

Paul Freire's Cultural Action for Freedom

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INTRODUCTION: Freire invites the hitherto silent sectors of the affluent world or at least the more awakened members of those overmanaged, overconsuming societies to a rediscovery of the world in which they live and of their own vocation in that world, in dialogue with its pariahs....The debate about 'development' is more than just another ideological debate, far more than a struggle between opposing economic or political interests. At issue are divergent images of man....The cardinal principle is man's vocation to be more - more that is than what he is at any given time or place. There are thus no developed men except in a biological sense. The essence of the human is to be in continual non-natural process....The characteristic of the human species is its own repeatedly demonstrated capacity for transcending what is merely given, what is purely determined.

] Education can be de-conditioning because man, essentially a conditioned being, is also essentially a being capable of knowing what conditions him, capable of reflecting on his action and behavior, and of perceiving his perceptions.

Utopian does not mean unrealizable - rather it means the denunciation of a dehumanizing reality and the annunciation of a possibly more human one, thus primarily turned toward the future.---Joao da Veiga Coutinho.

When the popular masses get beyond the stage of fascination with their own emergence...the power elites violently attempt to arrest the process. And if the elites lack the power to return the masses to their original silence, the director society, 'invited' or not, takes it upon itself to do so.

If for animals, orientation in the world means adaptation to the world, for man it means humanizing the world by transforming it. For animals, there is no historical sense, no options or values in their orientation in the world; for man there is both a historical and a value dimension. Men have the sense of 'project' in contrast to the instinctive routines of animals.

The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action. For the learner to know what he did not know before, he must engage in an authentic process of abstraction by means of which he can reflect on the action-object whole, or more generally, on forms of orientation in the world.

Reality is never just simply the objective datum, the concrete fact, but is also man's perception of it. Once again, this is not a subjectivistic or idealistic affirmation, as it might seem. On the contrary, subjectivism and objectivism come into play when the subjective-objective unity is broken.

In order to know, man not only 'ad-mires' the object, but must always be 're-ad-miring' his former 'admiration.'

To be utopian is not to be merely idealistic or impractical, but rather to engage in denunciation and annunciation. Our pedagogy cannot do without a vision of man and the world.

We are attempting to formulate a type of education which corresponds to the

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specifically human mode of being, which is historical....There is no genuine hope in those who intend to make the future repeat their present, nor in those who see the future as something predetermined. Both have a 'domesticated' notion of history; the former because they want to stop time; the latter because they are certain about a future they already 'know.' Utopian hope, on the contrary, is engagement full of risk. (The Right strives to idealize actual conditions, not to change them. What it needs is fraud, not utopia).

Whereas the being which merely lives is not capable of reflecting upon itself... the existent subject reflects upon his life within the very domain of existence and questions his relationship to the world. His domain of existence is the domain of work, of history, of culture, of values - the domain in which men experience the dialectic between determinism and freedom.

Consciousness is never a mere reflection of, but a reflection upon material reality.

Praxis is only possible where the objective-subjective dialectic is maintained.

Because they are able to have goals, men alone are capable of entertaining the result of their action even before initiating the proposed action. They are beings who pro-ject....Whereas animals adapt themselves to the world to survive*, men modify the world in order to be more....For men there is no here relative to a there which is not connected to a now, a before, and an after.

Social structure is not an abstraction; it exists in the dialectic between super-and-infra-structures. Failing to understand this dialectic, we will not understand the dialectic of change and permanence as the expression of the social structure.

The dominated consciousness does not have sufficient distance from reality to objectify it in order to know it in a critical way. We call this mode of consciousness 'semi-intransitive.' Men whose consciousness exists at this level of quasi-immersion lack what we call 'structural perception' which shapes and reshapes itself from concrete reality in the apprehension of facts and problematical situations. Lacking structural perception, men attribute the sources of such facts and situations in their lives either to some super-reality or to something within themselves; in either case to something outside objective reality (Fatalism) (it is possible to do away with the phenomenon of magic rites and modernize - yet simply substitute the mythology of technology for previous myths).

Semi-intransitive consciousness (limited to meeting challenges relative to biological needs) can develop into a new stage of popular consciousness - naive transitivity - where men begin to visualize and distinguish what before was not clearly outlined and begin making demands, i.e. going beyond silence. In Latin America the coup d'etat has become the answer of the economic and military power elites to the crises of popular emergence.

To the extent that real utopia implies the denunciation of an unjust reality and the proclamation of a pre-project, revolutionary leadership cannot:

a) denounce reality without knowing reality;

b) proclaim a new reality without having a draft project which, although it emerges in the denunciation, becomes a viable project only in praxis;

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*NB! Survival syndrome in recent years of black movement.

- c) know reality without relying on the people as well as on objective facts for the source of its knowledge;
- d) denounce and proclaim by itself;
- e) make new myths out of the denunciation and annunciation;
- f) renounce communion with the people.

Thus, revolutionary leadership falls into internal contradictions which compromise its purpose, when, victim of a fatalist concept of history, it tries to domesticate the people mechanically to a future which the leadership knows apriori but which it thinks the people are incapable of knowing.

A project's method cannot be dichotomized from its content and objectives, as if methods were neutral and equally appropriate for liberation or domination. Such a concept reveals a naive idealism which is satisfied with the subjective intention of the person who acts.

The role of revolutionaries is to seek the most efficient and viable means of helping the people to move from the levels of semi-intransitive or naive transitive consciousness to the level of critical consciousness. Every revolutionary project is 'basically cultural action' in the process of becoming 'cultural revolution.' Cultural action for freedom problematizes; cultural action for domination sloganizes.

In mass society men begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communications media rather than in response to their dialectical relationships with the world. The techniques of 'human relations' are only another way of domesticating and alienating men even further in the service of greater productivity.

Because men are historical beings, incomplete and conscious of being incomplete, revolution is as natural and permanent a human dimension as is education. Revolution is always cultural, whether it be in the phase of denouncing an oppressive society and proclaiming the advent of a just society, or in the phase of the new society inaugurated by the revolution. In the new society the revolutionary process becomes cultural revolution.

If we have faith in men, we cannot be content with saying that they are human persons while doing nothing concrete so that they may exist as such.

"In English 'conscious' as meaning 'inwardly sensible or aware' appears first in 1620, 'consciousness' or the 'state of being conscious' in 1678, and 'self-consciousness' or 'consciousness of one's own thoughts, etc.' in 1690. In German the equivalent terms are found in the same period, though it is more difficult to place them exactly; in French the corresponding terms appeared rather later. It is interesting that 'con-scious' whose Latin source had meant 'to know with' (to share knowledgewith another) now came to mean 'to know in oneself, alone.....This moment in the history of European languages marks a decisive phase in the social development of man." Lancelot Law Whyte, The Unconscious Before Freud, p. 43