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4

Rethinking Freire's "Oppressed": A "Southern" Route to Habermas's Communicative Turn and Theory of Deliberative Democracy

Raymond Morrow

"... those who thus classify me by drawing on certain naive phrases that can be lifted out of my works—and are today the object of my own self-criticism—must try to accompany me through the steps of my own evolution."

Freire, 1985, p. 152

"Error is a moment in the search for knowledge."

Freire, 2003, p. 65

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Competing strategies for resisting the domestication of Freire

One of the most contested issues in the reception of Freire has been leftist objections to the reduction of his pedagogy to a "method": "Paulo Freire's thought and work is revolutionary, but continuously in danger of being domesticated . . . by the 'progressives' in Western cultures into mere methodology" (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994, p. 3). Though agreeing with the strategic importance of the dangers of "domesticating" Freire's contributions, the following discussion will question the contemporary usefulness of rescuing Freire as a "revolutionary," especially in a specifically Marxist sense. Instead, his approach will be viewed as a variant of critical social theory that converges with Habermas's project in implying a reconstruction of historical materialism that gives primacy to radical democratization for the realization of humanization and autonomy. The discussion thus builds upon and extends a previous collaborative effort with Carlos Alberto Torres concerning the partial convergence and potential for mutual learning between Freire and Habermas (Morrow & Torres, 2002). The present author has subsequently discussed related issues in a series of papers on their relation to development, education, and indigenous knowledge (Morrow, 2008, 2009) and whether the reception of Habermas in Latin American could be charged with Eurocentrism (Morrow, 2012/forthcoming).

A first step will be to comment on some of the limitations of two other options that have been proposed for avoiding the instrumentalization of Freire's work as simply a method: first, the defense of his engagement in Brazilian politics as not being a "retreat" from his earlier revolutionary stance because of its compatibility with a Gramscian "open Marxism"; and second, a critical postmodernist and poststructuralist reading that emphasizes his utopian concern with a pedagogy that opens up a radical discourse of the "logic of possibility" and "social remembrance."

The first option was influentially initiated by Stanley Aronowitz's interpretation of Freire's later shift from a revolutionary to a democratic discourse. He instructively defends the consistency of Freire's "radical democratic humanism" in relation to a kind of "secular liberation theology" that recognizes the contextual necessity of engaging new social movements (Aronowitz, 1993). For example, Aronowitz cites Freire's contention that revolutionary parties must respond to the challenge of new and popular social movements, drawing the following conclusion: "With these remarks, Freire distances himself from elements of his own revolutionary Marxist past, but not from a kind of open Marxism represented by Gramsci's work" (p. 22). The assumptions of Gramsci's theory of democratic transition is outlined by Aronowitz in a later article (Aronowitz, 2009). Consequently, "*any attempt to interpret Freire's recent positions as a retreat from the revolutionary pedagogy of his earlier work is entirely unjustified* . . ." (p. 23, emphasis added). Similarly, the editors of the anthology in which Aronowitz's chapter appears refer approvingly to his interpretation of the "revolutionary soundness of Freire's current emphasis on the struggle for a 'radical democracy' on the grounds that in the present historical circumstances it is not realistic to put socialism on the immediate agenda" (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, pp. 3–4). But this phrasing—consistent with Aronowitz's effort to rescue a "revolutionary" Freire—suggests that it is this longer term revolutionary "hidden agenda" that justifies the conjunctural pragmatism of democratic compromise. Another version of the effort to link Freire and Gramscian Marxism is evident in Peter McLaren's more recent disillusionment with his earlier critical postmodernist position, shifting toward a more Marxist interpretation that pairs Freire and Che Guevara (McLaren, 2000) and later gives support for Paula Allman's effort to create a synthesis of Marx, Gramsci, and Freire as "critical revolutionary educational theory" (McLaren, 2010).

Though the strategy of interpreting Freire from the perspective of a Gramscian Marxism has proved to be productive for many purposes, it has also been plagued by some significant difficulties. First, such strategies obscure the ways in which Freire's later democratic position was indeed "a retreat from the revolutionary pedagogy of his earlier work," hence cannot be easily legitimated in terms of its "revolutionary soundness." Though he does not retreat from his radical pedagogy of resistance, he does back away from its symbiotic link with Marxist theory as part of a "pedagogy of revolution." Though aspects of Freire's educational theory can be appropriated by an open Gramscian Marxism, there is no basis for concluding that his later position can be reduced to it and therefore

credited with "revolutionary soundness." As Freire himself later cautions: "I do not identify myself today as democratic just because socialism cannot offer current historical opportunities. While I am a radical and substantive democratic, I am a socialist. There is no way of countering the one with the other" (Freire, 1996, p. 114). As well, efforts to link Freire with a Gramscian theory of revolution contradict Freire's explicit rejection of being "re-written" in Marxist categories (Freire, 1994, p. 181). Such a project may be legitimate from a Gramscian perspective, but it should be recognized that it does violence to Freire's expressed intentions.

Second, such efforts to defend a Gramscian Freire fail to adequately historicize and "re-invent" Gramsci in relation to the contemporary historical context or identify some of his fundamental weaknesses, for example, his celebration of "Fordism" and lack of a critique of technology; the incompleteness of the theory of the subaltern and its problematic relation to the collective subject necessary for revolution; and the lack of a well-developed democratic theory (a theme developed in the writings of the Italian social philosopher Norbert Bobbio).

In contrast, Henry Giroux and Peter McClaren (at least in his earlier work) have attempted to interpret Freire as a "critical postmodernist" and bring him into a conversation with poststructuralism and postmodernism. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that this requires "taking some liberties" given that "Freire's theoretical formulations are not formally situated within the disciplinary trajectories of structuralism and poststructuralism" (McLaren & Silva, 1993, p. 60). The outcome in McLaren's account is a somewhat over-theorized account of Freire's theory as implicitly developing a conception of utopian social remembrance. Giroux's characterization of Freire's strategy as offering a "language of possibility" is more cautious because it refrains more from directly projecting the theorist's utopian imagination onto how workers themselves ought to think and dream within a process of transformative mobilization.

Another theme developed in this critical postmodernist reception was recognition of the "postcolonial" aspects of Freire's theory in a sense related to postcolonial literary theory. What the postcolonial discussion added to previous discussion's of Freire as a Third World theorist, especially as developed by Giroux, was a better understanding of Freire as a "border thinker," thus drawing out the cosmopolitan and global dimensions of his peripheral standpoint (Giroux, 1993).

Though instructive at the time for facilitating recognition of the affinities between Freire and critical postmodernist tendencies, several limitations of such readings are evident. First, such discussions detracted attention from the actual epistemological origins and characteristics of his postfoundationalism in German historicism and the hermeneutically grounded theories of language and power found in the Frankfurt tradition and existentialism.

Second, though Freire was sympathetic to these utopian poststructuralist readings of his work, it should be noted that they went far beyond his more humble and situated understanding of conscientization and utopian imagination, despite a flirtation with revolutionary theory in the late 1960s and 1970s. For example, after his return to Brazil, Freire cites approvingly a conversation among workers as an example of an authentic expression of "reading the world": "What we really want, they clearly said, each in turn, 'is a just society, or at least, to begin with, a less unjust society.' As one of the leaders said: 'This is a process which does not come to a halt: it is something which moves, just as history moves'"(Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 62). Not only is such radical reformist working-class consciousness not an expression of revolutionary consciousness, its prosaic sense of justice reveals a significant gap between the "high theory" of McLaren's account of redemptive remembrance and the kinds of actual struggles that have had a significant impact on democratization.

Third, though associating Freire with postcolonial theory was constructive in many respects, such discussions in the 1990s did not address the historical specificity of the Latin American postcolonial (Moraña et al., 2008). The failure to sustain a proposed "subaltern studies" project in Latin America is indicative of these problems (Beverly, 2000).

A fourth weakness of such critical postmodernist readings is that the "deconstructive" focus of poststructuralism does not lend itself directly to a more detailed institutional theory of radical democracy and social movements, nor provide inspiration or guidance for the historical and empirical social scientific investigations necessary for the concrete understanding of the diversity of social struggles and liberation processes.

The Freire-Habermas convergence and Freire's intellectual development

The third reading of Freire approaches the implications of his radical democratic humanism from the perspective of the potential dialogue between his social and educational theory and Habermas's theories of communicative action and deliberative democracy, despite the absence of any explicit reference to Habermas's work or basis for an actual "influence" (Morrow & Torres, 2002). From this perspective, the following problematic will be addressed here: the version of radical democratic humanism that he defends with his return to Brazil was anticipated in his early embrace of Mannheim's notion of "fundamental democratization" and Fromm's socialist humanism, but does not follow automatically from either his partial awareness and selective appreciation of the early Frankfurt critical theory tradition (e.g. Marcuse) and French existentialism (e.g. Sartre), and even less so the idealized model of revolutionary dialogue outlined theoretically in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Addressing the question of the evolution of his thinking thus needs to be formulated in terms of the sociology of knowledge: what were the historical and theoretical conditions of possibility of the discontinuities or subtle "breaks" in his political thinking that were evident in both his shift to—and subsequent retreat from—his revolutionary phase toward a radical democratic one? His later personal reflections and self-criticism on these issues do not attempt to track explicitly key aspects of his changed relationship to his theoretical past, aside from maintaining an argument about the overall consistency of the evolution of his thinking with respect to critical pedagogy and democracy.

As background for the discussion that follows, several of the central features of the convergence between Habermas and Freire need to be introduced. Theoretically, the convergence of their efforts as forms of communicative and dialogical critical social theory can be traced along four dimensions that, taken together, mark a break with the Marxist tradition and its theory of revolution: 1) a postfoundationalist metatheoretical framework for a philosophy of social science grounded in a theory of communication and dialogue that legitimates a critical social science concerned with liberation and emancipation; 2) a theory of the social and cultural

reproduction of society and domination that identifies contradictions that create possibilities for transformation through the struggles of diverse social movements; 3) a developmental theory of the social subject that frames the relations between historical forms of domination and possibilities for critique and practice; and 4) a theory of individual and collective learning that locates education in relation to the challenges of transformative change and deliberative democracy (Morrow & Torres, 2002, pp. 14–15).

The developmental logic of the relation between Freire and Habermas's theoretical perspectives actually takes the form of paradoxical pattern of divergence-convergence. The turning points can be traced to important shifts in their thinking around 1967–71, at which point they were moving in opposite directions within the logic of their intellectual development at mid-career: Habermas began to rethink the revolutionary theory of his early Frankfurt School mentors at the very time that Freire embraced a "science of revolution."

Though Habermas began with a more neo-Marxist critical theory position indebted to his Frankfurt School mentors, by the late 1960s he began a process of transition that culminated in the paradigm shift evident in the theory of communicative action and further developed in the theory of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1996a, b). Habermas's rethinking of classical revolutionary theory was signaled by his 1971 introduction to his essay collection on Theory and Practice (Habermas, 1973): "The vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically unavoidable, but at the same time it is fictive and requires self-correction: in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants" (p. 40). In this period Habermas stops using the notion of an "emancipated society" that alluded to Marx's theory of class revolution.

Freire's critical pedagogy only becomes ambiguously linked with revolutionary theory in the late 1960s, as the culmination of being forced into exile in 1964 and increasing awareness of the class dimensions of education and modernization. Though Freire's dialogical theory of education and the generalized version of his concept of the oppressed brought him closer to Habermas (e.g. his theories of the democratic public sphere, distorted communication, critical knowledge interests, communicative action), linking liberation with a revolutionary model of transition nevertheless led to

a conjunctural parting of the ways until his reconvergence with Habermas when back in Brazil in the 1980s.

Freire's intellectual development can thus be characterized in terms of three overlapping phases: 1) until 1964 when forced into exile, his political perspective was defined by Mannheim's conception of "fundamental democratization" and resistance to the dogmatic Marxist theory he knew in Brazil, though he had already developed the foundations of his dialogical pedagogy; 2) following his exile and working in Chile, he entered a Marxist revolutionary phase that begins theoretically with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and continued at a practical level as a literacy consultant in diverse revolutionary situations, despite also facilitating literacy projects in nonrevolutionary democratic contexts; and 3) in returning to Brazil in 1980, he elaborated a new synthetic position involving a return to the democratic focus of his early work, but enriched with awareness of the "critically postmodern"—or more precisely, historicist—assumptions of his epistemology, the diversity and limitations of revolutionary movements, and the strategic importance of popular and "new" social movements. It is only in this third phase that his approach converges with Habermas at the political level, even though the intersubjective epistemology of his critical pedagogy actually anticipated insights parallel to Habermas's theory of communicative action. The developmental trajectory of his career can thus be viewed as an expression of the foundational commitment of his critical pedagogy to Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach, not only as a critique of revolutionary (and technocratic) elitism but also the biographical recognition that "The educator himself needs education" (Freire, 1985, p. 159).

The rest of this chapter will explore and defend an argument regarding the transitional "revolutionary moment" that sets the stage for his turn to or "re-discovery" of what Habermas calls a deliberative model of democracy (Habermas 1996a, b). The discussion that follows will explore in more detail the evolution of Freire's thinking in terms that help focus on the shift to and then away from this "revolutionary moment": 1) his radical historicism, which grounds his call for "re-invention," thus facilitating his responsiveness to changing historical circumstances; 2) his postcolonial and peripheral perspective as a "Southern theorist" (Connell, 2007), which results in a generic theory of the "pedagogy of the oppressed" that Freire momentarily mis-recognizes as consistent with an idealized Marxism-Leninism, thus diverting attention from a nonrevolutionary theory of democratic praxis; and 3), a final retreat from revolutionary theory in the name of the priority of radical democracy as a learning process and the necessary foundation of any potential socialist project grounded in ethical critique and the uncertainty of knowledge.

Radical historicism

The crucial feature of Freire's historicism—which is rooted in German historicism and close to the version proposed by Karl Mannheim—is that it attempts to steer between historicist particularism and historicist philosophies of history grounded in some form of historical determinism and teleology (e.g. Hegel and some interpretations of Marx). Nevertheless, though his ontological perspective does suggest a universalizing normative philosophy of history—the vocation of humanization, the realization of such possibilities can only be a human achievement as the outcome of struggles whose form and outcome cannot be determined in advance. As well, strategies of struggle need to be devised in relation to objective social realities whose constraints can only be evaluated practically, contextually, and experimentally as part of efforts to overcome "limit situations."

It is in relation to this contextual and pragmatic historicism that Freire's concepts of "re-invention" and "re-discovery"—and related criticism of "transplanting" ideas in heterogeneous contexts—can be understood as an appeal to the ongoing revision of theory and practice necessary for continuing the process of liberation. A representative example of this reflexivity is evident in his criticism of revolutionary factions in contemporary Brazil: "One cannot reread the world if one does not improve the old tools, if one does reinvent them . . . a new reading of my world requires a new language—that of possibility, open to hope" (Freire, 1997, p. 77). He also applied this reflexive notion of "re-reading" to his own biography. Important examples include his later admission of having neglected the question of the oppression of women and the problematic use of Portuguese for literacy training in Africa.

At this point it is necessary to turn to a more detailed analysis of the complex relations between the second and third phases—the shift toward and then away from the revolutionary option. A close examination of the origins and argument of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will reveal it to be a transitional and incomplete form of revolutionary "Southern theory" whose full and contradictory implications could be realized only though subsequent experience and self-criticism.

The southern route: The oppressed

As we have seen, Freire's radical historicism can be traced back to the perspectivism of German historicism, a tradition that—with the notable exception of Herder—has tended to be rather Eurocentric (and sexist) with respect to the "standpoints" that define historical locations. In the context of the origins of Freire's theory, two key aspects of his historicist approach involve an implicit critique of Eurocentric historicism, as well as classical Marxism: the need to address differences of perspective relating to North-South and center-periphery relations, including the history of colonialism and slavery in Brazil; and the imperative of broadening the Marxist critique of domination from a theory of the working class to one that embraces the peasant populations of agrarian societies, as well as other forms of oppression.

Freire's historicist critical appropriation—not a mechanistic "transplanting" as he would say—of European theory makes it possible to refer to him one of the world's most influential examples of "Southern theory" as defined by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (Connell, 2007). Her approach helps avoid the limitations of both the increasingly anachronistic notion of "Third World" theory and the narrower literary and cultural implications of postcolonial theory and its focus on very different colonial traditions than found in Latin America. Though she devotes a chapter to Latin America and has a background in educational sociology, she surprisingly neglects to mention Freire, perhaps because he is not a sociological theorist in the strict sense. Nevertheless, he is certainly the most influential Latin American social theorist globally. More

specifically, Freire's "Southern theory" can also be situated as part of the postoccidentalist Latin American tradition of critical social theory (Mendieta, 2007).

In the present context, two features of Freire's argument need to be briefly introduced as a prelude to considering the "revolutionary moment" of his theorizing in the next section: some of the peculiar features of the concept of the "oppressed" (and related notion of "the people") as an alternative to the Marxist concept of working class; and the implications of how the analysis of the oppressed was based on a very specific and limited theory of power.

First, it can be argued that his use of the concept of the oppressed is not only a "Southern" response to the realities of Brazil as a peripheral society with a colonial history, it also implies a critique of Marxism that was largely unconscious. But the resulting implicit critique is obscured by a concluding chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* devoted to an idealized Marxist model of revolutionary transition. At one level, Freire's reference to the oppressed could be viewed—as evident in most of his examples—as simply incorporating rural workers or peasants (complex categories whose internal differentiations are not considered) into a broader notion of the proletariat as the "oppressed classes"—themes already evident in Latin American Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. At the same time, however, his discussion of the oppressed is developed at a more general level, clearly implying a much more comprehensive, indeed universal concept embracing all possible sources for and standpoints of domination. In short, the theory of the oppressed implied a critique of class reductionism of the Marxist tradition, even though similar themes are indirectly anticipated in Gramsci's treatment of the "Southern question" in Italy and his fragmentary discussions of the "subaltern."

To turn to the second question, Freire proposed a theory of power as domination, but one of limited scope and range of application. More generally, it could be described as a critical social psychology of the origins of domination in the oppressor-oppressed relation and the potential of a critical pedagogy to cultivate processes of conscientization that facilitate critical consciousness and liberation. This theme is expressed in the focus on the oppressor-oppressed relation at a high level of generality, hence making universal claims of a quasi-ontological kind. Indeed, part of the universal narrative drama of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is that it provides an

epic utopian story of the potential liberation of the oppressed from oppressors. As an implicit theory of power, therefore, Freire's theory works with an inter-group model of social relations that has its origins in what Max Weber called "traditional domination" originating in patriarchy and what Michel Foucault later referred to as the "sovereign power" of European monarchy. Freire's use of the metaphor of Hegel's feudal lordship-bondage model provides the philosophical basis for Freire's own analysis. Though of foundational importance as far as it goes, the obvious limitation of this model is that it is not suited for comprehending more impersonal and structural relations of power and domination. Weber's concept of "legal-rational" domination, Marcuse's "one-dimensional" society, Foucault's related concerns with "bio-power" and "governmentality," and Steven Lukes's theory of the three faces of power represent several of the more influential efforts to analyze more abstract power relations and impersonal domination that transcend more visible personal relations of domination. In short, the reduction of a theory of domination and liberation to the intergroup theory of power based on a binary opposition between oppressors and oppressed as a collective subject can be questioned from both the perspectives of critical sociological and revolutionary Marxist theory.

To summarize, Freire's shift to a revolutionary Marxist perspective involved theoretical arguments that simply could not be ultimately reconciled either with the Marxist-Leninist theory that informed his discussion or the critical pedagogy that was supposed to guarantee the authenticity of revolutionary processes. To historicize the evolution of Freire's thinking, in short, what is needed is an immanent critique of what might be called the revolutionary phase or "moment" of his intellectual trajectory. Accordingly, the following section will argue that at that time Freire mis-recognized the full implications and tensions within his own theory and its relation to the conjunctural moment. The following reinterpretation of the genesis of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will thus attempt to follow through on Freire's own suggestion:

> The educator must fully understand the economic, social, cultural, and historical conditions that culminated, for example, in the writing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. When one thinks about the context that generated *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and also thinks about one's own context, one can begin to re-create *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 134)

The revolutionary Marxist moment and the missing fifth chapter

Ironically, despite building on the revolutionary images of a unique historical moment, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was not a "conjunctural book," as a friend pointed out to Freire from the beginning (Freire, 1994, pp. 190–1). The massive subsequent international reception of the book confirms that assessment, but also raises the historicist question of potential conjunctural aspects that might invite retrospective criticism and reinvention. The nonconjunctural dimension is confirmed by how, every decade thereafter, the book could have been rewrittten—hence reinvented—using the examples of the most prominent emerging struggles, as evident in his own later recognition of feminist theory and his concern with popular movements with his return to Brazil. Despite the masculinist and revolutionary focus of most of the examples, in short, his diverse readers could later readily project themselves into liberation processes from other standpoints based on gender, race, indigeneity, etc., whether in revolutionary or nonrevolutionary settings. In other words, aspects of the phenomenon of the "many Freires" that has often been noted has its origins in the ambiguity, inconsistencies, and incompletion of the argument of the book, issues that Freire only alludes to in his later self-criticisms.

The reception of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by diverse audiences for more than three decades can thus be explained partly by the fact that it contains both a general theory of oppression-liberation and a more specific theory of "revolutionary praxis" deemed necessary for "oppressed orders" that cannot tolerate problem-solving education (Freire, 2005, p. 86). The text was written on two levels, differentiating two forms of cultural action: revolutionary action (as carried out by urban and rural workers as representatives of "the people") both before and after a revolutionary transition, and a more generic nonrevolutionary theory of democratic mobilization. But the latter is not clearly defined or discussed in detail,

though it is implied by the generality of the first three chapters on banking versus critical education and the methodology of generative themes.

Symptomatic of his own self-criticism, however, is that in his later recollection of writing the book, his focus shifts from "revolutionary" to "democratic struggle," as is evident in his emphasizing the marginalized nonrevolutionary democratizing theme and renaming it in contemporary terminology as part of a process of achieving "citizenship," hence "the various levels of engagement in the process of mobilization and organization for the struggle—for the defense of rights, for laying claim to justice" (Freire, 1994, p. 40).

The conditions of the book's production, however, do provide clues to some of the tensions between the specific revolutionary and more general democratic model. It was written in the later part of the four and a half years he spent in Chile as part of a "profound learning process" related to his rural literacy work, Chile as a haven for leftist intellectuals from all over Latin America, and global events such as student movements, the death of Che Guevara, Mao's cultural revolution, and international receptions of Marcuse and Fanon. In the process he thought that he was finally able to define theoretically the implications his earlier practice in Brazil (Freire, 1994, pp. 40–3). This conjunctural revolutionary standpoint thus relied on both Marxist-Leninist (Althusser, Che Guevara) and Maoist reference points, as well as, though less directly, liberation theology and dependency theory.

The first three of the four chapters of the book—completed in 1968 before leaving for New York in 1969—are largely nonconjunctural in the sense that they developed a more radicalized synthesis—based on the concept of the "oppressed"—of his earlier critical pedagogy: the rationale for a *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (chapter 1); the critique of banking education (chapter 2); and the methodology of literacy training based on generative themes (chapter 3). After completing these chapters he let the text sit for two months before becoming "reacquainted" again: "I did not make many important changes in it. But I did make the basic discovery that the text was unfinished. I needed one more chapter" (Freire, 1994, p. 60). That last chapter was written mostly on the road around Santiago or "now in hotels in cities or towns further away . . . After dinner I would fairly race to my room, and seclude myself there the whole night through, writing chapter 4" (ibid.). Finally, "with the fourth chapter finally ready, I looked at the first three again and touched them up, then I handed over the whole text to a typist" and distributed copies to friends.

Some of those touch-ups in the earlier chapters likely related to the new themes stressed in the final chapter on revolutionary praxis, which begins with a quotation from Lenin. For example, in the earlier chapters the otherwise more open-ended concept of problem-posing education is discussed more generally as contributing to the "becoming" of unfinished beings. Nevertheless, probably in light of final chapter, Freire suddenly declares in concluding chapter two that "problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity" (Freire, 2005, p. 84).

Three significant features of Freire's focus on an essentializing notion of "the revolution" require further discussion: 1) the lack of a clear theoretical connection between critical literacy training, conscientization, and specifically revolutionary consciousness; 2) the assumption that revolution provides the only alternative for the transition to "transitive," critical consciousness; and 3) the reliance upon a Marxist-Leninist theory of revolution informed by the structuralist Marxism of French philosopher Louis Althusser.

With regard to the first point, chapter three on the construction of generative themes says nothing about "revolutionary futurity" or revolutionary consciousness, as opposed to the thematics as defined by the learners, but then returned to them by the teachers as problems to be solved. For example, the chapter concludes with reference to a learner's question about the meaning of nationalism. This disjuncture reappears again in the long article written after the book. Again, the discussion of adult learners (Part I) takes place at a very abstract level, concluding that conscientization "makes the transformation of their state of apathy into the utopian state of denunciation and annunciation a viable project" (Freire, 1985, p. 59). Yet neither this analysis—which concludes with a discussion of example of land reform in Chile—nor the appendix on generative codes provides any indication that the outcome of conscientization as utopian thinking would have to be revolutionary. In short, even in this period there is no assumption that "learning to question" through nonmanipulative "critical" or "transformative" literacy training necessarily or likely produces "revolutionary," as opposed to democratic or reformist, consciousness.

Regarding the second question of the necessity of revolution, in the long article published in 1970 Freire provided a more extensive rationale for a revolutionary strategy in dependent Latin American societies: "Since revolution is still a possibility in this phase, our analysis will focus on the dialectical confrontation between the revolutionary project (or, lamentably, projects) and the new regime" (p. 81). This assumption was based on his analysis of the emergence of the oppressed "masses" in Latin American societies, which "are still closed societies today" (p. 75). As he pessimistically concludes, "Latin American societies in transition are confronted with only two contradictory possibilities: revolution or coup d'état" (p. 80).

Third, in the final (fourth) chapter Freire embraces the necessity of a particular form of revolution, as indicated by the essentializing notion of "the revolution" (which curiously requires lamenting the plurality of "projects"). Consequently, at this stage he ignores the diversity of possible revolutionary processes in different contexts such as Africa or Latin America, as well as the implications of non-revolutionary democratic possibilities. Consequently, there is a tendency to conflate "cultural action for freedom" almost exclusively with "revolutionary cultural action," which in turn contributes to readings that overgeneralize his analysis: the assumption that only revolutionary action can produce critical transitive consciousness, even though this conclusion applies, strictly speaking, only to "oppressive" and "closed" societies.

Further, Freire's analysis of revolution ignores the extensive discussion of other revolutionary options in Western Marxism (e.g. anarchism's suspicions about the revolutionary state or even Gramsci), reducing the question instead to an idealized form of Marxism-Leninism. On the one hand, he analyzes revolutionary praxis as a dialogue that creates "communion" between leaders and masses, as exemplified by Che Guevara, Mao, etc. On the other, he draws upon French philosopher Louis Althusser's structuralist Marxism to justify the scientific character of revolutionary theory. Accordingly, a "scientific unveiling of reality" to expose myths and ideology is viewed as the "indispensable instrument" guiding conscientization (Freire, 1985, p. 85).

A complementary formulation in The *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* strangely conjoins an appeal to a "science of revolution" and its mission "as an act of love":

> *For me, the revolution, which is not possible without a theory of revolution—and therefore science*—is not irreconcilable with love. On the contrary: the revolution is made by people to achieve their humanization. What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanization of people? (Freire, 2005, p. 89, note 4, emphasis added)

These anomalies evident in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* suggest several comments. First, it can be argued that he mis-recognized the degree to which his theory implicitly challenged the revolutionary Marxist movements at the time, partly because of his problematic assumption that they were as fully dialogical as he claimed. His understanding of the Maoist cultural revolution was particularly unfortunate: "In China, to be conscious is not a slogan or a ready-made idea. To be conscious is a radical way of being, a way characteristic of humanity" (Freire, 1985, p. 106). Symptomatically, despite the sympathies expressed in the text, Cuba and China steadfastly rejected his pedagogical theory. Nevertheless, though Brazilian activist Frei Betto's effort to introduce Freire in Cuba in the 1980s was rebuffed, there is now tolerance in Cuba of a small Freire influenced educational institute (Pérez Cruz, 2007).

Second, Freire clearly did not have time to properly digest the implications of Althusserian structuralism. He probably hurriedly worked through the French edition of *For Marx* (though released in 1965, a 1967 edition is cited) "in the heat of the night" on the road in Chile. In the long article published in 1970, the Spanish translation of Reading Capital (1969) is first cited and was presumably read in the United States that same year under the hectic conditions of moving and teaching. At this time, he apparently did not realize that such a "Marxist science" was fundamentally incompatible with his own democratic humanism and historicist epistemology, as evident in his appreciation of Mannheim, Fromm, Kosik, Gramsci, and the dialogical and hermeneutic philosophy of science of the Mexican philosopher Eric Nicol, who is cited in both his first book and one of his last, *Pedagogy of Hope*.

Third, Freire's text did contain reflexive loopholes that would facilitate both his eventual shift away from the revolutionary model and the book's reinvention in the hands of readers. His defense of revolution was from the beginning doubly conditional: first, the

conjunctural assumption that there was no alternative in Latin America to armed revolutionary insurrection as a way of initiating a process of radical democratization; and second, the contention that revolutionary cultural action had to take a democratic dialogical form to be authentic. The first conditional proviso about the apparent necessity of revolution, however, was complemented by a general qualifying principle: "The limits of cultural action are set by the oppressive reality itself and the silence imposed by the power elite" (Freire, 1985, p. 90). So if the oppressive reality were to change—if "limits of cultural action" were to be vastly extended and opened up in a "democratic transition," then nonrevolutionary democratic action might become a viable option. The second proviso regarding dialogical authenticity, on the other hand, paradoxically set the stage for the redeployment of his analysis in a more empirically informed argument as part of a normative critique of Marxism-Leninism in practice.

Fourth, these tensions in the text can be linked to a violation of his own educational methodology as grounded in personal experience and practice. He anticipated this issue in his preface: "It is possible that some may question my right to discuss revolutionary cultural action, a subject of which I have no concrete experience" (Freire, 2005, p. 39). But the real issue is not his "right" to do so, but to be aware of the risks. Only in the subsequent decade did he get such experience, which ultimately transformed his understanding of revolution, especially by recognizing diversity of revolutionary processes (e.g. Africa versus Latin America), their limitations, and the need for democratic compromise where possible (e.g. Nicaragua, El Salvador, Brazil). The outcome was a rejection of any essentializing, unitary conception of "the revolution" that could be an object of "science" as exemplified in Althusser's structuralist theories and the revolutionary praxis of Castro, Guevara, and Mao. Though he does not appear to have ever explicitly renounced these inconsistent passages in his work, he does warn that militant political intellectuals inevitably run the risk of authoritarianism "if they are not capable of going beyond a messianic concept of social change, of revolutionary change" (Freire, 1983, p. 28).

Finally, viewed retrospectively in terms of the immanent critique sketched above, it can be argued that the text was still incomplete because of a missing fifth chapter on nonrevolutionary "radical democratic praxis" and cultural action that was needed

to complement the discussion of revolutionary praxis in chapter four. Despite this conjunctural silence, however, there is a sense in which his publications after returning to Brazil constitute that final chapter as an epilogue, which is the topic of the following concluding section.

Freire's postfoundationalist and democratic (re)turn

> "Therefore for me, all of these issues must be faced now must be properly addressed by the end of this century—problems like the role of social movements and the issues of power . . . I now feel that in transforming society, the important task is not to take power but to reinvent power."
>
> Freire, 1985, p. 179

The political standpoint of the "final Freire" can be summarized as a theory of radical democratic cultural action that can be used to supplement theories of deliberative democracy. This position is most concisely stated in his foreword responding to the book *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*: "Oppression must always be understood in its multiple and contradictory instances, just as liberation must be grounded in the particularity of suffering and struggle in concrete, historical experiences, without resorting to transcendental guarantees" (Freire, 1993a, p. x). Accordingly, he speaks only of "liberatory pedagogy" not "revolutionary pedagogy." Indeed, this foreword could be read as a précis of the final, fifth chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on "democratic cultural action" that was never written.

The present analysis has drawn upon the Freire-Habermas partial convergence and complementarity thesis as part of demonstrating that Freire does indeed implicitly retreat not only from crucial aspects of the account of revolution found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but also from equating his critical pedagogy with "revolutionary pedagogy" in the Gramscian sense. Such considerations suggest shifting the ground of debate away from the nostalgic

question of Freire's "revolutionary" credentials as part of the Marxist tradition by recognizing the underlying continuity of his project as grounded in a processual and procedural understanding of the contribution of his critical pedagogy to democratization as the springboard of liberation. So the possibility that he may have "retreated" from his previous revolutionary position should neither be glossed over by assimilating him into Gramscian Marxism nor dogmatically attributed to "revisionism" and "opportunism" and reduced to mere "reformism."

Understanding Freire as a "Southern theorist"—more specifically, a postoccidentalist, Latin American critical social theorist—reaffirms the advantage of viewing his theory as part of a dialogue of mutual learning with Habermas. From this perspective Freire's "revolutionary" democratic pedagogy can be viewed as a form of "Southern theory" that provides a foundational pedagogical contribution to the theory of deliberative democracy. The crucial shift in his vocabulary was thus away from a simplistic, romantic model of democratic relations as a form of "communion" between masses and revolutionary leaders to one that viewed the dialogue of democratic politics in more concrete terms as part of dynamic "procedural" relations among deliberative groups, as exemplified in his administration of educational reform (Freire, 1993b, p. 24). In place of the abstract, undifferentiated understanding of the oppressed as a collective subject, his analysis shifts to the recognition of the plurality of struggling groups and their debilitating divisions: "I do not understand how, in Brazil, we can maintain feminist, black, Indian, working class groups separately struggling for a less perverse society. Each group is fighting its own battles" (Freire, 1997, p. 86). Instead, he calls for strategies that promote solidarity and "unity in diversity." From this deliberative perspective, in reflecting on the case of El Salvador, he equates the "reinvention of society" as part of consolidating a democratic lifestyle. Crucial to this democratic process is overcoming "sectarian" positions, even though "deepening" radical ones, as part of a "learning process" for both the powerful and "the crushed" (Freire, 1994, pp. 197–8). Similarly, proponents of deliberative democracy have pointed to its particular value in deeply divided societies (Dryzek, 2005).

Having questioned the rhetorical abuse of the term "revolutionary" at the outset, in concluding it may nevertheless be appropriate

to suggest that deliberative democracy, as an admittedly utopian project, does have a revolutionary dimension:

> Deliberative democracy is a revolutionary political ideal. It calls for fundamental changes in the bases of political decision making, scope of those included in decision-making processes, institutions that house these processes, and thus the very character of politics itself. Deliberative democracy is also revolutionary in a second sense. It has been thought to require dramatically more egalitarian political, social, and economic conditions than exist in any contemporary society. Background inequities in resources, status, and other forms of privilege upset the communicative equality that deliberation requires. (Fung, 2005, pp. 397–8)

Not surprisingly in light of the preceding reconstruction of Freire's intellectual evolution, theories of deliberative democracy converge with his repeated call for "reinventing power" rather than "taking power" as the most important issue on the agenda of radical politics. But as he laments: "In respect to these issues, I don't think I have much of a contribution to make, and I say this, not with false modesty, but with sadness. Nonetheless, I will continue trying to contribute to a greater understanding of these issues" (Freire, 1985, p. 179). But his enduring contribution was to pose the problem as part of a reflexive effort to sustain the "coherence" of his democratic critical pedagogy. And as he always insisted—in a fully Deweyan and Habermasian critical pragmatist spirit—problem-posing and learning from error are crucial foundations of collective learning.

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Toward Historicity in Praxis

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