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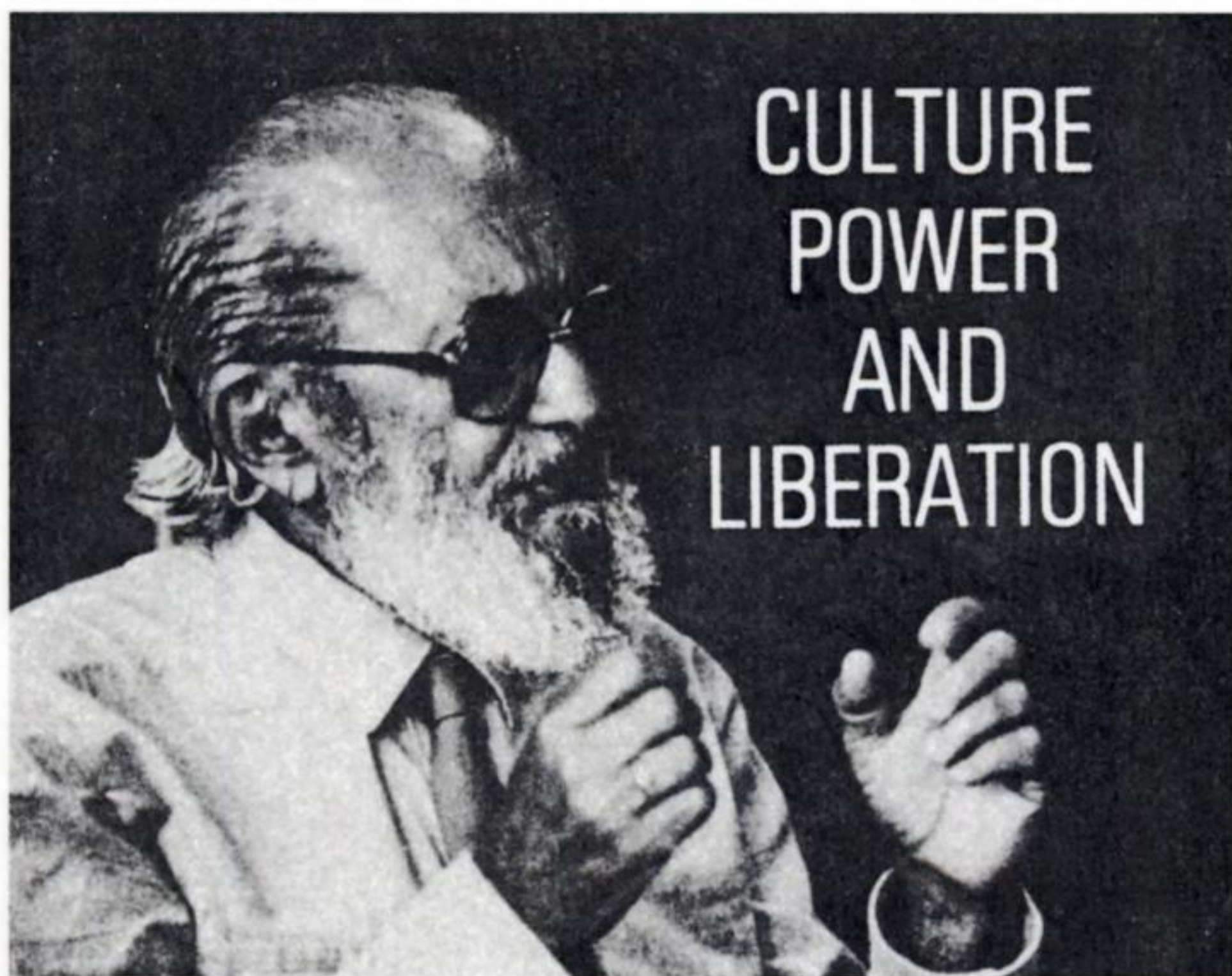


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THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION



CULTURE
POWER
AND
LIBERATION

PAULO FREIRE

INTRODUCTION BY HENRY A. GIROUX

TRANSLATED BY DONALDO MACEDO

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The translator must be given the freedom to recreate, as Chukovsky succinctly pointed out: "The most important thing for the translator to achieve is to recreate in his version of the text the thoughts of the translated author, his 'face,' his 'voice'. . . ." With the help of many friends, particularly Paulo Freire himself, Henry Giroux, and Jack Kimball, I have tried to re-create the author's voice.

The translation of this book posed a constant and provocative challenge; how to preserve the force of Freire's thoughts, in English, while maintaining the fluidity of his writing. In cases where thought was pitted against form, I opted for the former. This is particularly true of terms that are not readily translated into English—terms like *mechanicist* and *technicist*. As originally used, these terms mean more than "mechanical" and "technical," respectively. They embody an ideology with underlying interests that legitimize specific forms of social relations. In our discussions about the translation, Freire insisted that unless North American readers begin to accept the coinage of foreign words in English just as other languages readily incorporate English terms, they will develop a form of linguistic colonialism.

There were other terms that I could only give a close approximation of in the English translation and still others that were untranslatable. A definition of these terms is in order.

The *asentamiento* is an economic organization of agricultural production adopted as an experiment in Chile, and probably in other countries, during the period of agrarian reform. In these organizations the property belongs to the community, and the management of the production process is controlled by the peasants. A *culture circle* is a group of individuals involved in learning to read and write, as well as in the political analysis of their immediate reality and the national interests. In culture circles, reading demands more than decodification of linguistic symbols. It is viewed as a social and political "reading" of the world. The *central team* refers to coordinators responsible for literacy and other activities of culture circles. *Latifundium* is a Spanish and Portuguese word of Latin origin and means a large, privately owned landholding.

This translation would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of many friends. I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, particularly Mary Anne Ferguson, Neal Bruss, Gilman Hebert, and Vivian Zamel, who provide me with a stimulating environment and support highly conducive to academic pursuits. I would like to thank my friend and mentor, Henry Giroux, for his guidance and, above all, his faith in me. My thanks also go to Jack



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and practice worldwide. Freire has appropriated the unclaimed heritage of emancipatory ideas in those versions of secular and religious philosophy located within the corpus of bourgeois thought. He has also critically integrated into his work a heritage of radical thought without assimilating many of the problems that have plagued it historically. In effect, Freire has combined what I call the language of critique with the language of possibility.

Utilizing the language of critique, Freire has fashioned a theory of education that takes seriously the relationship between radical critical theory and the imperatives of radical commitment and struggle. By drawing upon his experiences in Latin America, Africa, and North America, he has generated a discourse that deepens our understanding of the dynamics and complexity of domination. In this instance, Freire has rightly argued that domination cannot be reduced exclusively to a form of class domination. With the notion of difference as a guiding theoretical thread, Freire rejects the idea that there is a universalized form of oppression. Instead, he acknowledges and locates within different social fields forms of suffering that speak to particular modes of domination and, consequently, diverse forms of collective struggle and resistance. By recognizing that certain forms of oppression are not reducible to class oppression, Freire steps outside standard Marxist analyses by arguing that society contains a multiplicity of social relations, which contain contradictions and can serve as a basis from which social groups can struggle and organize themselves. This becomes clear in those social relations in which the ideological and material conditions of gender, racial, and age discrimination are at work.

Equally important is the insight that domination is more than the simple imposition of arbitrary power by one group over another. Instead, for Freire, the logic of domination represents a combination of historical and contemporary ideological and material practices that are never completely successful, always embody contradictions, and are constantly being fought over within asymmetrical relations of power. Underlying Freire's language of critique, in this case, is the insight that history is never foreclosed and that just as the actions of men and women are limited by the specific constraints in which they find themselves, they also make those constraints and the possibilities that may follow from challenging them. It is within this theoretical juncture that Freire introduces a new dimension to radical educational theory and practice. I say it is new because he links the process of struggle to the particularities

of people's lives while simultaneously arguing for a faith in the power of the oppressed to struggle in the interests of their own liberation. This is a notion of education fashioned in more than critique and Orwellian pessimism; it is a discourse that creates a new starting point by trying to make hope realizable and despair unconvincing.

Education in Freire's view becomes both an ideal and a referent for change in the service of a new kind of society. As an ideal, education "speaks" to a form of cultural politics that transcends the theoretical boundaries of any one specific political doctrine, while also linking social theory and practice to the deepest aspects of emancipation. Thus, as an expression of radical social theory, Freire's cultural politics is broader and more fundamental than any one specific political discourse such as classical Marxist theory, a point that often confuses his critics. In fact, his cultural politics represents a theoretical discourse whose underlying interests are fashioned around a struggle against all forms of subjective and objective domination as well as a struggle for forms of knowledge, skills, and social relations that provide the conditions for social and, hence, self-emancipation.

As a referent for change, education represents both a place within and a particular type of engagement with the dominant society. For Freire, education includes and moves beyond the notion of schooling. Schools represent only one important site where education takes place, where men and women both produce and are the product of specific social and pedagogical relations. Education represents in Freire's view both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. Its dynamic is forged in the dialectical relation between individuals and groups who live out their lives within specific historical conditions and structural constraints, on the one hand, and those cultural forms and ideologies that give rise to the contradictions and struggles that define the lived realities of various societies, on the other. Education is that terrain where power and politics are given a fundamental expression, since it is where meaning, desire, language, and values engage and respond to the deeper beliefs about the very nature of what it means to be human, to dream, and to name and struggle for a particular future and way of life. As a referent for change, education represents a form of action that emerges from a joining of the languages of critique and possibility. It represents the need for a passionate commitment by educators to make the political more pedagogical, that is, to make critical reflection and action a fundamental part of a social project that not only

engages forms of oppression but also develops a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to humanize life itself. It is the particular nature of this social project that gives Freire's work its theoretical distinction.

The theoretical distinction of this book can best be understood by examining briefly how Freire's discourse stands between two radical traditions. On the one hand, the language of critique as it is expressed in Freire's work embodies many of the analyses that characterize what has been called the new sociology of education. On the other hand, Freire's philosophy of hope and struggle is rooted in a language of possibility that draws extensively from the tradition of liberation theology. It is from the merging of these two traditions that Freire has produced a discourse that not only gives meaning and theoretical coherence to his work but also provides the basis for a more comprehensive and critical theory of pedagogical struggle.

The New Sociology of Education and the Language of Critique

The new sociology of education emerged in full strength in England and the United States in the early 1970s as a critical response to what can be loosely called the discourse of traditional educational theory and practice. The central question through which it developed its criticism of traditional schooling as well as its own theoretical discourse was typically Freirian: how does one make education meaningful in a way that makes it critical and, hopefully, emancipatory.

Radical critics, for the most part, agreed that educational traditionalists generally ignored the question, and avoided the issue through the paradoxical attempt of depoliticizing the language of schooling while reproducing and legitimating capitalist ideologies. The most obvious expression of this approach could be seen in the positivist discourse used by traditional educational theorists. A positivist discourse, in this case, took as its most important concern the mastery of pedagogical techniques and the transmission of knowledge instrumental to the existing society. In the traditional world view, schools were considered merely instructional sites. That schools were also cultural and political sites was ignored, as was the notion that they represented areas of contention among differently empowered cultural and economic groups.

In the discourse of the new sociology of education, traditional educational theory suppressed important questions about the relations among knowledge, power, and domination. Furthermore, out of this criticism emerged a new theoretical language and mode of criticism that argued that schools did not provide opportunities in the broad Western humanist tradition for self and social empowerment in the society at large. On the contrary, left critics provided theoretical arguments and enormous amounts of empirical evidence to suggest that schools were, in fact, agencies of social, economic, and cultural reproduction. At best, public schooling offered limited individual mobility to members of the working class and other oppressed groups, and in the final analysis they were powerful instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and the legitimating ideologies of everyday life.

Radical critics within the new sociology of education provided a variety of useful models of analysis to challenge traditional educational ideology. Against the conservative insistence that schools transmitted objective knowledge, radical critics developed theories of the hidden curriculum as well as theories of ideology that identified the interests underlying specific forms of knowledge. Rather than viewing school knowledge as objective, as something to be merely transmitted to students, proponents of the new sociology of education argued that school knowledge was a particular representation of the dominant culture, one that was constructed through a selective process of emphases and exclusions. Against the claim that schools were only instructional sites, radical critics pointed to the transmission and reproduction of a dominant culture in schools, with its selective ordering and privileging of specific forms of language, modes of reasoning, social relations, and cultural forms and experiences. In this view, culture was linked to power and to the imposition of a specific set of ruling class codes and experiences. Moreover, school culture functioned not only to confirm and privilege students from the dominant classes but also through exclusion and insult to discredit the histories, experiences, and dreams of subordinate groups. Finally, against the assertion made by traditional educators that schools were relatively neutral institutions, radical critics illuminated the way in which the state, through its selective grants, certification policies, and legal powers, shaped school practice in the interest of capitalist rationality.

For the new sociology of education, schools were analyzed primarily within the language of critique and domination. Since schools were viewed primarily as reproductive in nature, left critics failed to provide

a programmatic discourse through which contrasting hegemonic practices could be established. The agony of the left in this case was that its language of critique offered no hope for teachers, parents, or students to wage a political struggle within the schools themselves. Consequently, the language of critique was subsumed within the discourse of despair.

While working with Brazilian peasant communities, Freire demonstrated that his work shared a remarkable similarity with some of the major theoretical tenets found in the new sociology of education. By redefining and politicizing the notion of literacy, Freire developed a similar type of critical analysis in which he asserted that traditional forms of education functioned primarily to reify and alienate oppressed groups. Moreover, Freire explored in great depth the reproductive nature of dominant culture and systematically analyzed how it functioned through specific social practices and texts to produce and maintain a "culture of silence" among Brazilian peasants. Though Freire did not use the term *hidden curriculum* as part of his discourse, he demonstrated pedagogical approaches through which groups of learners could decide ideological and material practices, and in the form, content, and selective omissions of these one uncovered the logic of domination and oppression. In addition, Freire linked the selection, discussion, and evaluation of knowledge to the pedagogical processes that provided a context for such activity. In his view, it was impossible to separate one from the other and any viable pedagogical practice had to link radical forms of knowledge with corresponding radical social practices.

The major difference between Freire's work and the new sociology of education is that the latter appeared to start and end with the logic of political, economic, and cultural reproduction, whereas Freire's analysis begins with the process of production, that is, with the various ways in which human beings construct their own voices and validate their contradictory experiences within specific historical settings and constraints. The reproduction of capitalist rationality and other forms of oppression was only one political and theoretical moment in the process of domination, rather than an all-encompassing aspect of human existence. It was something to be decoded, challenged, and transformed, but only within the ongoing discourse, experiences, and histories of the oppressed themselves. In this shift from the discourse of reproduction and critique to the language of possibility and engagement, Freire draws from other traditions and fashions a more comprehensive and radical pedagogy.

Liberation Theology and the Language of Possibility

Central to Freire's politics and pedagogy is a philosophical vision of a liberated humanity. The nature of this vision is rooted in a respect for life and the acknowledgment that the hope and vision of the future that inspire it are not meant to provide consolation for the oppressed as much as to promote ongoing forms of critique and a struggle against objective forces of oppression. By combining the dynamics of critique and collective struggle with a philosophy of hope, Freire has created a language of possibility that is rooted in what he calls a permanent prophetic vision. Underlying this prophetic vision is a faith that, as Dorothee Soelle argues in *Choosing Life*, "makes life present to us and so makes it possible. . . . It is a great 'Yes' to life . . . [one that] presupposes our power to struggle."

Freire's attack against all forms of oppression, his call to link ideology critique with collective action, and the prophetic vision central to his politics are heavily indebted to the spirit and ideological dynamics that have both informed and characterized the theologies of liberation that have emerged primarily from Latin America since the early 1970s. In truly dialectical fashion, Freire has criticized and rescued the radical underside of revolutionary Christianity. As the reader will discover in this book, Freire is a harsh critic of the reactionary church. At the same time, he situates his faith and sense of hope in the God of history and of the oppressed, whose teachings make it impossible, in Freire's words, to "reconcile Christian love with the exploitation of human beings."

Within the discourse of theologies of liberation, Freire fashions a powerful theoretical antidote to the cynicism and despair of many left radical critics. The utopian character of his analysis is concrete in its nature and appeal, and takes as its starting point collective actors in their various historical settings and the particularity of their problems and forms of oppression. It is utopian only in the sense that it refuses to surrender to the risks and dangers that face all challenges to dominant power structures. It is prophetic in that it views the kingdom of God as something to be created on earth but only through a faith in both other human beings and the necessity of permanent struggle. The notion of faith that emerges in Freire's work is informed by the memory of the oppressed, the suffering that must not be allowed to continue, and the

need to never forget that the prophetic vision is an ongoing process, a vital aspect of the very nature of human life. In short, by combining the discourses of critique and possibility Freire joins history and theology in order to provide the theoretical basis for a radical pedagogy that combines hope, critical reflection, and collective struggle.

It is at this juncture that the work of Paulo Freire becomes crucial to the development of a radical pedagogy. For in Freire, we find the dialectician of contradictions and emancipation. In Freire's work a discourse is developing that bridges the relationship between agency and structure, a discourse that situates human action in constraints forged in historical and contemporary practices, while also pointing to the spaces, contradictions, and forms of resistance that raise the possibility for social struggle. I will conclude by turning briefly to those theoretical elements in Freire's work that are vital for developing a new language and theoretical foundation for a radical theory of pedagogy, particularly in a North American context.

Two qualifications must be made before I begin. First, as will be made clear in this book, Freire's mode of analysis can no longer be dismissed as irrelevant to a North American context. Critics have argued that his experiences with Brazilian peasants do not translate adequately for educators in the advanced industrial countries of the West. Freire makes it clear through the force of his examples and the variety of pedagogical experiences he provides in this book that the context for his work is international in scope. Not only does he draw on his experiences in Brazil, he also includes pedagogical discussion based on his work in Chile, Africa, and the United States. Furthermore, he takes as the object of his criticism both adult education and the pedagogical practices of the Catholic Church, social workers, and public education. As he has pointed out repeatedly, the object of his analysis and the language he uses is for the oppressed everywhere; his concept of the Third World is *ideological* and *political* rather than merely geographical.

This leads to the second qualification. In order to be true to the spirit of Freire's most profound pedagogical beliefs, it must be stated that he would never argue that his work is meant to be adapted in gridlike fashion to any site or pedagogical context. What Freire does provide is a metalanguage that generates a set of categories and social practices that have to be critically mediated by those who would use them for the insights they might provide in different historical settings and contexts. Freire's work is not meant to offer radical recipes for instant forms of critical pedagogy; rather, it is a series of theoretical signposts that need

to be decoded and critically appropriated within the specific contexts in which they might be useful.

Freire and the Discourse of Power

Freire provides one of the most dialectical notions of power in contemporary social theory. Power is viewed as both a negative and positive force; its character is dialectical and its mode of operation is always more than simply repressive. For Freire, power works both on and through people. On the one hand, this means that domination is never so complete that power is experienced exclusively as a negative force. On the other hand, it means that power is at the basis of all forms of behavior in which people resist, struggle, and fight for their image of a better world. In a general sense, Freire's theory of power and his demonstration of its dialectical character serve the important function of broadening the terrain on which it operates. Power, in this instance, is not exhausted in those public and private spheres where governments, ruling classes, and other dominant groups operate. It is more ubiquitous and is expressed in a range of oppositional public spaces and spheres that traditionally have been characterized by the *absence* of power and thus any form of resistance.

Freire's view of power suggests not only an alternative perspective to those radical theorists trapped in the straitjacket of despair and cynicism, it also stresses that there are always cracks, tensions, and contradictions in various social spheres such as schools where power is often exercised as a positive force in the name of resistance. Furthermore, Freire understands that power as a form of domination is not simply something imposed by the state through agencies such as the police, the army, and the courts. Domination is also expressed by the way in which power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and other concrete cultural forms that function to actively silence people. But the subtlety of domination is not exhausted by simply referring to those cultural forms that bear down on the oppressed daily; it is also to be found in the way in which the oppressed internalize and thus participate in their own oppression. This is an important point in Freire's work and indicates the ways in which domination is subjectively experienced through its internalization and sedimentation in the very needs of the personality. What is at work here

in Freire's thought is an important attempt to examine the psychically repressive aspects of domination and, hence, the possible internal obstacles to self-knowledge and thus to forms of social and self-emancipation.

Freire's notion of domination and how power works repressively on the psyche broadens the notion of learning to include how the body learns tacitly, how habit translates into sedimented history, and how knowledge itself may block the development of certain subjectivities and ways of experiencing the world. This perception of knowledge is important because it points to a radically different conception of how emancipatory forms of knowledge may be refused by those who could benefit most from them. In this case, the oppressed people's accommodation to the logic of domination may take the form of actively resisting forms of knowledge that pose a challenge to their world view. Rather than being a passive acceptance of domination, this form of knowledge becomes instead an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal to listen, to hear, or to affirm one's possibilities. The pedagogical question that emerges from this view of domination is: how do radical educators assess and address the elements of repression and forgetting at the heart of this type of domination? What accounts for the conditions that sustain an active refusal to know or to learn in the face of knowledge that may challenge the nature of domination itself?

The message that emerges from Freire's pedagogy is relatively clear. If radical educators are to understand the meaning of liberation, they must first be aware of the form that domination takes, the nature of its location, and the problems it poses for those who experience it as both a subjective and objective force. But such a project would be impossible unless one took the historical and cultural particularities, the forms of social life, of subordinate and oppressed groups as a starting point for such analysis. It is to this issue in Freire's work that I will now turn.

Freire's Philosophy of Experience and Cultural Production

One of the most important theoretical elements for a radical pedagogy that Freire provides is his view of experience and cultural production. Freire's notion of culture is at odds with both conservative and progressive positions. In the first instance, he rejects the notion

that culture can simply be divided into its high, popular, and low forms, with high culture representing the most advanced heritage of a nation. Culture, in this view, hides the ideologies that legitimate and distribute specific forms of culture as if they were unrelated to ruling-class interests and existing configurations of power. In the second instance, he rejects the notion that the moment of cultural creation rests solely with dominant groups and that these cultural forms harbor merely the seeds of domination. Related to this position, and also rejected by Freire, is the assumption that oppressed groups possess by their very location in the apparatus of domination a progressive and revolutionary culture that simply has to be released from the fetters of ruling-class domination.

For Freire, culture is the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts, and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish within a given society at a particular point in historical time. Culture is a form of production whose processes are intimately connected with the structuring of different social formations, particularly those that are related to gender, age, race, and class. It is also a form of production that helps human agents to transform society through their use of language and other material resources. In this case, culture is intimately related to the dynamics of power and produces asymmetries in the ability of individuals and groups to define and achieve their goals. Furthermore, culture is also a terrain of struggle and contradictions, and there is no one culture in the homogeneous sense. On the contrary, there are dominant and subordinate cultures that express different interests and operate from different and unequal terrains of power.

Freire argues for a notion of cultural power that takes as its starting point the social and historical particularities, the problems, sufferings, visions, and acts of resistance, that constitute the cultural forms of subordinate groups. Freire's notion of cultural power has a dual focus as part of his strategy to make the political more pedagogical. First, he argues that educators have to work with the experiences that students, adults, and other learners bring to schools and other educational sites. This means making these experiences in their public and private forms the object of debate and confirmation; it means legitimating such experiences in order to give those who live and move within them a sense of affirmation and to provide the conditions for students and others to display an active voice and presence. The pedagogical experience here becomes an invitation to make visible the languages, dreams, values, and encounters that constitute the lives of those whose histories are often



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for "choosing life." Moreover, Freire demonstrates once again that he is not only a man of the present but also a man of the future. His speech, actions, warmth, and vision represent a way of acknowledging and criticizing a world that lives perilously close to destruction. In one sense, Freire's work and presence remind us not simply of what we are but also of the possibilities of what we might become. His newest book could not have come at a more important time.



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2 The Politics of Education

the works cited, not merely reading superficially or simply scanning pages.

Indeed, studying is a difficult task that requires a systematic critical attitude and intellectual discipline acquired only through practice. This critical attitude is precisely what "banking education" does not engender.² Quite the contrary, its focus is fundamentally to kill our curiosity, our inquisitive spirit, and our creativity. A student's discipline becomes a discipline for ingenuity in relation to the text, rather than an essential critique of it.

When readers submit to this ingenuous process, reading becomes purely mechanical and this, among other factors, can explain the readers' tuning out on the text and daydreaming about other things. What is required of readers, in essence, is not comprehension of content but memorization. Instead of understanding the text, the challenge becomes its memorization and if readers can do this, they will have responded to the challenge.

In a critical vision, things happen differently: A reader feels challenged by the entire text and the reader's goal is to appropriate its deeper meaning.

Here are some essential criteria for developing a critical posture in the act of study:

(a) *The reader should assume the role of subject of the act.* It's impossible to study seriously if the reader faces a text as though magnetized by the author's word, mesmerized by a magical force; if the reader behaves passively and becomes "domesticated," trying only to memorize the author's ideas; if the reader lets himself or herself be "invaded" by what the author affirms; if the reader is transformed into a "vessel" filled by extracts from an internalized text.

Seriously studying a text calls for an analysis of the study of the one who, through studying, wrote it. It requires an understanding of the sociological-historical conditioning of knowledge. And it requires an investigation of the content under study and of other dimensions of knowledge. Studying is a form of reinventing, re-creating, rewriting; and this is a subject's, not an object's, task. Further, with this approach, a reader cannot separate herself or himself from the text because she or he would be renouncing a critical attitude toward the text.

This critical attitude in studying is the same as that required in dealing with the world (that is, the real world and life in general), an attitude of inward questioning through which increasingly one begins to see the reasons behind facts.

We study more thoroughly the more we strive for a global view and



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Adult Literacy: The Ingenuous and the Critical Visions

Our concept of illiteracy is naive, at best, when we compare it, on the one hand, to a “poison herb” (as is implied in the current expression “eradication of illiteracy”) and, on the other, to a “disease” that’s contagious and transmitted to others.¹ Again, sometimes we see it as a depressing “ulcer” that should be “cured”. Its indices, statistically compiled by international organizations, distort the level of “civilization” of certain societies. Moreover, from this ingenuous or astute perspective, illiteracy can also appear as a manifestation of people’s “incapacity,” their “lack of intelligence,” or their proverbial “laziness.”

When educators limit their understanding of this complex issue, which they may not appreciate (or not wish to appreciate), their solutions are always of a mechanical character. Literacy, as such, is reduced to the mechanical act of “depositing” words, syllables, and letters *into*



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phrases that seem to be nonsensical, but by respecting the unity between practice and theory. It is most essential to liberate the equivocal theory by which learners usually become victims linked to verbalism, to nonsensical syllables that are just a waste of time.

This explains such oft-repeated expressions as "You'd have much better results if education were less theoretical and more practical," or "We need to eliminate these theoretical courses."

This also explains the distinction made between theoretical and practical men and women, the former considered to be at the periphery of action while the latter realize it. A distinction should be made, however, between theoreticians and verbalists. Theoreticians then would also be practitioners.

What should be contrasted with practice is not theory, which is inseparable from it, but the nonsense sounds of imitative thinking.

Since we can't link theory with verbalism, we can't link practice with activism. Verbalism lacks action; activism lacks a critical reflection on action.

It's not that strange, then, for verbalists to retreat to their ivory tower and see little merit in those who are committed to action, while activists consider those who conceptualize an act as "noxious intellectuals," "theoreticians," or "philosophers" who do nothing but undercut their work.

For me, I see myself between both groups, among those who won't accept the impossible division between practice and theory, since all educational practice implies an educational theory.

Theory and Practice

The theoretical foundations of my practice are explained in the actual process, not as a *fait accompli*, but as a dynamic movement in which both theory and practice make and remake themselves. Many things that today still appear to me as valid (not only in actual or future practice but also in any theoretical interpretation that I might derive from it) could be outgrown tomorrow, not just by me, but by others as well.

The crux here, I believe, is that I must be constantly open to criticism and sustain my curiosity, always ready for revision based on the results of my future experience and that of others. And in turn, those who put my experience into practice must strive to recreate it and also



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another world they did not create and that now restrains them, is the cultured world that stretches out into the world of history.

Similarly, they understand the creative and regenerative meaning of their transformative work. They discover a new meaning as well. For instance, chopping down a tree, cutting it into pieces, and processing the logs according to a plan will create something that is no longer a tree. Thus they come to appreciate that this new thing, a product of their efforts, is a cultural object.

From discovery to discovery, they reach the fundamental truth:

- (a) Obstacles to their right to "utter the word" are in direct relationship to the establishment's lack of appreciating them and the product of their work.
- (b) Given that their work provides them a certain knowledge, it's not highly significant that they are illiterates.
- (c) Finally, human ignorance and knowledge are not absolute. No one knows everything. No one is ignorant of everything.

From my experience in Brazil and from my past practice in Chile, these truths have been continually confirmed.

In discussing the meaning of work, an old Chilean peasant once said, "Now I know that I'm a cultured man." When asked why he felt cultured, he replied, "Because through work and by working I change the world."

This type of affirmation reveals people seeing at a truly practical level that their presence in the world (through a critical response to this presence) is implied by the knowledge that they are not only in the world but *with* the world.

It's an important new awareness when we realize we are cultured because through work and by working we change the world (even though there's a lot to be done between the recognition of this and the real transformation of society). This understanding cannot be compared with the monotonous repetition of *ba, be, bi, bo, bu*.

"I like talking about this," a woman said, also a Chilean, pointing to the codification of her own living situation, "because that's the way I live. But while I am living this way, I don't see it. Now, yes, I can see the way I am living."

Challenged by her own way of living as depicted in the codification, this woman could understand her life in a way she couldn't see before. She did this by an "immersion" in her own existence, by "admiring" it.⁶ Making the way she lives obvious in her consciousness, describing



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CHAPTER THREE





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24 The Politics of Education

the more antidogmatic, and the more evaluative (in the sense here described) they will be.

In addition to the texts developed by outside educators, teachers absolutely must take advantage of the texts written by peasants. Gradually, these should increase in number. But this doesn't mean that outside educators should stop writing texts or stop using texts prepared by specialists (like rural economists or health specialists).

Actually, educators should take advantage of all opportunities to stimulate peasants, even by sharing their own views, doubts, and criticisms.

During a discussion of a problematical situation—like codification—educators should ask peasants to write down their reactions—a simple phrase or whatever—first on the blackboard, and then, on a sheet of paper.

These two periods of writing have distinct objectives. The goal of the first period is to propose a group discussion around the ideas written by one of their peers. In order for the experience to be reinforced, the author should coordinate the discussion.

The purpose of the second period, during which the learner writes his or her thoughts on a sheet of paper, is to develop material for later use in an anthology of peasants' texts. This anthology should be organized jointly by outside educators, base educators, and some peasants as well. Once the texts are selected and classified by themes, the educators could write individual comments, simple and problem posing in character. Another way to collect peasant discourse and convert it into reading texts is to tape-record discussions among groups of peasants.

The "codification" that peasants have in front of them is not a mere visual aid, one that the educator uses to "conduct" a better class.² The codification, to the contrary, is an object of knowledge that, in mediating between the educator and students, allows its own unveiling to take place.

By representing an aspect of the peasants' concrete reality, the codification contains the generative word that refers to the codification or to some of its elements.

While participating with the educator in "decodifying" a codification, peasants analyze their reality and in their discourse they express levels of seeing themselves relative to an objective situation.³ They reveal the ideological conditioning to which they were subjected in the "culture of silence" and in the latifundium system.

For all of us who have participated in projects like this, experience



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CHAPTER FOUR





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“reactivate” itself under certain conditions, reappearing in its typical manifestations.

Only through the “dialect of superdeterminism” can we appreciate the persistent character of this “silence,” which creates real problems even for revolutionary transformations.²

When we are equipped with methodological means, we can understand and explain peasants’ fatalistic reaction to the challenges they face in their new reality. We also should understand that they frequently look to the dominating latifundium master as a model they must follow. Even when they’re part of the *asentamiento*, it seems normal for them to allude to the old master in various ways, for example, in the expression “the true master lives above.” In this expression of choosing this master as the real one, they are questioning the very validity of their state of *asentamiento*, a state in which they must overcome their previous role as objects and assume the new role of subjects. Then again, many find a new boss in the organization or agency that officially administers the agrarian reform.

These reactions cannot be understood by mechanistic. Ingenuously convinced of the automatic transformation of the superstructure by a change in the infrastructure, they tend antiscientifically to explain these reactions by characterizing peasants as “incapable and lazy,” and sometimes as “ingrates” as well.

Instead of stimulating the peasants’ decision-making power the mechanistic tend to act in a paternalistic manner, thereby reactivating the culture of silence and keeping peasants in a state of dependence. Mechanistic do nothing to help peasants overcome their fatalistic view of limiting situations; they do nothing to help peasants exchange their fatalism for another, critical vision, one capable of looking beyond these circumstances, one we call viable and unwritten.

Facing circumstances fatalistically, peasants search for reasons beyond the facts; they almost always find the answer in destiny or divine punishment.

At this point, a structural view of the problem resulting from the peasants’ critical involvement is not really possible. Such a view is only possible when peasants actively participate in a political experience through a permanent mobilization. Defending their interests and recognizing that they cannot be antagonistic toward their peers (the urban workers), peasants are able to overcome the state that Goldman calls “real consciousness” through “maximal possible consciousness.”³

To immobilize peasants by promoting a welfare syndrome is not a viable approach to overcoming their difficulties. Through this approach,



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The Social Worker's Role in the Process of Change

To understand “the social worker’s role in the process of change,” we should begin by reflecting on these very words that articulate our theme. These words show us the sum of their meaning. Our inward critical analysis will let us see the interaction of these terms as a genesis of structured thinking that incorporates a significant message.

In leading us to a deeper meaning, our inward and critical analysis ought to surpass any notion of a simplistic overview that repeatedly leaves us on the surface of whatever we discuss.

In the critical view we are here defending, the act of looking implies another, that of “admiring.”¹ We admire and in our looking deeply into what we admire, we look inward and from within; this makes us see.

In the naive view (our “unarmed” way of confronting reality), we



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THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

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