power and identity certainly give weight to certain poststructuralist assumptions. For instance, Freire's work stresses that language practices among individuals and groups do more than reflect reality, they effectively organize our social universe and reinforce what is considered to be the limits of the possible while constructing at the same time the faultlines of the practical. To a large extent, the sign systems and semiotic codes that we use are always already populated by prior interpretations since they have been necessarily conditioned by the material, historical, and social formations that help to give rise to them. They endorse and enforce particular social arrangements since they are situated in historically conditioned social practices in which the desires and motivations of certain groups have been culturally and ideologically inscribed, not to mention overdetermined. All sign systems are fundamentally arbitrary but certain systems have been accorded a privileged distinction over others, in ways that bear the

imprint of race, class and gender struggles (Gee, 1993). Sign systems not only are culture-bound and conventional but also are distributed socially, historically and geopolitically (Berlin, 1993). For U.S. educators, this implicates our language use in Euro-American social practices that have been forged in the crucible of patriarchy and white supremacy (Giroux, 1993).

Knowledge does not, according to the view sketched above, possess any inherent meaningfulness in and of itself but depends on the context in which such knowledge is produced and the purpose to which such knowledge is put. If there is no pre-ontological basis for meaning that is extralinguistically verifiable, no philosophical calculus that can assist us in making choice - then we can come to see language as a form of power that apprentices us to particular ways of seeing and engaging the self and others and this, in turn, has particular social consequences and political effects (McLaren and Leonard, 1993). Few educators have helped us to judge the political effects of language practices as much as Paulo Freire. And few educators have been as misused and misunderstood. Clearly, Freire does not see individuals and groups to be agentless beings invariably trapped in and immobilized by language effects. Rather, human beings are politically accountable for their language practices and as such, agency is considered immanent (McLaren and Lankshear, in press). Freire's position reflects Gramsci's notion that the structural intentionality of human beings needs to be critically interrogated through a form of conscientization or conscientizacao (this Portuguese word is defined by Freire as a deep or critical reading of commonsense reality).

### **The Educational Institution As (A) Moral Agent**

When the surgical pick of Egas Moniz was poised to perform the first medical lobotomy (a procedure which, it may be recalled won him the Nobel Prize and which led reactionary advocates to consider lobotomies for individuals subversive of good citizenship practices) it was inconceivable at that time to think that such an act of cerebral terrorism could be achieved at a cultural level more effectively and much less painfully through the powerful articulations of new and ever more insidious forms of capitalist hegemony. The emancipatory role of university and public intellectuals has been greatly diminished by this process, as well as the function of the organic intellectual. In fact, emancipatory praxis has been largely orphaned in our institutions of education as educators are either unable or refuse to name the political location of their own pedagogical praxis. Part of the problem is

that postmodern traditions of mediation have become simulacra whose ideological dimensions cannot easily be identified with or organically linked to the most oppressive effects of capitalist social relations and material practices. The redoubled seduction of new information technologies not only rearticulates a submission to multinational financial strategies, but create possibilities for a resignification of, resistance to, and popular participation in, the politics of everyday life. The fact that relationships between the specific and the general have become blurred by these new electronic forces of mediation has both increased a reorganization and liberation of difference but has also posed a danger of further cultural fragmentation and dissolution limiting the struggle for strategic convergences among sites of intellectual production, the formation of new moral economies, and the expansion of new social movements. This disaggregation of public spheres and the massification of mestizaje identities makes it difficult to establish the solidarities necessary for developing liberating idioms of social transformation (Martin-Barbero, 1992; McLaren, 1992). It is to a deeper understanding of the relationship between the role of hegemony in the formation of public intellectuals and the function of the university itself in the context of wider social and political formations that Freire's work needs to be engaged. Part of this engagement necessitates an engagement with postmodernist criticisms.

Freire's work has not explicitly addressed current political debates surrounding the pedagogy and politics of postmodernism. What can be loosely described as postmodern social theory has been influential in, among other things, offering criticisms of material and economic causality and the Cartesian notion of subjectivity by placing an emphasis on reading social reality as a text, on language as a model of representation that helps "construct" social reality, on power as both a condition and effect of discourse, on world-construction as an interplay of signifying relations and on unmasking Enlightenment conceptions of truth as the aesthetic effectiveness of the rhetoric of reading and writing practices.

Recently Sande Cohen has from a postmodern perspective, offered a forceful challenge to the timid and frequently duplicitous role which university intellectuals have assumed in relation to the sociality of capital and the "catastrophe of socialized expectations". Following the persistent contentions of Baudrillard, Nietzsche, and others, Cohen maintains that objectivity can no longer hide or deny its subjectively-based interests - a situation that

has serious implications for the role of the intellectual in contemporary North American society. He writes:

For intellectual it is suggested that our texts and objects now fail to connect with everything but *our own simulacra, image, power, formation of exchange*. In doubting and negating everything, in affirming and consecrating everything, intellectuals remain prisoners of the futile role of the subject-in-consciousness and enforce the pretense that our efforts *translate and represent* for the truth of others, the reality of the world. (Italics original, 1993, p. 154).

For Cohen, as for Freire, the dilemma of the intellectual lies in the failure to forcefully challenge the perils of capitalism. In response to this dilemma, Cohen mounts an articulate and vigorous attack on the U.S. professoriate. University discourse and practices are condemned as mobilizing the academicization and domestication of meaning through a modernist process of historicization - a process which, in effect, amounts to creating various self-serving theologies of the social that enable professors to speculate on the future in order to justify their social function as intellectuals. Resulting from this process are acute forms of anti-skepticism leading in many instances to a debilitating cynicism. According to Cohen, universities and their academic gentry operate as a discursive assemblage directed at creating a regime of truth, a process that fails to undertake the important task of "inventing systems independent of the system of capital" (p.3). In this instance, academic criticism is crippled by its inability to break from conventional categories such as "resemblance." Critical languages forged in the theoretical ovens of the academy simply and regrettably pursue their own hegemony through the production of pretense and the desire for power. Further, in face of the cultural logic of late capitalism, "the category of the intellectual is disengaged from any possible antimodernist argument" (p.68). This situation recenters "high status" knowledge within the liberal tradition of therapeutic discourse. According to Cohen, "Universities cannot speak to their own participation in the destruction of events without undoing their 'need' and control structures" (p. 114).

Even Habermas' now popular appeal for a rational means of resolving differences and restoring democratic social life in the ideal speech situation is described as "psychologically based moral economy" (p.67) in which "intellectuals are empowered so long as they stay in the precut grooves of providing resocialization with concepts, theory, sophistication, the

seductions, one might say, of bureaucratic integration" (p.70). With this dilemma in mind, Cohen asserts:

Why isn't capitalism - which makes mincemeat of real argumentation by its homogenization of signifiers, accomplished, for example, by the media's ordinary excessive displacement of analysis or the marginalization of unfamiliar cultural and social voices - rendered more critically?...Why is the economic mode so accepted in the first place as an unalterable form of social relation? Why is criticism so often an opposition that acts under the identity of a "loyal opposition"? (p.70)

In order to escape the inevitability under capitalism of a modernist historicist recoding of knowledge, Cohen astutely adopts Lyotard's notion of "dispossession." Dispossession is recruited in this context in terms of "the dispossession of historicizing, narrating, reducing, demanding" (p.72). More specifically, it refers to a form of "uncontrolled presentation (which is not reducible to presence)" (p.73). It also points to the suspension of identification--including negative identification. Cohen also conscripts into the service of a critique of capitalism Hannah Arendt's concept of "active critique" of ends and goals "that never identif[ies] with time valuations which are, unavoidably, always already atrophied" (p.113). We are advised here to "strangify" - a term he employs in tandem with an unyielding commitment to resubjectification--to making subjectivity different outside the acts of negation and opposition through the creation of insubordinate signifiers which loosen and "neutralize...the Platonic control on the power to select" (p. 118). To strangify is to engage in a non reduction of meaning that terrorizes all forms of equational logic, positive and negative (p. 119).

Cohen's project of strangification - a type of postmodern extension of Freire's term of conscientization - is directed at destabilizing and decentering the monumentalization of the already known and the militarization of existing sign systems established by the academic gentry and mandarins of high status knowledge whose participation is aimed at the legitimization of their own power. Along with smashing through the Western arcs of destiny - those supposedly unassailable narratives of individual freedom arching towards Disneyland, Aztecland, Inca-Blinka, San Banadov, or Gangsterland - strangification unsettles foundational myths which anchor meaning in a sedentary web of contradictory

appearances and pre-code the world in such a way that entrance to the world of "success" depends on the imprimatur of one's cultural capital and the potential for earning power.

A number of questions are raised by Cohen's analysis for those who are developing Freirean based pedagogical work. These questions include, among others:

- Of what importance does "postmodern theory" and "resistance postmodernism" have for the Brazilian sociopolitical context?
- The recent thesis on "the death of the subject" advanced by many poststructuralists (the individual is constituted by discourse or is simply a position in language, systems of signification, chains of signs) as called into question the feasibility of historical agency of political praxis. How can we think of agency outside of a transhistorical and prediscursive "I" and yet not fall into the cynical trap that suggests that individuals are simply the pawns of the interpretive communities in which they find themselves? If the subject has been aestheticized and reduced to simply a "desiring machine," how are we to address the concepts of morality and ethics and multidimensional forms of agency?
- How are we to react to those who proclaim the "death of History" thesis which decries the meta-narratives of the Enlightenment as a misguided belief in the power of rational reflection? If we are to reject "grand theories" that essentialize others and speak for their needs from a perspective that refuses to critically interrogate its own ideological constitutiveness, then are we simply left with a micropolitics of local struggles? In other words, is it possible to build global alliances in the postmodern era that do not produce the same forms of technocratic capitalism that are part of the problem?
- If master narratives are colonizing practices that repress differences and the recognition of multiple identities, and if it is virtually impossible to represent the real outside the constraints of regimes of representation, how should we begin to rethink and practice liberation?

- While postmodern theorists have developed new understandings of desire as a means of criticizing the disabling effects of instrumental reason, how can we address pragmatically the project of human freedom?

Postmodern critiques of educational institutions such as those advanced by Cohen can be helpful to Freirean educators in placing social and educational critique within a wider contemporary problematic.

### The Nocturnal Academy And The Politics Of Difference

Western intellectuals need to further understand that while affirming the experiences of subaltern groups is exceedingly important within a praxis of liberation, it is a highly questionable practice to render the "other" as transparent by inviting the other to speak for herself. Freire and other critics make this point very clear. As Gaurav Desai (following Gayatri Spivak, Lata Mani, and Partha Chatterjee) notes, the position of permitting the other to speak for herself is uncomfortably "complicitous with a Western epistemological tradition that takes the conditions of the possibility of subaltern counterinvention for granted without engaging in a critique of the effects of global capitalism on such counterinvention" (1993:137). Since the oppressed speak for themselves within a particular sign structure, the language of critique adopted by the insurgent intellectual needs to be able to analyze the embeddedness of such a sign system in the larger episteme of colonialism and white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Insurgent intellectuals must apply the same critique to their own assumptions about the other as they do to the other's self-understanding. In fact, critical educators need to counterinvent a discourse that transcends existing epistemes (Desai, 1993).

Jim Merod (1987) poses the challenge of the intellectual as follows:

The critic's task is not only to question truth in its present guises. It is to find ways of putting fragments of knowledge, partial views, and separate disciplines in contact with questions about the use of expert labor so that the world we live in can be seen for what it is (1987:188).

The problem, as Merod sees it, is that there exists within the North American academy no political base for alliances among radical social theorists and the oppressed. He writes:

The belief among liberal humanists that they have no "liberation strategy" to direct their steps is a vivid reminder of the humanities' class origin. Yet intellectuals always have something to fight for more important than their own professional position. North American intellectuals need to move beyond theory, tactics, and great dignified moral sentiments to support, in the most concrete ways possible, people harmed or endangered by the guiltless counterrevolutionary violence of state power... The major intellectual task today is to build a political community where ideas can be argued and sent into the world of news and information as a force with a collective voice, a voice that names cultural distortions and the unused possibilities of human intelligence (1987:191).

One important task of the critical educator is to translate cultural difference. This is certainly the challenge for Freirean educators. The act of translation is, in Bhabha's (1990) terms, "a borderline moment" (p.314). As Walter Benjamin pointed out, all cultural languages are to a certain extent foreign to themselves and from the perspective of otherness it is possible to interrogate the contextual specificity of cultural systems (Bhabha, 1990). It is in this sense, then, that "it becomes possible to inscribe the specific locality that apprehension of difference, to perform the act of cultural translation" (ibid.:314).

All forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because all cultural meanings resist totalization and complete closure. In other words, cultural meanings are hybrid and cannot be contained within any discourse of authenticity or race, class, gender, essences. Bhabha describes the subject of cultural difference as follows:

the subject of cultural difference is neither pluralistic nor relativistic. The frontiers of cultural differences are always belated or secondary in the sense that their hybridity is never simply a question of the admixture of pre-given identities or essences. Hybridity is the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life; it is an instance of iteration, in the minority discourse, of the time of the arbitrary sign--'the minus in the origin'--through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization. (ibid)

The subaltern voices of minority cultures constitute "those people who speak the encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant" (ibid.:315). The transfer of their meaning can never be total. The "desolate silences of the wandering people" (ibid.:316) illustrate the



incommensurability of translation which confronts the discourse of white supremacist and capitalist patriarchy with its own alterity.

As translators, critical educators must assume a transformative role by "dialogizing the other" rather than trying to "represent the other" (Hitchcock, 1993). The site of translation is always an arena of struggle. The translation of other cultures must resist the authoritative representation of the other through a decentering process that challenges dialogues which have become institutionalized through the semantic authority of state power. Neither the practice of signification nor translation occurs in an ideological void, and for this reason educators need to interrogate the sign systems that are used to produce readings of experience. As Joan Scott notes, "experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment" (1992:34). It is Freire's particular strength that he has developed a critical vernacular which can help to translate both the other's experience and his own experience of the other in such a way that ideological representations may be challenged. The challenge here is to rethink authoritative representations of the other in a critical language that does not simply re-authorize the imperatives of "First World" translation practices. To do otherwise would open translation to a form of cultural imperialism. Experiences never speak for themselves, even those of the oppressed. Freire is careful to make sure his language of translation provides the oppressed with tools to analyze their own experiences while at the same time recognizing that the translation process itself is never immune from inscription in ideological relations of power and privilege.

While Freire's dialogue does not centrally address the politics of race, his message can none the less, be elaborated through an engagement with the work of Black insurgent intellectuals. Cornel West blames what he perceives as a decline in Black literate intellectual activity on the "relatively greater Black integration into postindustrial capitalist America with its bureaucratized, elite universities, dull middlebrow colleges, and decaying high schools, which have little concern for and confidence in Black students as potential intellectuals" (1991, p.137). He is highly critical of "aspects of the exclusionary and repressive effects of White academic institutions and humanistic scholarship" (p.137) and, in particular, "the rampant xenophobia of bourgeois humanism predominant in the whole academy" (p.142). West sketches out four models for Black intellectual activity as a means of enabling critical forms of Black literate activity in the United States. The bourgeois humanist model is premised on Black intellectuals possessing sufficient legitimacy and

placement within the "hierarchical ranking and the deep-seated racism shot through bourgeois humanistic scholarship" (p.138). Such legitimation and placement must, however, "result in Black control over a portion of, or significant participation within, the larger White infrastructures for intellectual activity" (p.140).

The Marxist revolutionary model, according to West, is "the least xenophobic White intellectual subculture available to Black intellectuals" (p.140). However, West is also highly critical of the constraints Marxist discourse places on the creative life of Black intellectuals in terms of constructing a project of possibility and hope, including an analytical apparatus to engage short-term public policies. According to West,

the Marxist model yields Black-intellectual self satisfaction which often inhibits growth; also highlights social structural constraints with little practical direction regarding conjunctural opportunities. The self-satisfaction results in either dogmatic submission to and upward mobility with sectarian party or pre-party formations, or marginal placement in the bourgeois academy equipped with cantankerous Marxist rhetoric and sometimes insightful analysis utterly divorced from the integral dynamics, concrete realities, and progressive possibilities of the Black community. The preoccupation with social structural constraints tends to produce either preposterous chiliastic projections or paralyzing, pessimistic pronouncements. (p.141)

It is important to point out amidst all of this criticism that West does recognize the enabling aspects of the Marxist revolutionary model in its promotion of critical consciousness and its criticisms of dominant research programs within the bourgeois academy.

The Foucaultian postmodern skeptic model invoked by West investigates the relationship among knowledge, power, discourse, politics, cognition and social control. It offers a fundamental rethinking of the role of the intellectual within the contemporary postmodern condition. Foucault's "political economy of truth" is viewed by West as a critique of both bourgeois humanist and Marxist approaches through the role of Foucault's specific intellectual. The specific intellectual, according to West,

shuns the labels of scientificity, civility, and prophecy, and instead delves into the specificity of the political, economic, and cultural matrices within which regimes of truth are produced, distributed, circulated, and consumed. No longer

should intellectuals deceive themselves by believing - as do humanist and Marxist intellectuals - that they are struggling "on behalf" of the truth; rather the problem is the struggle over the very status of truth and the vast institutional mechanism which account for this status. (p.142)

West summarizes the Foucaultian model as an encouragement of "an intense and incessant interrogation of power-laden discourses" (p.143). But the Foucaultian model is not a call to revolution. Rather, it's an invitation to revolt against the repressive effects of contemporary regimes of truth.

Selectively appropriating from these three models, West goes on to propose his own "insurgency model" which posits the Black intellectual as a critical, organic catalyst for social justice. His insurgency model for Black intellectual life recovers the emphasis on human will and heroic effort from the bourgeois model, highlights the emphasis on structural constraints, class formations, and radical democratic values from the Marxist model, and recuperates the worldly skepticism evidenced in the Foucaultian model's destabilization of regimes of truth. However, unlike the bourgeois model, the insurgency model privileges collective intellectual work and communal resistance and struggle. Contrary to the Marxist model, the insurgency model does not privilege the industrial working class as the chosen agent of history but rather attacks a variety of forms of social hierarchy and subordination, both vertical and horizontal. Further, the insurgency model places much more emphasis on social conflict and struggle than does the Foucaultian model. While Freire's critique of domesticating forms of pedagogy gives a specifically Latin American context for the development of the insurgent intellectual, West's own typology extends some central Freirean themes in order to deepen its engagement with issues of race.

Bell Hooks describes an intellectual as "somebody who trades in ideas by transgressing discursive frontiers...who trades in ideas in their vital bearing on a wider political culture" (p.152). However, Hooks argues that White supremacist capitalist patriarchy has denied Black women, especially, "the opportunity to pursue a life of the mind." This is a problem that is also firmly entrenched in the racist White university system that involves "persecution by professors, peers, and professional colleagues" (p.157). Hooks rightly notes that "any discussion of intellectual work that does not underscore the conditions that make such work possible misrepresents the concrete circumstances that allow for intellectual production" (p.158). She further elaborates:

Within a White supremacist capitalist, patriarchal social context like this culture, no Black woman can become an intellectual without decolonizing her mind. Individual Black women may become successful academics without undergoing this process and, indeed, maintaining a colonized mind may enable them to excel in the academy but it does not enhance the intellectual process. The insurgency model that Cornel West advocates, appropriately identifies both the process Black females must engage to become intellectuals and the critical standpoints we must assume to sustain and nurture that choice. (p.160)

I have employed criticisms of the academy by West, Hooks, and Cohen because concerns dealing with postmodern social conditions and theory and those of race and gender help to widen Freire's criticisms by situating his insights more fully within the context and concerns of North American liberation struggles, specifically as they address struggles of the poor, of women, and people of color. Of course, there is room to broaden the context even further in relation to the struggles of indigenous peoples, of gays and lesbians, and other cultural workers within and outside of university settings. Freirean-based educators need to raise more questions related to race and gender so that these issues are given a more central focus in the struggle for social transformation. These include:

- . In what ways have pedagogical practices been colonized by racialized discourses?
- . What is the relationship between racial differentiation and subordination and dominant discourses about race and ethnicity? How are these relationships reproduced by white supremacist discursive regimes and communicative practices?
- . While the struggle for racial and gender equality is deemed worthwhile, those who struggle on behalf of this worthy goal are often deemed deviant when they step outside of the legitimating norms of what is considered to be the "common culture". How is race and gender inequality reproduced within liberal humanist discourses?
- . If there is no necessary racial teleology within the educational practices of most U.S. schools, how does the reproduction of racist discourses occur in most school sites?
- . How does the hypervisibility of white cultures actually hide their obviousness in relations of domination and oppression?

- How does race constitute a boundary constraint on what is considered normal and appropriate behavior?
- In what ways are the conditions within the dominant culture for being treated justly and humanely predicted on utilitarian forms of rationality and the values inscribed and legitimated by bourgeois, working class and elite forms of white culture? How do these forms of rationality work within the episteme of a larger discourse of colonialism?

Despite these absent discourses, Freire's work remains vitally important in the current debates over the role of universities, public schools and educational sites of all kinds throughout North America. Freire warns educators that the activity of reading the world in relation to the social world has been regrettably pragmatic rather than principled. In other words, schooling (in relation to both universities and public schools) revolves around the necessity of differentially reproducing a citizenry distinguished by class, race, and gender injustices. The challenges of educators in both First and Third World contexts is to transform these reproductive processes. But I need to nuance this idea. Freirean pedagogy is set firmly against what Kristin Ross calls "the integral 'pedagogicizing' of society" by which she refers to the "general infantilization" of individuals or groups through the discourses and social practices of "the nineteenth-century European myth of progress" (1993:669).

Ross conceives of critical pedagogy through what she refers to as the "antidisciplinary practice" of cultural studies. Drawing upon revisionist theories of allegory of Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and others, Ross moves away from the essentialist conceptions of cultural identity informed by a symbolic (mimetic and synecdochical) model of experience and representation in which one part timelessly and ahistorically reflects the whole. According to this model, the plight of, say, white women in New York reflects the plight of Black women in the Southern U.S. Rather than viewing this relationship as an unmediated one in which the plight of black women constitutes an authentic reflection of the plight of white women, Ross prefers to see this and similar relationships as allegorical rather than mimetic.

According to Ross,

Allegory preserves the differences of each historically situated and embedded experience, all the while drawing a relationship between those experiences. In other words, one experience is read in terms of another but not necessarily in terms of establishing identity, not obliterating the qualities particular to each (1993:672).

Since it is impossible to represent every cultural group in the curriculum, the task of critical pedagogy, in Ross' terms, is to construct cultural identity allegorically - for each group to see, his or her cultural narrative in a broader and comparative relation to others and within a larger narrative of social transformation.

For students to recognize the historical and cultural specificity of their own lived experiences allegorically--i.e., in allegorical relations to other narratives--is especially urgent, especially, as Ross puts it,

at a time of growing global homogenization [in which] the non-west is conceived in two, equally reductive ways: one whereby differences are reified and one whereby differences are lost. In the first, the non-West is assigned the role for the repository for some more genuine or organic lived experience; minority cultures and non-Western cultures in the West are increasingly made to provide something like an authenticity rush for blasé or jaded Westerners, and this is too heavy a burden for anyone to bear. In the second, non-Western experiences are recorded and judged according to how closely they converge on the same: a single public culture or global average, that is, how far each has progressed toward a putative goal of modernization. (1993:673)

An emancipatory curriculum cannot present First and Third World cultures in the context of binary oppositions as relations of domination and resistance, since this move usually permits the First World perspective to prevail as the privileged point of normative civilizations (Ross, 1993). While Freire's work calls attention to the danger of a reductive dichotomization of First and Third World cultures, his interpreters often attempt simply to transplant Freire's perspective into First World contexts as a fortuitous equivalence or natural counterpart to subaltern resistance without recoding Freire's arguments sufficiently in terms of First World contexts. This leads to an unwitting embrace of pedagogy as a Western "civilizing" practice.

As a teacher, Freire has provided the pedagogical conditions necessary to understand that Enlightenment humanism and its specifically Eurocentric (and Euro American) "voice of reason" has not always been insightful or even reasonable in exercising its transcontinental thinking in the service of truth and justice. Freire's work helps us to further confront this issue as well as many others of concern to educators and cultural workers.

The perspectives of Freire can help deepen the debate over the role of the university in contemporary North American culture and, by extension, can also help to situate the struggle of Latin American educators within the concerns of postmodern and insurgent criticisms of the academy as exemplified by the perspectives of West, Hooks, and Cohen.

In a world of global capitalism we need global alliances through cultural and political contact in the form of critical dialogue. Samir Amin (1989) notes that we collectively face a problem that "resides in the objective necessity for a reform of the world system; failing this, the only way out is through the worst barbarity, the genocide of entire peoples or a worldwide conflagration" (p.114).

In attempting to develop a project premised on the construction of an emancipatory cultural imaginary that is directed at transforming the conditions that create the victims of capitalist expansion, educators need to go beyond simply severing their arterial connections to the forces of production and consumption that defraud them through the massification of their subjectivities. Rather, they need to create new alliances through a politics of difference. Otherwise, they face the prospect of becoming extensions of multinational corporations within the larger apparatus of capitalist expansion in the service of unequal accumulation and further underdevelopment in the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries of Latin America. In short, what is needed is a politics of radical hope. Hope needs to be conjugated with some aspect of the carnal, tangible world of historical and material relations in order to be made a referent point for a critically transformative praxis.

We are reminded by Freire and his colleagues not to engage in controversies about difference but rather to be encouraged to dialogue about difference. It is in this sense that the university is invited to become truly plural and dialogical, a place where students are not only required to read texts but to understand contexts. A place where educators are

required to learn to talk about student experiences and then form this talk into a philosophy of learning and a praxis of transformation.

I have recently witnessed in Brazil an experiment using Freire's work in conjunction with contributions by critical educators in Europe and the United States at Escola 1.<sup>o</sup> e 2.<sup>o</sup> Graus Jose Cesar de Mesquita. The project is currently supported by the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Industrias Metalurgicas, Mecanicas e Material Eletrico de Porto Alegre. Here, the curriculum has been forged out of dialogues among teachers, researchers, and scholars from many different countries in both First and Third Worlds. While there exists a great deal of political opposition to this school for workers (a public school and high school consisting of 1,000 students who live in an industrial zone in Porto Alegre) from both reactionary and neo-liberal educators, administrators, and politicians, the experiment itself is a testament to the Freirean vision of transcultural alliances and geo-political realignment.

Freirean pedagogy argues that pedagogical sites, whether they are universities, public schools, museums, art galleries, or other spaces, must have a vision that is not content with adapting individuals to a world of oppressive social relations but is dedicated to transforming the very conditions that promote such conditions. This means more than simply reconfiguring or collectively refashioning subjectivities outside of the compulsive ethics and consumerist ethos of flexible specialization or the homogenizing calculus of capitalist expansion. It means creating new forms of sociality, new idioms of transgression, and new instances of popular mobilization that can connect the institutional memory of the academy to the tendential forces of historical struggle and the dreams of liberation that one day might be possible to guide them. This is a mission that is not simply Freirean but immanently human.

Rather than ground his pedagogy in a doctrinal absolutism, Freire's attention is always fixed on both the specific and generalized other. Categories of identity, when confronted by Freire's practice of conscientization, are vacated of their pretended access to certainty and truth. What has endeared several generations of critical educators to Freire, both in terms of a respect for his political vision and for the way he conducts his own life, is the manner in which he has situated his work within an ethics of compassion, love and solidarity.



To disentangle hope from the vagaries of everyday life, to disconnect human capacity from the structures of domination and then to reconnect them to a project where power works as a form of affirmation and a practice of freedom is, these days, to invite more cynical critics to view Freire's work as a nostalgic interlude in a world whose modernist dream of revolutionary alterity has been superseded by the massifying logic of capitalist accumulation and alienation. Yet Freire's work cannot be so easily dismissed as an anachronistic project that has failed to notice history's wake-up call from recent postmodernist critiques. Many, but not all, of these critiques have relegated human agency to the dustbin of history, along with modernist projects of emancipation including those, like Freire's, that continue to be informed by socialist and humanistic ideals. To argue in this climate of the simulacrum, as does Freire, that freedom can be both true and real is to instantly arouse skepticism and in some quarters, to provoke derision.

For both the oppressed and non-oppressed alike, Freire's life and work have served as a life-affirming bridge from private despair to collective hopefulness to self and social transformation. In so far as he addresses individuals as more than the capricious outcomes of historical accident, or exceeding the abstract boundaries of metaphysical design, Freire's work presupposes a subject of history and a culture of redemption.

At a time in U.S. culture in which history has been effectively expelled from the formation of meaning and hope has been quarantined in the frenetic expansion of capital into regions of public and private life hitherto unimaginable and unthinkable, Freire's pedagogy of liberation is one we dismiss at our peril.

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