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PAULO FREIRE

PEDAGOGY
of the
OPPRESSED

• 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION •

Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos

With an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo

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*To the oppressed,
and to those who suffer with them
and fight at their side*

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Publisher's Foreword

This is the thirtieth anniversary of the publication in the United States of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Since the original publication, this revolutionary work has gone into more than a score of printings and sold over 750,000 copies worldwide.

In his foreword to the first edition, which is included in this one, Richard Shaull wrote:

In this country, we are gradually becoming aware of the work of Paulo Freire, but thus far we have thought of it primarily in terms of its contribution to the education of illiterate adults in the Third World. If, however, we take a close look, we may discover that his methodology as well as his educational philosophy are as important for us as for the dispossessed in Latin America. . . . For this reason, I consider the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in an English edition to be something of an event.

These words have proved prophetic. Freire's books have since taken on a considerable relevance for educators in our own technologically advanced society, which to our detriment acts to program the individual—especially the disadvantaged—to a rigid conformity. A new underclass has been created, and it is everyone's responsibility to react thoughtfully and positively to the situation. This is the underlying message of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

As times change so do attitudes and beliefs. The translation has been modified—and the volume has been newly typeset—to reflect the connection between liberation and inclusive language. An important introduction by Donaldo Macedo has been added.

This revised thirtieth-anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* thus represents a fresh expression of a work that will continue to stimulate and shape the thought of educators and citizens everywhere.

CHAPTER

2

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness.

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power. “Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belém.” The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of “capital” in the affirmation “the capital of Pará is Belém,” that is, what Belém means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil.

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to

memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher’s existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher.

The *raison d’être* of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

This solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept. On the contrary, banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their “humanitarianism” to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates

the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another.

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them";¹ for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken."

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves." Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student *conscientização*.

The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. It will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Roger gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on the contrary, Roger gave green grass to the rabbit. The "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human.

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Pensée de Droite, Aujourd'hui* (Paris); ST, *El Pensamiento político de la Derecha* (Buenos Aires, 1963), p. 34.

Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation. If men and women are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them.

The banking concept does not admit to such partnership—and necessarily so. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation.

Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, the person is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he or she is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. For example, my desk, my books, my coffee cup, all the objects before me—as bits of the world which surround me—would be "inside" me, exactly as I am inside my

study right now. This view makes no distinction between being accessible to consciousness and entering consciousness. The distinction, however, is essential: the objects which surround me are simply accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of them, but they are not inside me.

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge.² And since people "receive" the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.

The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements,³ the methods for evaluating "knowledge," the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking.

The bank-clerk educator does not realize that there is no true security in his hypertrophied role, that one must seek to live *with* others in solidarity. One cannot impose oneself, nor even merely

2. This concept corresponds to what Sartre calls the "digestive" or "nutritive" concept of education, in which knowledge is "fed" by the teacher to the students to "fill them out." See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: L'intentionnalité," *Situations I* (Paris, 1947).

3. For example, some professors specify in their reading lists that a book should be read from pages 10 to 15—and do this to "help" their students!

co-exist with one's students. Solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and proscribes communication.

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.

Because banking education begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects, it cannot promote the development of what Fromm calls "biophily," but instead produces its opposite: "necrophily."

While life is characterized by growth in a structured, functional manner, the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. . . . Memory, rather than experience; having, rather than being, is what counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object—a flower or a person—only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself: if he loses possession he loses contact with the world. . . . He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life.⁴

Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power.

4. Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

When their efforts to act responsibly are frustrated, when they find themselves unable to use their faculties, people suffer. "This suffering due to impotence is rooted in the very fact that the human equilibrium has been disturbed."⁵ But the inability to act which causes people's anguish also causes them to reject their impotence, by attempting

. . . to restore [their] capacity to act. But can [they], and how? One way is to submit to and identify with a person or group having power. By this symbolic participation in another person's life, [men have] the illusion of acting, when in reality [they] only submit to and become a part of those who act.⁶

Populist manifestations perhaps best exemplify this type of behavior by the oppressed, who, by identifying with charismatic leaders, come to feel that they themselves are active and effective. The rebellion they express as they emerge in the historical process is motivated by that desire to act effectively. The dominant elites consider the remedy to be more domination and repression, carried out in the name of freedom, order, and social peace (that is, the peace of the elites). Thus they can condemn—logically, from their point of view—"the violence of a strike by workers and [can] call upon the state in the same breath to use violence in putting down the strike."⁷

Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. This accusation is not made in the naïve hope that the dominant elites will thereby simply abandon the practice. Its objective is to call the attention of true humanists to the fact that they cannot use banking educational methods in the pursuit of liberation, for they would only negate that very pursuit. Nor may a revolutionary society inherit these methods from an oppressor society. The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided or

5. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1960), p. 130.

mistrusting of people. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction.

Unfortunately, those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate. Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge this educational practice. But one does not liberate people by alienating them. Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation.

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness—*intentionality*—rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being *conscious of*, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jasperian "split"—consciousness as consciousness *of* consciousness.

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors—teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction to be resolved. Dialogical relations—indispensable to the capacity of cognitive

actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object—are otherwise impossible.

Indeed, problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of freedom*, not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are “owned” by the teacher.

The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher. Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teacher and students. Hence in the name of the “preservation of culture and knowledge” we have a system which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture.

The problem-posing method does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student: she is not “cognitive” at one point and “narrative” at another. She is always “cognitive,” whether preparing a project or engaging in dialogue with the students. He does not regard cognizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and the students. In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the

students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed.

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup: extérieur par essence à la conscience, le monde est, par essence relatif à elle.⁸

8. Sartre; *op. cit.*, p. 32.

In one of our culture circles in Chile, the group was discussing (based on a codification⁹) the anthropological concept of culture. In the midst of the discussion, a peasant who by banking standards was completely ignorant said: "Now I see that without man there is no world." When the educator responded: "Let's say, for the sake of argument, that all the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained, together with trees, birds, animals, rivers, seas, the stars . . . wouldn't all this be a world?" "Oh no," the peasant replied emphatically. "There would be no one to say: 'This is a world'."

The peasant wished to express the idea that there would be lacking the consciousness of the world which necessarily implies the world of consciousness. *I cannot exist without a non-I. In turn, the not-I depends on that existence. The world which brings consciousness into existence becomes the world of that consciousness. Hence, the previously cited affirmation of Sartre: "La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup."*

As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena:

In perception properly so-called, as an explicit awareness [*Gewahren*], I am turned towards the object, to the paper, for instance. I apprehend it as being this here and now. The apprehension is a singling out, every object having a background in experience. Around and about the paper lie books, pencils, inkwell, and so forth, and these in a certain sense are also "perceived", perceptually there, in the "field of intuition"; but whilst I was turned towards the paper there was no turning in their direction, nor any apprehending of them, not even in a secondary sense. They appeared and yet were not singled out, were not posited on their own account. Every perception of a thing has such a zone of background intuitions or background awareness, if "intuiting" already includes the state of being turned towards, and this also is a "conscious experience", or more briefly

9. See chapter 3.—Translator's note.

a "consciousness of" all indeed that in point of fact lies in the co-perceived objective background.¹⁰

That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to "stand out," assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their "background awareness" and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition.

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all), it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action.

Once again, the two educational concepts and practices under analysis come into conflict. Banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demythologizing. Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from

10. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas—General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London, 1969), pp. 105–106.

the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take the people's historicity as their starting point.

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.

Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*. Its "duration" (in the Bergsonian meaning of the word) is found in the interplay of the opposites *permanence* and *change*. The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a "well-behaved" present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence, it corresponds to the historical nature of humankind. Hence, it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. Hence, it identifies with the movement which engages people as beings aware of their incompleteness—an historical movement which has its point of departure, its Subjects and its objective.

The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves. But since people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human-world relationship. Accordingly, the point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now," which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation—which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging.

Whereas the banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men's fatalistic perception of their situation, the problem-posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem. As the situation becomes the object of their cognition, the naïve or magical perception which produced their fatalism gives way to perception which is able to perceive itself even as it perceives reality, and can thus be critically objective about that reality.

A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control. If people, as historical beings necessarily engaged with other people in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement, it would be (and is) a violation of their humanity. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

This movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization—the people's historical vocation. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so. Attempting to *be more* human, individualistically, leads to *having*

more, egotistically, a form of dehumanization. Not that it is not fundamental *to have* in order *to be* human. Precisely because it is necessary, some men's *having* must not be allowed to constitute an obstacle to others' *having*, must not consolidate the power of the former to crush the latter.

Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization.

Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why? While only a revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms, the revolutionary leaders need not take full power before they can employ the method. In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset.

CHAPTER

3

As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.¹ Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.²

An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.

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1. Action } word = work = praxis
 Reflection }
 Sacrifice of action = verbalism
 Sacrifice of reflection = activism

2. Some of these reflections emerged as a result of conversations with Professor Ernani Maria Fiori.

On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter—action for action's sake—negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy.

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence,³ but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which

3. I obviously do not refer to the silence of profound meditation, in which men only apparently leave the world, withdrawing from it in order to consider it in its totality, and thus remaining with it. But this type of retreat is only authentic when the meditator is "bathed" in reality; not when the retreat signifies contempt for the world and flight from it, in a type of "historical schizophrenia."

is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind.

Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.⁴ Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act

4. I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, 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? The distortion imposed on the word "love" by the capitalist world cannot prevent the revolution from being essentially loving in character, nor can it prevent the revolutionaries from affirming their love of life. Guevara (while admitting the "risk of seeming ridiculous") was not afraid to affirm it: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality." *Venceremos—The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, edited by John Gerassi (New York, 1969), p. 398.

of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue.

On the other hand, dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I’s”? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know.

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the “dialogical man” believes in others

even before he meets them face to face. His faith, however, is not naïve. The “dialogical man” is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power. Far from destroying his faith in the people, however, this possibility strikes him as a challenge to which he must respond. He is convinced that the power to create and transform, even when thwarted in concrete situations, tends to be reborn. And that rebirth can occur—not gratuitously, but in and through the struggle for liberation—in the superseding of slave labor by emancipated labor which gives zest to life. Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation.

Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence. It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue—loving, humble, and full of faith—did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world. Conversely, such trust is obviously absent in the anti-dialogics of the banking method of education. Whereas faith in humankind is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue, trust is established by dialogue. Should it founder, it will be seen that the preconditions were lacking. False love, false humility, and feeble faith in others cannot create trust. Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party’s words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one’s own word lightly—cannot inspire trust. To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie.

Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search—a search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of

the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of women and men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious.

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. Critical thinking contrasts with naïve thinking, which sees “historical time as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past,”⁵ from which the present should emerge normalized and “well-behaved.” For the naïve thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized “today.” For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men. In the words of Pierre Furter:

The goal will no longer be to eliminate the risks of temporality by clutching to guaranteed space, but rather to temporalize space . . . The universe is revealed to me not as space, imposing a massive presence to which I can but adapt, but as a scope, a domain which takes shape as I act upon it.⁶

For naïve thinking, the goal is precisely to hold fast to this guaranteed space and adjust to it. By thus denying temporality, it denies itself as well.

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communi-

5. From the letter of a friend.

6. Pierre Furter, *Educação e Vida* (Rio, 1966), pp. 26–27.

cation, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus, the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education.

For the anti-dialogical banking educator, the question of content simply concerns the program about which he will discourse to his students; and he answers his own question, by organizing his own program. For the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition—bits of information to be deposited in the students—but rather the organized, systematized, and developed “re-presentation” to individuals of the things about which they want to know more.⁷

Authentic education is not carried on by “A” *for* “B” or by “A” *about* “B,” but rather by “A” *with* “B,” mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built. In its desire to create an ideal model of the “good man,” a naïvely conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people. Authentic humanism, in Pierre Furter’s words, “consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation

7. In a long conversation with Malraux, Mao-Tse-Tung declared, “You know I’ve proclaimed for a long time: we must teach the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly.” André Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York, 1968), pp. 361–362. This affirmation contains an entire dialogical theory of how to construct the program content of education, which cannot be elaborated according to what the educator thinks best for the students.

and as a project."⁸ We simply cannot go to the laborers—urban or peasant⁹—in the banking style, to give them “knowledge” or to impose upon them the model of the “good man” contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed.

For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other people—not other men and women themselves. The oppressors are the ones who act upon the people to indoctrinate them and adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched. Unfortunately, however, in their desire to obtain the support of the people for revolutionary action, revolutionary leaders often fall for the banking line of planning program content from the top down. They approach the peasant or urban masses with projects which may correspond to their own view of the world, but not to that of the people.¹⁰ They forget that their fundamental objective is to fight

8. Furter, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

9. The latter, usually submerged in a colonial context, are almost umbilically linked to the world of nature, in relation to which they feel themselves to be component parts rather than shapers.

10. “Our cultural workers must serve the people with great enthusiasm and devotion, and they must link themselves with the masses, not divorce themselves from the masses. In order to do so, they must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. . . . There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them.” From the *Selected Works of Mao-Tse-Tung*, Vol. III. “The United Front in Cultural Work” (October 30, 1944) (Peking, 1967), pp. 186–187.

alongside the people for the recovery of the people’s stolen humanity, not to “win the people over” to their side. Such a phrase does not belong in the vocabulary of revolutionary leaders, but in that of the oppressor. The revolutionary’s role is to liberate, and be liberated, with the people—not to win them over.

In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter’s “submerged” state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to “fill” that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. This practice is incompatible with a truly liberating course of action, which, by presenting the oppressors’ slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to “eject” those slogans from within themselves. After all, the task of the humanists is surely not that of pitting their slogans against the slogans of the oppressors, with the oppressed as the testing ground, “housing” the slogans of first one group and then the other. On the contrary, the task of the humanists is to see that the oppressed become aware of the fact that as dual beings, “housing” the oppressors within themselves, they cannot be truly human.

This task implies that revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of “salvation,” but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation—the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist. One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion,¹¹ good intentions notwithstanding.

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires

11. This point will be analyzed in detail in chapter 4.

a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.¹²

We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears—programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of “banking” or of preaching in the desert.

Often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric. The language of the educator or the politician (and it seems more and more clear that the latter must also become an educator, in the broadest sense of the word), like the language of the people, cannot exist without thought; and neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they refer. In order to communicate effectively, educator and politician must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed.

It is to the reality which mediates men, and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people, that we must go to find the program content of education. The investigation of what I have termed the people’s “thematic universe”¹³—the complex of their “generative themes”—inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom. The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover

12. It is as self-contradictory for true humanists to use the banking method as it would be for rightists to engage in problem-posing education. (The latter are always consistent—they never use a problem-posing pedagogy.)

13. The expression “meaningful thematics” is used with the same connotation.

generative themes and to stimulate people’s awareness in regard to these themes. Consistent with the liberating purpose of dialogical education, the object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found.

Before describing a “generative theme” more precisely, which will also clarify what is meant by a “minimum thematic universe,” it seems to me indispensable to present a few preliminary reflections. The concept of a generative theme is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypothesis to be proved. If it were a hypothesis to be proved, the initial investigation would seek not to ascertain the nature of the theme, but rather the very existence or non-existence of themes themselves. In that event, before attempting to understand the theme in its richness, its significance, its plurality, its transformations, and its historical composition, we would first have to verify whether or not it is an objective fact; only then could we proceed to apprehend it. Although an attitude of critical doubt is legitimate, it does appear possible to verify the reality of the generative theme—not only through one’s own existential experience, but also through critical reflection on the human-world relationship and on the relationships between people implicit in the former.

This point deserves more attention. One may well remember—trite as it seems—that, of the uncompleted beings, man is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection; this capacity distinguishes him from the animals, which are unable to separate themselves from their activity and thus are unable to reflect upon it. In this apparently superficial distinction lie the boundaries which delimit the action of each in his life space. Because the animals’ activity is an extension of themselves, the results of that activity are also inseparable from themselves: animals can neither set objectives nor infuse their transformation of nature with any significance beyond itself. Moreover, the “decision” to perform this activity belongs not to them but to their species. Animals are, accordingly, fundamentally “beings in themselves.”

Unable to decide for themselves, unable to objectify either themselves or their activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living "submerged" in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a "tomorrow" and a "today" because they exist in an overwhelming present, animals are ahistorical. Their ahistorical life does not occur in the "world," taken in its strict meaning; for the animal, the world does not constitute a "not-I" which could set him apart as an "I." The human world, which is historical, serves as a mere prop for the "being in itself." Animals are not challenged by the configuration which confronts them; they are merely stimulated. Their life is not one of risk-taking, for they are not aware of taking risks. Risks are not challenges perceived upon reflection, but merely "noted" by the signs which indicate them; they accordingly do not require decision-making responses.

Consequently, animals cannot commit themselves. Their ahistorical condition does not permit them to "take on" life. Because they do not "take it on," they cannot construct it; and if they do not construct it, they cannot transform its configuration. Nor can they know themselves to be destroyed by life, for they cannot expand their "prop" world into a meaningful, symbolic world which includes culture and history. As a result, animals do not "animalize" their configuration in order to animalize themselves—nor do they "de-animalize" themselves. Even in the forest, they remain "beings-in-themselves," as animal-like there as in the zoo.

In contrast, the people—aware of their activity and the world in which they are situated, acting in function of the objectives which they propose, having the seat of their decisions located in themselves and in their relations with the world and with others, infusing the world with their creative presence by means of the transformation they effect upon it—unlike animals, not only live but exist,¹⁴ and their existence is historical. Animals live out their lives on an atemporal, flat, uniform "prop"; humans exist in a world which they are

14. In the English language, the terms "live" and "exist" have assumed implications opposite to their etymological origins. As used here, "live" is the more basic term, implying only survival; "exist" implies a deeper involvement in the process of "becoming."

constantly re-creating and transforming. For animals, "here" is only a habitat with which they enter into contact; for people, "here" signifies not merely a physical space, but also an historical space.

Strictly speaking, "here," "now," "there," "tomorrow," and "yesterday" do not exist for the animal, whose life, lacking self-consciousness, is totally determined. Animals cannot surmount the limits imposed by the "here," the "now," or the "there."

Humans, however, because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world—because they are *conscious beings*—exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them: the "limit-situations."¹⁵ Once perceived by individuals as fetters, as obstacles to their liberation, these situations stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality. Men and women respond to the challenge with actions which Vieira Pinto calls "limit-acts": those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the "given."

Thus, it is not the limit-situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers. As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads men to attempt to overcome the limit-situations. This objective can be achieved only through action upon the con-

15. Professor Alvaro Vieira Pinto analyzes with clarity the problem of "limit-situations," using the concept without the pessimistic aspect originally found in Jaspers. For Vieira Pinto, the "limit-situations" are not "the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin"; they are not "the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from nothingness but the frontier which separates being from being more." Alvaro Vieira Pinto, *Consciência e Realidade Nacional* (Rio de Janeiro, 1960), Vol. II, p. 284.

crete, historical reality in which limit-situations historically are found. As reality is transformed and these situations are superseded, new ones will appear, which in turn will evoke new limit-acts.

The prop world of animals contains no limit-situations, due to its ahistorical character. Similarly, animals lack the ability to exercise limit-acts, which require a decisive attitude towards the world: separation from and objectification of the world in order to transform it. Organically bound to their prop, animals do not distinguish between themselves and the world. Accordingly, animals are not limited by limit-situations—which are historical—but rather by the entire prop. And the appropriate role for animals is not to relate to their prop (in that event, the prop would be a world), but to adapt to it. Thus, when animals “produce” a nest, a hive, or a burrow, they are not creating products which result from “limit-acts,” that is, transforming responses. Their productive activity is subordinated to the satisfaction of a physical necessity which is simply stimulating, rather than challenging. “An animal’s product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product.”¹⁶

Only products which result from the activity of a being but do not belong to its physical body (though these products may bear its seal), can give a dimension of meaning to the context, which thus becomes a world. A being capable of such production (who thereby is necessarily aware of himself, is a “being for himself”) could no longer *be* if she or he were not *in the process of being* in the world with which he or she relates; just as the world would no longer exist if this being did not exist.

The difference between animals—who (because their activity does not constitute limit-acts) cannot create products detached from themselves—and humankind—who through their action upon the world create the realm of culture and history—is that only the latter are beings of the praxis. Only human beings *are* praxis—the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is

16. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Dirk Struik, ed. (New York, 1964), p. 113.

the source of knowledge and creation. Animal activity, which occurs without a praxis, is not creative; people’s transforming activity is.

It is as transforming and creative beings that humans, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods—tangible objects—but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts.¹⁷ Through their continuing praxis, men and women simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings. Because—in contrast to animals—people can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present, and the future, their history, in function of their own creations, develops as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialize. These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which people are confined. Were this the case, a fundamental condition of history—its continuity—would disappear. On the contrary, epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity.¹⁸

An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people’s full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch. These themes imply others which are opposing or even antithetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. Thus, historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites. Nor can these themes be found anywhere except in the human-world relationship. The complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its “thematic universe.”

Confronted by this “universe of themes” in dialectical contradiction, persons take equally contradictory positions: some work to maintain the structures, others to change them. As antagonism deepens between themes which are the expression of reality, there

17. Regarding this point, see Karel Kosik, *Dialéctica de lo Concreto* (Mexico, 1967).

18. On the question of historical epochs, see Hans Freyer, *Teoría de la época actual* (Mexico).

is a tendency for the themes and for reality itself to be mythicized, establishing a climate of irrationality and sectarianism. This climate threatens to drain the themes of their deeper significance and to deprive them of their characteristically dynamic aspect. In such a situation, myth-creating irrationality itself becomes a fundamental theme. Its opposing theme, the critical and dynamic view of the world, strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization, and achieve a full realization of the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favor of the liberation of people.

In the last analysis, the *themes*¹⁹ both contain and are contained in *limit-situations*; the *tasks* they imply require *limit-acts*. When the themes are concealed by the limit-situations and thus are not clearly perceived, the corresponding tasks—people's responses in the form of historical action—can be neither authentically nor critically fulfilled. In this situation, humans are unable to transcend the limit-situations to discover that beyond these situations—and in contradiction to them—lies an *untested feasibility*.

In sum, limit-situations imply the existence of persons who are directly or indirectly served by these situations, and of those who are negated and curbed by them. Once the latter come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and being more human, rather than the frontier between being and nothingness, they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception. On the other hand, those who are served by the present limit-situation regard the untested feasibility as a threatening limit-situation which must not be allowed to materialize, and act to maintain the status quo. Consequently, liberating actions upon an historical milieu must correspond not only to the generative themes but to the way in which these themes are perceived. This requirement in turn implies another: the investigation of meaningful thematics.

19. I have termed these themes "generative" because (however they are comprehended and whatever action they may evoke) they contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled.

Generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular. The broadest epochal unit, which includes a diversified range of units and sub-units—continental, regional, national, and so forth—contains themes of a universal character. I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination*—which implies its opposite, the theme of *liberation*, as the objective to be achieved. It is this tormenting theme which gives our epoch the anthropological character mentioned earlier. In order to achieve humanization, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanizing oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which people are reduced to things.

Within the smaller circles, we find themes and limit-situations characteristic of societies (on the same continent or on different continents) which through these themes and limit-situations share historical similarities. For example, underdevelopment, which cannot be understood apart from the relationship of dependency, represents a limit-situation characteristic of societies of the Third World. The task implied by this limit-situation is to overcome the contradictory relation of these "object"-societies to the metropolitan societies; this task constitutes the untested feasibility for the Third World.

Any given society within the broader epochal unit contains, in addition to the universal, continental, or historically similar themes, its own particular themes, its own limit-situations. Within yet smaller circles, thematic diversifications can be found within the same society, divided into areas and sub-areas, all of which are related to the societal whole. These constitute epochal sub-units. For example, within the same national unit one can find the contradiction of the "coexistence of the non-contemporaneous."

Within these sub-units, national themes may or may not be perceived in their true significance. They may simply be *felt*—sometimes not even that. But the nonexistence of themes within the sub-units is absolutely impossible. The fact that individuals in a certain area do not perceive a generative theme, or perceive it in a distorted way, may only reveal a limit-situation of oppression in which people are still submerged.

In general, a dominated consciousness which has not yet perceived a limit-situation in its totality apprehends only its epiphenomena and transfers to the latter the inhibiting force which is the property of the limit-situation.²⁰ This fact is of great importance for the investigation of generative themes. When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole.

Equally appropriate for the methodology of thematic investigation and for problem-posing education is this effort to present significant dimensions of an individual's contextual reality, the analysis of which will make it possible for him to recognize the interaction of the various components. Meanwhile, the significant dimensions, which in their turn are constituted of parts in interaction, should be perceived as dimensions of total reality. In this way, a critical analysis of a significant existential dimension makes possible a new, critical attitude towards the limit-situations. The perception and comprehension of reality are rectified and acquire new depth. When carried out with a methodology of *conscientização* the investigation of the generative theme contained in the minimum thematic universe (the generative themes in interaction) thus introduces or begins to introduce women and men to a critical form of thinking about their world.

20. Individuals of the middle class often demonstrate this type of behavior, although in a different way from the peasant. Their fear of freedom leads them to erect defense mechanisms and rationalizations which conceal the fundamental, emphasize the fortuitous, and deny concrete reality. In the face of a problem whose analysis would lead to the uncomfortable perception of a limit-situation, their tendency is to remain on the periphery of the discussion and resist any attempt to reach the heart of the question. They are even annoyed when someone points out a fundamental proposition which explains the fortuitous or secondary matters to which they had been assigning primary importance.

In the event, however, that human beings perceive reality as dense, impenetrable, and enveloping, it is indispensable to proceed with the investigation by means of abstraction. This method does not involve reducing the concrete to the abstract (which would signify the negation of its dialectical nature), but rather maintaining both elements as opposites which interrelate dialectically in the act of reflection. This dialectical movement of thought is exemplified perfectly in the analysis of a concrete existential, "coded" situation.²¹ Its "decoding" requires moving from the abstract to the concrete; this requires moving from the part to the whole and then returning to the parts; this in turn requires that the Subject recognize himself in the object (the coded concrete existential situation) and recognize the object as a situation in which he finds himself, together with other Subjects. If the decoding is well done, this movement of flux and reflux from the abstract to the concrete which occurs in the analysis of a coded situation leads to the superseding of the abstraction *by* the critical perception of the concrete, which has already ceased to be a dense, impenetrable reality.

When an individual is presented with a coded existential situation (a sketch or photograph which leads by abstraction to the concreteness of existential reality), his tendency is to "split" that coded situation. In the process of decoding, this separation corresponds to the stage we call the "description of the situation," and facilitates the discovery of the interaction among the parts of the disjoined whole. This whole (the coded situation), which previously had been only diffusely apprehended, begins to acquire meaning as thought flows back to it from the various dimensions. Since, however, the coding is the representation of an existential situation, the decoder tends to take the step from the representation to the very concrete situation in which and with which she finds herself. It is thus possible to explain conceptually why individuals begin to behave differently with regard to objective reality, once that reality has ceased to look

21. The coding of an existential situation is the representation of that situation, showing some of its constituent elements in interaction. Decoding is the critical analysis of the coded situation.

like a blind alley and has taken on its true aspect: a challenge which human beings must meet.

In all the stages of decoding, people exteriorize their view of the world. And in the way they think about and face the world—fatalistically, dynamically, or statically—their generative themes may be found. A group which does not concretely express a generative thematic—a fact which might appear to imply the nonexistence of themes—is, on the contrary, suggesting a very dramatic theme: *the theme of silence*. The theme of silence suggests a structure of mutism in face of the overwhelming force of the limit-situations.

I must re-emphasize that the generative theme cannot be found in people, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from people; much less in “no man’s land.” It can only be apprehended in the human-world relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that the investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as *co-investigators*. The more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality.

Some may think it inadvisable to include the people as investigators in the search for their own meaningful thematics: that their intrusive influence (n. b., the “intrusion” of those who are most interested—or ought to be—in their own education) will “adulterate” the findings and thereby sacrifice the objectivity of the investigation. This view mistakenly presupposes that themes exist, in their original objective purity, outside people—as if themes were *things*. Actually, themes exist in people in their relations with the world, with reference to concrete facts. The same objective fact could evoke different complexes of generative themes in different epochal sub-units. There is, therefore, a relation between the given objective fact, the perception women and men have of this fact, and the generative themes.

A meaningful thematic is expressed by people, and a given moment of expression will differ from an earlier moment, if they have changed their perception of the objective facts to which the themes refer. From the investigator’s point of view, the important thing is to detect the starting point at which the people visualize the “given” and to verify whether or not during the process of investigation any transformation has occurred in their way of perceiving reality. (Objective reality, of course, remains unchanged. If the perception of that reality changes in the course of the investigation, that fact does not impair the validity of the investigation.)

We must realize that the aspirations, the motives, and the objectives implicit in the meaningful thematics are *human* aspirations, motives, and objectives. They do not exist “out there” somewhere, as static entities; *they are occurring*. They are as historical as human beings themselves; consequently, they cannot be apprehended apart from them. To apprehend these themes and to understand them is to understand both the people who embody them and the reality to which they refer. But—precisely because it is not possible to understand these themes apart from people—it is necessary that those concerned understand them as well. Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character.

The real danger of the investigation is not that the supposed objects of the investigation, discovering themselves to be co-investigators, might “adulterate” the analytical results. On the contrary, the danger lies in the risk of shifting the focus of the investigation from the meaningful themes to the people themselves, thereby treating the people as objects of the investigation. Since this investigation is to serve as a basis for developing an educational program in which teacher-student and students-teachers combine their cognitions of the same object, the investigation itself must likewise be based on reciprocity of action.

Thematic investigation, which occurs in the realm of the human,

cannot be reduced to a mechanical act. As a process of search, of knowledge, and thus of creation, it requires the investigators to discover the interpenetration of problems, in the linking of meaningful themes. The investigation will be most educational when it is most critical, and most critical when it avoids the narrow outlines of partial or "focalized" views of reality, and sticks to the comprehension of *total* reality. Thus, the process of searching for the meaningful thematics should include a concern for the links between themes, a concern to pose these themes as problems, and a concern for their historical-cultural context.

Just as the educator may not elaborate a program to present to the people, neither may the investigator elaborate "itineraries" for researching the thematic universe, starting from points which *he* has predetermined. Both education and the investigation designed to support it must be "sympathetic" activities, in the etymological sense of the word. That is, they must consist of communication and of the common experience of a reality perceived in the complexity of its constant "becoming."

The investigator who, in the name of scientific objectivity, transforms the organic into something inorganic, what is becoming into what is, life into death, is a person who fears change. He or she sees in change (which is not denied, but neither is it desired) not a sign of life, but a sign of death and decay. He or she does want to study change—but in order to stop it, not in order to stimulate or deepen it. However, in seeing change as a sign of death and in making people the passive objects of investigation in order to arrive at rigid models, one betrays their own character as a killer of life.

I repeat: the investigation of thematics involves the investigation of the people's thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking out reality. I cannot think *for others* or *without others*, nor can others think *for me*. Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others—must constitute that process.

People, as beings "in a situation," find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own "situationality" to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it.

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be "in a situation." Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.

Every thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is thus really educational, while all authentic education investigates thinking. The more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate. Education and thematic investigation, in the problem-posing concept of education, are simply different moments of the same process.

In contrast with the antidialogical and non-communicative "deposits" of the banking method of education, the program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found. The content thus constantly expands and renews itself. The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to "re-present" that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and "re-present" it not as a lecture, but as a problem.

Let us say, for example, that a group has the responsibility of coordinating a plan for adult education in a peasant area with a high percentage of illiteracy. The plan includes a literacy campaign and a post-literacy phase. During the former stage, problem-posing education seeks out and investigates the "generative word"; in the post-literacy stage, it seeks out and investigates the "generative theme."

Let us here, however, consider only the investigation of the generative themes or the meaningful thematics.²² Once the investigators have determined the area in which they will work and have acquired a preliminary acquaintance with the area through secondary sources, they initiate the first stage of the investigation. This beginning (like any beginning in any human activity) involves difficulties and risks which are to a certain point normal, although they are not always evident in the first contact with the individuals of the area. In this first contact, the investigators need to get a significant number of persons to agree to an informal meeting during which they can talk about the objectives of their presence in the area. In this meeting they explain the reason for the investigation, how it is to be carried out, and to what use it will be put; they further explain that the investigation will be impossible without a relation of mutual understanding and trust. If the participants agree both to the investigation and to the subsequent process,²³ the investigators should call for volunteers among the participants to serve as assistants. These volunteers will gather a series of necessary data about the life of the area. Of even greater importance, however, is the active presence of these volunteers in the investigation.

Meanwhile, the investigators begin their own visits to the area, never forcing themselves, but acting as sympathetic observers with an attitude of *understanding* towards what they see. While it is normal for investigators to come to the area with values which influ-

22. Regarding the investigation and use of "generative words," see my *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

23. According to the Brazilian sociologist Maria Edy Ferreira (in an unpublished work), thematic investigation is only justified to the extent that it returns to the people what truly belongs to them; to the extent that it represents, not an attempt to learn about the people, but to come to know with them the reality which challenges them.

ence their perceptions, this does not mean that they may transform the thematic investigation into a means of imposing these values. The only dimension of these values which it is hoped the people whose thematics are being investigated will come to share (it is presumed that the investigators possess this quality) is a critical perception of the world, which implies a correct method of approaching reality in order to unveil it. And critical perception cannot be imposed. Thus, from the very beginning, thematic investigation is expressed as an educational pursuit, as cultural action.

During their visits, the investigators set their critical "aim" on the area under study, as if it were for them an enormous, unique, living "code" to be deciphered. They regard the area as a totality, and visit upon visit attempt to "split" it by analyzing the partial dimensions which impress them. Through this process they expand their understanding of how the various parts interact, which will later help them penetrate the totality itself.

During this decoding stage, the investigators observe certain *moments* of the life of the area—sometimes directly, sometimes by means of informal conversations with the inhabitants. They register everything in their notebooks, including apparently unimportant items: the way the people talk, their style of life, their behavior at church and at work. They record the idiom of the people: their expressions, their vocabulary, and their syntax (not their incorrect pronunciation, but rather the way they construct their thought).²⁴

It is essential that the investigators observe the area under varying circumstances: labor in the fields, meetings of a local association (noting the behavior of the participants, the language used, and the

24. The Brazilian novelist Guimarães Rosa is a brilliant example of how a writer can capture authentically, not the pronunciation or the grammatical corruptions of the people, but their syntax: the very structure of their thought. Indeed (and this is not to disparage his exceptional value as a writer), Guimarães Rosa was the investigator par excellence of the "meaningful thematics" of the inhabitants of the Brazilian hinterland. Professor Paulo de Tarso is currently preparing an essay which analyzes this little-considered aspect of the work of the author of *Grande Sertão—Veredas* [in English translation: *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (New York, 1963)].

relations between the officers and the members), the role played by women and by young people, leisure hours, games and sports, conversations with people in their homes (noting examples of husband-wife and parent-child relationships). No activity must escape the attention of the investigators during the initial survey of the area.

After each observation visit, the investigator should draw up a brief report to be discussed by the entire team, in order to evaluate the preliminary findings of both the professional investigators and the local assistants. To facilitate the participation of the assistants, the evaluation meetings should be held in the area itself.

The evaluation meetings represent a second stage in the decoding of the unique living code. As each person, in his decoding essay, relates how he perceived or felt a certain occurrence or situation, his exposition challenges all the other decoders by re-presenting to them the same reality upon which they have themselves been intent. At this moment they "re-consider," through the "considerations" of others, their own previous "consideration." Thus the analysis of reality made by each individual decoder sends them all back, dialogically, to the disjoined whole which once more becomes a totality evoking a new analysis by the investigators, following which a new evaluative and critical meeting will be held. Representatives of the inhabitants participate in all activities as members of the investigating team.

The more the group divide and reintegrate the whole, the more closely they approach the nuclei of the principal and secondary contradictions which involve the inhabitants of the area. By locating these nuclei of contradictions, the investigators might even at this stage be able to organize the program content of their educational action. Indeed, if the content reflected these contradictions, it would undoubtedly contain the meaningful thematics of the area. And one can safely affirm that action based on these observations would be much more likely to succeed than that based on "decisions from the top." The investigators should not, however, be tempted by this possibility. The basic thing, starting from the initial perception of

these nuclei of contradictions (which include the principal contradiction of society as a larger epochal unit) is to study the inhabitants' level of awareness of these contradictions.

Intrinsically, these contradictions constitute limit-situations, involve themes, and indicate tasks. If individuals are caught up in and are unable to separate themselves from these limit-situations, their theme in reference to these situations is *fatalism*, and the task implied by the theme is *the lack of a task*. Thus, although the limit-situations are objective realities which call forth needs in individuals, one must investigate with these individuals their level of awareness of these situations.

A limit-situation as a concrete reality can call forth from persons in different areas (and even in sub-areas of the same area) quite opposite themes and tasks. Thus, the basic concern of the investigators should be to concentrate on the knowledge of what Goldman calls "real consciousness" and the "potential consciousness."

Real consciousness [is] the result of the multiple obstacles and deviations that the different factors of empirical reality put into opposition and submit for realization by [the] potential consciousness.²⁵

Real consciousness implies the impossibility of perceiving the "untested feasibility" which lies beyond the limit-situations. But whereas the untested feasibility cannot be achieved at the level of "real [or present] consciousness," it can be realized through "testing action" which reveals its hitherto unperceived viability. The untested feasibility and real consciousness are related, as are testing action and potential consciousness. Goldman's concept of "potential consciousness" is similar to what Nicolai terms "unperceived practicable solutions"²⁶ (our "untested feasibility"), in contrast to "perceived practicable solutions" and "presently practiced solutions," which

25. Lucien Goldman, *The Human Sciences and Philosophy* (London, 1969), p. 118.

26. See André Nicolai, *Comportment Économique et Structures Sociales* (Paris, 1960).

correspond to Goldman's "real consciousness." Accordingly, the fact that the investigators may in the first stage of the investigation approximately apprehend the complex of contradictions does not authorize them to begin to structure the program content of educational action. This perception of reality is still their own, not that of the people.

It is with the apprehension of the complex of contradictions that the second stage of the investigation begins. Always acting as a team, the investigators will select some of these contradictions to develop the codifications to be used in the thematic investigation. Since the codifications (sketches or photographs)²⁷ are the *objects* which mediate the decoders in their critical analysis, the preparation of these codifications must be guided by certain principles other than the usual ones for making visual aids.

The first requirement is that these codifications must necessarily represent situations familiar to the individuals whose thematics are being examined, so that they can easily recognize the situations (and thus their own relation to them). It is inadmissible (whether during the process of investigation or in the following stage, when the meaningful thematics are presented as program content) to present pictures of reality unfamiliar to the participants. The latter procedure (although dialectical, because individuals analyzing an unfamiliar reality could compare it with their own and discover the limitations of each) cannot precede the more basic one dictated by the participants' state of submersion, that is, the process in which individuals analyzing their own reality become aware of their prior, distorted perceptions and thereby come to have a new perception of that reality.

An equally fundamental requirement for the preparation of the codifications is that their thematic nucleus be neither overly explicit nor overly enigmatic. The former may degenerate into mere propa-

27. The codifications may also be oral. In this case they consist of a few words presenting an existential problem, followed by decoding. The team of the *Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario* (Institute for Agrarian Development) in Chile has used this method successfully in thematic investigations.

ganda, with no real decoding to be done beyond stating the obviously predetermined content. The latter runs the risk of appearing to be a puzzle or a guessing game. Since they represent existential situations, the codifications should be simple in their complexity and offer various decoding possibilities in order to avoid the brainwashing tendencies of propaganda. Codifications are not slogans; they are cognizable objects, challenges towards which the critical reflection of the decoders should be directed.

In order to offer various possibilities of analysis in the decoding process, the codifications should be organized as a "thematic fan." As the decoders reflect on the codifications, the codifications should open up in the direction of other themes. This opening up which does not occur if the thematic content is either too explicit or too enigmatic) is indispensable to the perception of the dialectical relations which exist between the themes and their opposites. Accordingly, the codifications reflecting an existential situation must objectively constitute a totality. Its elements must interact in the makeup of the whole.

In the process of decoding, the participants externalize their thematics and thereby make explicit their "real consciousness" of the world. As they do this, they begin to see how they themselves acted while actually experiencing the situation they are now analyzing, and thus reach a "perception of their previous perception." By achieving this awareness, they come to perceive reality differently; by broadening the horizon of their perception, they discover more easily in their "background awareness" the dialectical relations between the two dimensions of reality.

By stimulating "perception of the previous perception" and "knowledge of the previous knowledge," decoding stimulates the appearance of a new perception and the development of new knowledge. The new perception and knowledge are systematically continued with the inauguration of the educational plan, which transforms the untested feasibility into testing action, as potential consciousness supersedes real consciousness.

Preparing the codifications further requires that insofar as possi-

ble they should represent contradictions "inclusive" of others which constitute the system of contradictions of the area under study.²⁸ As each of these "inclusive" codifications is prepared, the other contradictions "contained" therein should also be codified. The decoding of the former will be dialectically clarified by the decoding of the latter.

In this connection, a very valuable contribution to our method has been made by Gabriel Bode, a young Chilean civil servant in one of the most significant Chilean governmental institutions: the *Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario* (INDAP).²⁹ During his use of this method in the post-literacy stage, Bode observed that the peasants became interested in the discussion only when the codification related directly to their felt needs. Any deviation in the codification, as well as any attempt by the educator to guide the decoding discussion into other areas, produced silence and indifference. On the other hand, he observed that even when the codification³⁰ centered on their felt needs the peasants could not manage to concentrate systematically on the discussion, which often digressed to the point of never reaching a synthesis. Also, they almost never perceived the relationship of their felt needs to the direct and indirect causes of these needs. One might say that they failed to perceive the untested feasibility lying beyond the limit-situations which engendered their needs.

Bode then decided to experiment with the simultaneous projection of different situations; in this technique lies the value of his contribution. Initially, he projects a very simple codification of an existential situation. He terms his first codification "essential"; it represents the basic nucleus and opens up into a thematic fan extending to "auxiliary" codifications. After the essential codification is decoded, the educator maintains its projected image as a reference

28. This recommendation is made by José Luis Fiori, in an unpublished manuscript.

29. Until recently, INDAP was directed by the economist and authentic humanist Jacques Chonchol.

30. These codifications were not "inclusive," in Fiori's definition.

for the participants and successively projects alongside it the auxiliary codifications. By means of the latter, which are directly related to the essential codification, he sustains the vivid interest of the participants, who are thereby enabled to reach a synthesis.

The great achievement of Gabriel Bode is that, by means of the dialectics between the essential and the auxiliary codifications, he has managed to communicate to the participants a sense of *totality*. Individuals who were *submerged* in reality, merely *feeling* their needs, *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs. In this way, they can go beyond the level of real consciousness to that of potential consciousness much more rapidly.

Once the codifications have been prepared and all their possible thematic facets have been studied by the interdisciplinary team, the investigators begin the third stage of the investigation by returning to the area to initiate decoding dialogues in the "thematic investigation circles."³¹ These discussions, which decode the material prepared in the preceding stage, are taped for subsequent analysis by the interdisciplinary team.³² In addition to the investigator acting as decoding co-ordinator, two other specialists—a psychologist and a sociologist—attend the meetings. Their task is to note and record the significant (and apparently insignificant) reactions of the decoders.

During the decoding process, the co-ordinator must not only lis-

31. Each "investigation circle" should have a maximum of twenty persons. There should be as many circles as necessary to involve, as participants, ten percent of the area or sub-area being studied.

32. These subsequent meetings of analysis should include the volunteers from the area who assisted in the investigation, and some participants of the "thematic investigation circles." Their contribution is both a right to which they are entitled and an indispensable aid to the analysis of the specialists. As co-investigators of the specialists, they will rectify and/or ratify the interpretations the latter make of the findings. From the methodological point of view, their participation gives the investigation (which from the beginning is based on a "sympathetic" relationship) an additional safeguard: the critical presence of representatives of the people from the beginning until the final phase, that of thematic analysis, continued in the organization of the program content of educational action as liberating cultural action.

ten to the individuals but must challenge them, posing as problems both the codified existential situation and their own answers. Due to the cathartic force of the methodology, the participants of the thematic investigation circles externalize a series of sentiments and opinions about themselves, the world, and others, that perhaps they would not express under different circumstances.

In one of the thematic investigations³³ carried out in Santiago, a group of tenement residents discussed a scene showing a drunken man walking on the street and three young men conversing on the corner. The group participants commented that "the only one there who is productive and useful to his country is the souse who is returning home after working all day for low wages and who is worried about his family because he can't take care of their needs. He is the only worker. He is a decent worker and a souse like us."

The investigator³⁴ had intended to study aspects of alcoholism. He probably would not have elicited the above responses if he had presented the participants with a questionnaire he had elaborated himself. If asked directly, they might even have denied ever taking a drink themselves. But in their comments on the codification of an existential situation they could recognize, and in which they could recognize themselves, they said what they really felt.

There are two important aspects to these declarations. On the one hand, they verbalize the connection between earning low wages, feeling exploited, and getting drunk—getting drunk as a flight from reality, as an attempt to overcome the frustration of inaction, as an ultimately self-destructive solution. On the other hand, they manifest the need to rate the drunkard highly. He is the "only one useful to his country, because he works, while the others only gab." After praising the drunkard, the participants then identify themselves with him, as workers who also drink—"decent workers."

In contrast, imagine the failure of a moralistic educator,³⁵ sermoniz-

33. This particular investigation was, unfortunately, not completed.

34. The psychiatrist Patrício Lopes, whose work is described in *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

35. See Niebuhr, *op cit*.

ing against alcoholism and presenting as an example of virtue something which for these men is not a manifestation of virtue. In this and in other cases, the only sound procedure is the *conscientização* of the situation, which should be attempted from the start of the thematic investigation. (Obviously, *conscientização* does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception of a situation, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.)

In another experience, this time with peasants, I observed that the unchanging motif during an entire discussion of a situation depicting work in the fields was the demand for an increase in wages and the necessity of joining together to create a union to obtain this particular demand. Three situations were discussed during the session, and the motif was always the same.

Now imagine an educator who has organized *his* educational program for these men, consisting of reading "wholesome" texts in which one learns that "the water is in the well." But precisely this type of thing happens all the time in both education and politics, because it is not realized that the dialogical nature of education begins with thematic investigation.

Once the decoding in the circles has been completed, the last stage of the investigation begins, as the investigators undertake a systematic interdisciplinary study of their findings. Listening to the tapes recorded during the decoding sessions and studying the notes taken by the psychologists and the sociologist, the investigators begin to list the themes explicit or implicit in the affirmations made during the sessions. These themes should be classified according to the various social sciences. Classification does not mean that when the program is elaborated the themes will be seen as belonging to isolated categories, but only that a theme is viewed in a specific manner by each of the social sciences to which it is related. The theme of development, for example, is especially appropriate to the field of economics, but not exclusively so. This theme would also be focalized by sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (fields concerned with cultural change and with the modification of atti-

tudes and values—questions which are equally relevant to a philosophy of development). It would be focalized by political science (a field concerned with the decisions which involve development), by education, and so forth. In this way, the themes which characterize a totality will never be approached rigidly. It would indeed be a pity if the themes, after being investigated in the richness of their interpenetration with other aspects of reality, were subsequently to be handled in such a way as to sacrifice their richness (and hence their force) to the strictures of specialties.

Once the thematic demarcation is completed, each specialist presents to the interdisciplinary team a project for the “breakdown” of his theme. In breaking down the theme, the specialist looks for the fundamental nuclei which, comprising learning units and establishing a sequence, give a general view of the theme. As each specific project is discussed, the other specialists make suggestions. These may be incorporated into the project and/or may be included in the brief essays to be written on the theme. These essays, to which bibliographic suggestions are annexed, are valuable aids in training the teacher-students who will work in the “culture circles.”

During this effort to break down the meaningful thematics, the team will recognize the need to include some fundamental themes which were not directly suggested by the people during the preceding investigation. The introduction of these themes has proved to be necessary, and also corresponds to the dialogical character of education. If educational programming is dialogical, the teacher-students also have the right to participate by including themes not previously suggested. I call the latter type of theme “hinged themes,” due to their function. They may either facilitate the connection between two themes in the program unit, filling a possible gap between the two; or they may illustrate the relations between the general program content and the view of the world held by the people. Hence, one of these themes may be located at the beginning of thematic units.

The anthropological concept of culture is one of these hinged

themes. It clarifies the role of people in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings.³⁶

Once the breakdown of the thematics is completed,³⁷ there follows the stage of its “codification”: choosing the best channel of communication for each theme and its representation. A codification may be simple or compound. The former utilizes either the visual (pictorial or graphic), the tactile, or the auditive channel; the latter utilizes various channels.³⁸ The selection of the pictorial or graphic channel depends not only on the material to be codified, but also on whether or not the individuals with whom one wishes to communicate are literate.

After the thematics has been codified, the didactic material (photographs, slides, film strips, posters, reading texts, and so forth) is prepared. The team may propose some themes or aspects of some themes to outside specialists as topics for recorded interviews.

Let us take the theme of development as an example. The team

36. With regard to the importance of the anthropological analysis of culture, see *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

37. Note that the entire program is a totality made up of interrelated units which in themselves are also totalities.

The themes are totalities in themselves but are also elements which in interaction constitute the thematic units of the entire program.

The thematic breakdown splits the total themes in search of their fundamental nuclei, which are the partial elements.

The codification process attempts to re-totalize the disjointed theme in the representation of existential situations.

In decoding, individuals split the codification to apprehend its implicit theme or themes. The dialectical decoding process does not end there, but is completed in the re-totalization of the disjointed whole which is thus more clearly understood (as are also its relations to other codified situations, all of which represent existential situations).

38. CODIFICATION

a) Simple:

visual channel

pictorial

graphic

tactile channel

auditive channel

b) Compound: simultaneity of channels

approaches two or more economists of varying schools of thought, tells them about the program, and invites them to contribute an interview on the subject in language comprehensible to the audience. If the specialists accept, an interview of fifteen to twenty minutes is taped. A photograph may be taken of each specialist while he is speaking.

When the taped interview is presented to the culture circle, an introductory statement indicates who each speaker is, what she or he has written, done, and doing now; meanwhile, the speaker's photograph is projected on a screen. If, for instance, the speaker is a university professor, the introduction could include a discussion regarding what the participants think of universities and what they expect of them. The group has already been told that the recorded interview will be followed by a discussion of its contents (which function as an auditive codification). The team subsequently reports to the specialist the reaction of the participants during the discussion. This technique links intellectuals, often well-intentioned but not infrequently alienated from the reality of the people, to that reality. It also gives the people an opportunity to hear and criticize the thought of intellectuals.

Some themes or nuclei may be presented by means of brief dramatizations, containing the theme only—no “solutions”! The dramatization acts as a codification, as a problem-posing situation to be discussed.

Another didactic resource—as long as it is carried out within a problem-posing rather than a banking approach to education—is the reading and discussion of magazine articles, newspapers, and book chapters (beginning with passages). As in the case of the recorded interviews, the author is introduced before the group begins, and the contents are discussed afterward.

Along the same lines, it is indispensable to analyze the contents of newspaper editorials following any given event: “Why do different newspapers have such different interpretations of the same fact?” This practice helps develop a sense of criticism, so that people will react to newspapers or news broadcasts not as passive objects of

the “communiqués” directed at them, but rather as consciousnesses seeking to be free.

With all the didactic material prepared, to which should be added small introductory manuals, the team of educators is ready to represent to the people their own thematics, in systematized and amplified form. The thematics which have come from the people return to them—not as contents to be deposited, but as problems to be solved.

The first task of the basic-education teachers is to present the general program of the educational campaign. The people will find themselves in this program; it will not seem strange to them, since it originated with them. The educators will also explain (based on the dialogical character of education) the presence in the program of the hinged themes, and their significance.

If the educators lack sufficient funds to carry out the preliminary thematic investigation as described above, they can—with a minimum knowledge of the situation—select some basic themes to serve as “codifications to be investigated.” Accordingly, they can begin with introductory themes and simultaneously initiate further thematic investigation.

One of these basic themes (and one which I consider central and indispensable) is the anthropological concept of culture. Whether men and women are peasants or urban workers, learning to read or enrolled in a post-literacy program, the starting point of their search to know more (in the instrumental meaning of the term) is the debate of the concept. As they discuss the world of culture, they express their level of awareness of reality, in which various themes are implicit. Their discussion touches upon other aspects of reality, which comes to be perceived in an increasingly critical manner. These aspects in turn involve many other themes.

With the experience now behind me, I can affirm that the concept of culture, discussed imaginatively in all or most of its dimensions, can provide various aspects of an educational program. In addition, after several days of dialogue with the culture circle participants, the educators can ask the participants directly: “What other themes

or subjects could we discuss besides these?" As each person replies, the answer is noted down and is immediately proposed to the group as a problem.

One of the group members may say, for example: "I'd like to talk about nationalism." "Very well," says the educator, noting down the suggestion, and adds: "What does nationalism mean? Why is a discussion about nationalism of any interest to us?" My experience shows that when a suggestion is posed as a problem to the group, new themes appear. If, in an area where (for example) thirty culture circles meet on the same night, all the "co-ordinators" (educators) proceed in this fashion, the central team will have a rich variety of thematic material for study.

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate.

CHAPTER

4

This chapter, which analyses the theories of cultural action which develop from antidialogical and dialogical matrices, will make frequent reference to points presented in the previous chapters, either to expand these points or to clarify new affirmations.

I shall start by reaffirming that humankind, as beings of the *praxis*, differ from animals, which are beings of pure activity. Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast, human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor.

Animals, which do not labor, live in a setting which they cannot transcend. Hence, each animal species lives in the context appropriate to it, and these contexts, while open to humans, cannot communicate among themselves.

But human activity consists of action and reflection: it is *praxis*; it is transformation of the world. And as *praxis*, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot, as I stressed in chapter 2, be reduced to either verbalism or activism.

Lenin's famous statement: "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement"¹ means that a revolution is

1. Vladimir Lenin, "What is to be Done," in *Essential Works of Lenin*, Henry M. Christman, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 69.