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Generative Themes: A Critical Examination of Their Nature and Function in Paulo Freire's Educational Model

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GENERATIVE THEMES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF

THEIR NATURE AND FUNCTION IN PAULO

FREIRE'S EDUCATIONAL MODEL

by

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VITA

Alberto Antonio García, S.J., son of Sixto José García and María Teresa García, was born on December 11, 1943, in Havana, Cuba.

He attended De La Salle School in Havana for his elementary and high school education. He was graduated from high school in June, 1960.

He studied classics at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas, Venezuela, and philosophy at Fordham University in New York, where he was graduated in June, 1967. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree upon graduation. From 1969 to 1973 he studied theology at Bellarmine School of Theology of Loyola University in Chicago, where he was graduated in February, 1974, receiving a Master of Divinity degree.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the years following the publication of _Pedagogy of the Oppressed_ (1970),[1] Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has gained the attention of North American educators. Much has been written about Freire's method of adult education, developed out of his experiences in literacy and adult education campaigns in Brazil and in Chile. His work has received thoughtful praise and criticism as well as irrational adoration and condemnation.

A first glance at his writings does not seem to justify the extremes of praise and condemnation they have aroused: Freire himself admits that most of what he has written is not original, and the written expression of his thought, either in Spanish or in English, is baffling, confusing, obscure, and, at times, downright exasperating. But even if the Freire "cult" should prove to be a fad, destined to become a forgotten chapter in the history of educational "Messiahs," it cannot be denied that at least he has been influential in raising important questions in the educational community.

The reasons for the impact Freire has had on educators in this country and abroad are probably as complex

as the educational scene itself and as the larger cultural context in which we live. That cultural context includes a growing disenchantment, shared by an increasingly widening spectrum of North Americans, with the dominant patterns of the culture and a heightened awareness of the larger, global context. It is a commonplace to say that we live in a period of cultural crisis, a climate of restlessness and uncertainty. If such a climate is accompanied by anxiety, it also encourages an openness to self-criticism and a challenge to long-accepted cultural patterns. More and more people are willing to question and confront their own culture, especially educational institutions which traditionally have been considered vehicles and propagators of the dominant culture.

In this climate, it is not surprising that a warm reception be accorded to an educational practitioner like Freire, who comes accompanied by impressive credentials of success as an educator who seeks to challenge culture by means of a dynamic, though not novel, approach to the educational task.

Freire claims that his methodology of literacy training and of follow-up (or "post-literacy") educational programs is the only humanist option for educators who are committed to the ideal of making it possible for every person to participate fully in a democratic society. As the result of the process, the students will be not only func-

tionally literate, but "politically" literate as well. The "conscientization" process—defined as the process by which the consciousness of people is raised to a critical level—is concomitant with literacy training and is continued and deepened during the post-literacy phase. The content of the educational program Freire offers to marginal, functionally and/or politically illiterate students is elaborated on the basis of the students' own existential situations and of the affective and cognitive responses they make to those situations. The complex of visions, ideas, outlooks, feelings, and attitudes of the students, as reflected in their linguistic discourse, constitutes what Freire calls the "generative themes" of the students.

I intend to examine in this thesis Freire's theory of generative themes. I will locate them in the framework of his methodology and in the larger context of his educational theories and analyze their nature and function in Freire's strategy.

Review of the Literature

Freire's most systematic treatment of generative themes is found in his major work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, especially in Chapter 3. This chapter includes and expands material previously written by Freire as texts for discussion in courses designed to train coordinators in the adult education campaigns in Chile. The material appeared in the form of two essays which were published in Sobre la Acción

Cultural,[2] a collection of essays compiled by the Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria (ICIRA), in Santiago, Chile. They were also included in Educação e Conscientização,[3] a similar collection compiled by the Centro Internacional de Documentación (CIDOC), in Cuernavaca, Mexico. These essays were entitled: "Investigación y Metodología de la Investigación del Tema Generador--Reducción y Codificación Temáticas" ("Investigation and Methodology of the Investigation into the Generative Theme--Thematic Reduction and Codification") and "A Propósito del Tema Generador y del Universo Temático" ("On the Generative Theme and the Thematic Universe").

There is a vast amount of literature discussing general aspects of Freire's work. The best source for a comprehensive review of literature dealing with historical background, methodology, reviews of Freire's books (especially of Pedagogy of the Oppressed), and studies of other topics in Freire is Denis E. Collins' unpublished doctoral dissertation.[4] The most comprehensive bibliographical source of material on Freire in English and foreign languages is John Ohliger and Anne Hartung's "Quotational Bibliography."[5] This bibliography includes theses and dissertations on Freire, completed or in progress. Many of the items reviewed by Collins in his doctoral dissertation contain brief descriptions of generative themes and of Freire's methodology. Most of the items, though, deal either with

more general aspects of Freire's theory or with its applicability in the North American context. None of them deals systematically with generative themes.

Outline of the Remainder of the Study.

Chapter II provides a biographical sketch of Freire's background and experience.

Chapter III presents a general description of Freire's two-phase educational strategy.

Chapter IV discusses the larger context of Freire's vision of human beings and their situation.

Chapter V analyzes in detail the nature, structure, and function of generative themes and the process of their pedagogical treatment.

Chapter VI summarizes findings and critical conclusions.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Hereinafter referred to as Pedagogy . . . .

2. Paulo Freire, Sobre la Accion Cultural (Santiago, Chile: ICIRA, 1969), chapters 3 and 4.

3. Paulo Freire et al., Educação e Conscientização (Cuernavaca: CIDOC Cuaderno No. 25, 1968), chapters 4 and 5. Hereinafter referred to as Educação e Conscientização.

4. Denis E. Collins, "Two Utopians: A Comparison and Contrast of the Educational Philosophies of Paulo Freire and Theodore Brameld," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, University of Southern California, 1973), pp. 14-48. Hereinafter referred to as "Two Utopians: A Comparison and Contrast . . . ."

5. John Ohliger and Anne Hartung, "Quotational Bibliography," in Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator, ed. Stanley M. Grabowski (Syracuse: Publications in Continuing Education and ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education, 1972), pp. 96-136.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON PAULO FREIRE

Paulo Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in Estrada de Encanamento, barrio de la Casa Amarela ("neighborhood of the Yellow House"), a middle-class neighborhood of Pernambuco (or Recife, as it is also called), the capital of Brazil's Northeast.[1]

Recife, a city of one million people, is a sea port opening up to the Atlantic Ocean. The section of the country of which it is the capital is notorious for its poverty and underdevelopment.[2] The Northeast became a privileged place for the study of what Josué de Castro called the "geography of hunger." [3]

Freire's father was Joaquín Temístocles Freire, now dead. Joaquín Freire came from Río Grande del Norte. He served as an officer in the military police of Recife. Paulo describes his father as a religious man, though not a member of religious circles; as "a good man, intelligent, capable of loving"; as delicately respectful of the religious convictions of Paulo's mother.

Freire's mother, Edeltrudis Neves Freire, is from Recife. Freire describes her as "catholic, sweet, kind, just . . ."; "living and suffering, trusting unceasingly

in God and in his kind love." [4]

Freire is married to Elza Maia Costa Oliveira, also
of Recife. She was a grammar school teacher and later a
principal. The Freires have five children: Madalena, Cris-
tina, Fátima, Joaquín, and Lutgardes.

Freire's family enjoyed a comfortable economic sta-
tus until the depression of 1929. Reduced to poverty, they
were forced to move to the city of Jaboatao in April of
1931. Although no longer in a position of economic comfort,
Freire's father, a proud man, maintained many of the sym-
bols of his previous status. Young Paulo continued to at-
tend school, although hunger and malnutrition seriously
hampered his school performance. It was in Jaboatao that
Freire lost his father. The physical suffering of hunger
and the humiliation of retardation in school left a pro-
found impression on Paulo. Of these hard and frustrating
years he remembers:

> It was in Jaboatao, when I was ten, that I began to
> think there were things in the world that did not go
> well. And though I was a mere child, I began to ask
> myself what could I do to help men. [5]

At the age of eleven, Freire vowed that if he lived he
would commit himself to the eradication of conditions that
brought hunger to people.

He barely passed his admission exams into secondary
school at the age of 15. At that time, he still spelled
ratón (mouse) with two r's. But at the age of twenty, he
was already enrolled in the School of Law at the Federal

University of Recife. At that time, he had read already
several books in grammatical studies by Portuguese and
Brazilian authors and began to take an interest in the phi-
losophy and psychology of language. To help his older broth-
ers support the family, he taught Portuguese in a secondary
school.

This was a period of disengagement from the insti-
tutional Church for Freire. "I withdrew from the Church
(not from God) for about a year, because of the distance
between life and the sermons preached by priests on Sun-
days . . . ."[6] He returned to the Church mainly through
his reading of the works of Tristan de Atayde. Other au-
thors he read at the time include Maritain, Bernanos, and
Mounier.

In 1944 he married Elza, and Freire considers this
a significant turning point in his life.

> It was precisely after my marriage that I began to take
> a more systematic interest in educational problems. I
> devoted more time to education, to the philosophy and
> sociology of education than to law, a discipline where
> I never surpassed mediocrity.[7]

After he obtained his Licenciate in Law, he had a
brief and distasteful practice in the field. He then joined
the Department of Social Service in Pernambuco and served
as a legal consultant to several workers' unions. As an in-
direct consequence of this work, he began to get involved
in popular education programs for adults in the slums of
Recife, where most of the unions recruited their members.

From 1946 to 1954 he served as Superintendent of the Department of Education and Culture, a division of the Department of Social Service. His first experiences in popular education were integrated into the Popular Culture movement in Recife, a movement organized by the National Union of Students. [8]

Along with his field experiences, Freire continued graduate studies in the history and philosophy of education at the Federal University of Recife. He completed a doctoral dissertation there in 1959, entitled Educação e Atualidade Brasileira.

In 1959, Celso Furtado, then Director of Brazil's National Bank for Economic Development, submitted a report to President Kubitschek. The report was an analysis of the problems of the Northeast and a plan for economic development. The government responded favorably to Furtado's report and erected a new Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast (SUDENE). President Kubitschek appointed Furtado as first Director of SUDENE. Although the new Superintendency was not primarily an educational organization, it did have a Department of Human Resources, and under this Department there was a Division of Education. Through the Division of Education SUDENE provided the institutional framework for Freire's literacy campaigns.

While teaching at the University of Recife, Freire recruited many students as volunteer workers in several

educational projects in the _favelas_ (slums) of Recife and among the peasants of the Northeast.

By the end of the fifties, Freire was ready to launch the literacy campaigns. These started in a small scale in 1961 and excited the interest of the people in the Alliance for Progress program after a very successful experience at Angicos, in Río Grande do Norte, where 300 workers learned to read and write in only 45 days.

President Goulart was even more interested, and his government adopted the Freire method for the national campaign of alphabetization. Between June 1963 and March 1964 courses for the training of coordinators of the "culture circles" [9] were organized in almost all the state capitals. The plan for 1964 included the inauguration of 20,000 culture circles capable of handling 2 million students (30 students in each circle; each circle lasting 3 months.)

The literacy program, in the form in which it was conceived by Freire, came to an end with the military _coup_ that overthrew President Goulart's government in 1964. The equipment used in the culture circles was confiscated and destroyed, including over 20,000 film-strip projectors. Freire was imprisoned in April 1964 and kept in prison for seventy days.

In September 1964 Freire sought refuge in the Bolivian Embassy and left for Chile. There he worked with the

adult education programs of the Frei government. From 1965
to 1968 Freire acted as consultant to the Institute of
Training and Research in Agrarian Reform (ICIRA: Instituto
de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria.) ICIRA
was a government project in collaboration with the United
Nations Program for Development and the United Nations Or-
ganization for Food and Agriculture. The literacy campaigns
conducted as part of ICIRA's program gained Chile recogni-
tion from UNESCO as one of the five countries that had best
dealt with their illiteracy problems.

In 1969 Freire came to Harvard as a visiting pro-
fessor at the invitation of Harvard University's Center
for the Study of Education and Development and of the Cen-
ter for the Study of Development and Social Change.

In February 1970 Freire moved to Geneva, Switzer-
land, to serve as special consultant to the Office of Edu-
cation of the World Council of Churches. Since then, his
main work has been the investigation of educational prob-
lems in Asia and Africa. He is also the Director of the
Institut Oecumenique du Developpement des Peuples (INODEP),
an organization located in Paris, France, to help promote
educational encounters around the problems of development.

Freire has collaborated regularly in seminars with
Ivan Illich at the Intercultural Center for Documentation
(CIDOC: Centro Intercultural de Documentación) in Cuernava-
ca, Mexico. He has also conducted a number of workshops in

the United States between 1970 and 1973.

Freire continues to lecture on educational topics at international conferences and seminars. He is aware of the danger that his educational method be taken as an instant panacea to solve all social problems. According to remarks that he himself has made at several workshops, he is supposed to be working on a new book to "demythologize" his own Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1. The framework for this biographical sketch is taken from Freire's autobiographical remarks in Conscientisation: Recherche de Paulo Freire. Document de Travail (Paris: INODEP France, 1971). I have used the Spanish version of this document, Concientización: Paulo Freire (2a. ed.; Bogotá: Asociación de Publicaciones Educativas, 1973), pp. 15-18 (my translation). Hereinafter referred to as Concientización.

2. For geographical and historical background on Brazil's Northeast, see chapter 2 of John J. DeWitt, "An Exposition and Analysis of Paulo Freire's Radical Psycho-Social Andragogy of Development," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, School of Education, Boston University, 1971. Hereinafter referred to as "An Exposition and Analysis . . . ."

3. Josué de Castro, The Geography of Hunger (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1952).

4. Concientización, p.15 (my translation).

5. Ibid., p. 16 (my translation).

6. Ibid. (my translation).

7. Ibid., p. 17 (my translation).

8. For an excellent summary of these and other educational and social movements of this period which serve as the background for Freire's educational campaigns, see DeWitt, "An Exposition and Analysis . . . ," chapters 2 and 3.

9. "Culture circle" is the term used by Freire to designate his basic educational unit: a group of students with a coordinator to moderate and stimulate discussion.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

Freire has described his method as "conscientiza-
tion," as a "problem-posing pedagogy," as a "pedagogy of
the oppressed," and as "cultural action for liberation."

The method is "conscientization"; it seeks to de-
velop a critical consciousness in the learner, that is, a
capacity to confront reality as transformable and to inter-
vene subsequently in it to effect that transformation. The
method, therefore, is "problem-posing" education as opposed
to "banking education." [1] Reality is presented not as an
unalterable given, impenetrable, dense, but as a problem,
a challenge to be answered by the person in action and re-
flection. The method is a "pedagogy of the oppressed," and
it is worked out with them, not for them. The right of ev-
ery person to be a subject in relationship with other sub-
jects and with the world is explicitly recognized. Since it
calls for the active participation of every person in the
shaping and reshaping of culture and history, the method
is "cultural action for liberation." It invites people to
be creators of culture rather than passive spectators or
willing "consumers" of super-imposed culture.

Freedom from oppression and freedom to create cul-

ture, to name the world through personal and social transformation: these are the goals of the Freire method of education. This freedom is the historical vocation of every human being.[2] It is every person's right to become more and more of a subject, an actor and author of history. It follows that a situation in which any person is prevented from exercising this right is an oppressive situation, a situation of violence. Freire seeks to reach precisely these oppressed people. More specifically, his method arises out of the Latin American context. The subjects Freire has in mind when he talks of the oppressed are the poor and the illiterate of Brazil and Chile, the two countries where his method has been extensively applied. In a literate culture, a situation of illiteracy is, objectively, a situation of oppression, since the illiterate are prevented from even basic participation in the decisions that affect their lives. They are politically, socially, and economically marginal. The discussion that follows presupposes the narrowing down of the term "oppressed" to include primarily the illiterate adults of Freire's pedagogical experiences in Brazil and in Chile.

In the Freire method, the process of education of the illiterate comprises two phases: the literacy training (or "alphabetization") phase and the "post-alphabetization" phase. These two phases are not to be thought of as exclusive of each other. As it will become evident from the de-

scription of the phases, there is a great deal of overlap
between them. The description will enable us to locate the
generative themes within the larger background of Freire's
strategy.

In an area with a high illiteracy rate, the first
educational priority is to initiate a literacy program.
The basic goal of the educational process--freedom from op-
pression and freedom to name the world--is specified during
the first phase of the method as freedom from illiteracy
and as an opening up of the world of the word through the
ability to read and to write. More fundamentally, it is to
earn the right to express one's own ideas, desires, and
goals.

Since the pedagogy of Paulo Freire is a pedagogy
of the oppressed, a pedagogy that is worked out with them
and not for them, literacy training cannot be the imposi-
tion of the educator's words. Freire's criticism of most
literacy programs is that they are thought out, planned,
and executed by the educators, who choose the words, de-
sign, and compose the primers to be used in the literacy
campaign. The illiterate receive passively the "gift" of
literacy from the educator. This traditional approach pos-
tulates absolute ignorance on the part of the illiterate,
ignorance that must be remedied by the "saving" influence
of the educator, who alone knows.

In contrast to this approach, Freire insists on

preserving the dialogical character of the educational process from the very beginning. Once the team of educators, ideally composed of a sociologist, a psychologist, a linguistic analyst, a social worker, an anthropologist, etc., has located an area where literacy programs are needed, its members visit the area and attempt to establish contacts with the people there. They will try to develop a relationship of trust with the people, explaining why they are in the area and emphasizing the need for the active cooperation of the people in the process. This first contact is crucial, and everything hinges on the success of the team in developing a climate of trust.

If this trust and mutual respect can be established, the team of educators will enlist as many of the people as possible in the first step of the process, which consists in an investigation of the "linguistic universe" of the community. This "linguistic universe," the object of the search, is the language of the people, their syntax (that is, the way they construct their thought), their typical expressions. This search takes place during personal visits to the area and is not limited to the words used by the people. The investigators look at the area as a cultural totality; they observe its institutions and organizations (both formal and informal), the behavior of the people at work, at home, in church, the tools they use, the patterns of relationships: boss-worker, man-woman, adult-child.

The search will provide a wealth of information and material for the critical reflection of the members of the team. They come together now to share the results of their observations and to compare notes. In this process they attempt to analyze the cultural totality which functions for them as a code. The interplay of further visits to the area and critical reflection and dialogue on their observations contributes to a more complete perception of the code in its totality and in its analyzed components. This "decodification" process is followed by the selection of existential situations to be presented in graphic form to the people. This "re-codification" is an attempt to give back to the people their own existential situations in objectified form, thus making it possible for them to attain psychological distance from the situation. Perceiving the situation as an object, they rediscover themselves as subjects.

The "re-presentation" of the codifications to the people is done at meetings in the area. Freire calls these meetings "culture circles." A coordinator has the responsibility of presenting the codifications to the people. A codification can be a picture, a diagram, slides, a film, a tape, a dramatization. The function of the coordinator is not reduced to a moderation of the discussion. The coordinator will attempt to present to the people as a problem not only the codified situation but also their own responses to it. This session should be taped. Ideally, two or more

observers, including a psychologist and a sociologist, will be present to register the significant behavior of the participants.

It should be noted here that this process of investigation (decodification by team, codification, decodification by the people) is essentially the same at both the alphabetization and post-alphabetization stages. Whether the goal is alphabetization or a critical analysis of reality, it is imperative that the process actively incorporate the learner as subject and not as object of the educational experience.

In the literacy phase, the illiterate students are invited to bring into the learning process all their wealth of life and experience. Starting with the illiterate's perception of the world, distorted and uncritical as it may be, the educator seeks to pose that perception as a problem and to motivate the students to see their illiteracy in its true perspective, that is, as part of a cultural totality of marginality and dependence, resulting from historical actions of human beings, and capable, therefore, of being transformed by similar historical actions. This motivation is the purpose of the first meetings with the illiterate prior to the actual literacy training.

Freire does not advocate a purely passive role for his coordinators at these meetings. The dialogicity of education demands that the students' word be heard and accept-

ed, but this demand does not limit educators to just the
input from students. Dialogue is not destroyed but fur-
thered if educators introduce themes, perceptions, and
values that are theirs, provided these are not imposed on
the students. These preliminary sessions produced astonish-
ing results in the campaigns in Brazil and in Chile, as
the "ignorant" peasants were able to perceive and discuss
critically crucial concepts such as nature, culture, dia-
logue, and literacy itself from the very first meetings.

The process of alphabetization proper can now be-
gin. The "building blocks" to be used are what Freire calls
"generative words." These words were discovered during the
preliminary phase of investigation into the linguistic
universe of the people. They are called generative because
they can generate other words when broken down into their
component syllables and their respective families. [3] Gener-
ative words are chosen according to four criteria:

1. The criterion of familiarity: they must belong
to the linguistic universe of the community where the cam-
paign is taking place.

2. The criterion of phonemic richness: the greater
or lesser variety of combinations to which the word can
give rise.

3. The criterion of gradualism: the words are ar-
ranged in order of increasing difficulty.

4. The criterion of existential and affective reso-

nance: the capacity of a particular word to elicit emotional involvement from the illiterate.

Freire found that in Portuguese and Spanish he needed only fifteen or eighteen words to obtain, by syllabic composition, the entire vocabulary.[4] Each one of these words is presented to the participants of a culture circle in conjunction with a visualization of a situation that includes a representation of the word under study. The pictorial representation enables the group to launch into a discussion of the existential situations evoked by the word. The word is then presented without the visual aids, and then presented again, this time broken into syllables. Finally, a "discovery card" is presented to the group. This card shows the families of syllables of the word and facilitates an insight into the syllabic nature of the language.

Generative words, then, constitute the program content for the first phase of the education of the illiterate. Received from the people, the words are returned to them in problem-posing dialogue by the educators. Literacy becomes for the illiterate much more than the mechanical memorization of words and phrases presented by a saving elite of educators. It is the restoration to the person of a basic right: the right to say one's own word, to name the world through creative transformation, to enter history as its author and as subject.

Generative themes function in the second phase of

post-alphabetization in roughly the same way as do generative words in the first phase. The investigation of the themes always accompanies--and usually precedes--the investigation of the linguistic universe of the people. The recording of typical expressions of the people of an area cannot fail to reveal at the same time their vision of the world, their dreams and ideals, their ways of perceiving reality and of acting upon it. The object of the investigation, Freire emphasizes over and over again, is not the people, nor their situation. The investigators try to find out, with the people, what is their thought and language and response to the situation in which they live. It is in the relationship between men and the world that the themes are to be found. The themes are not abstract entities that exist in an isolated realm, independent of the human world:

> 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 men them-
> selves; consequently they cannot be apprehended apart
> from men. To apprehend these themes and to understand
> them is to understand both the men who embody them and
> the reality to which they refer. 5

What are then generative themes? Generative themes are concrete representations of many of the ideas, out-looks, [6] hopes, doubts, fears, values, and challenges arising out of human beings' orientations to the world at a given time and place. [7] They represent a certain way of viewing the world and of acting upon it. These representa-

tions are found only in human beings in their relationship
with the world. Themes thus include a subjective as well
as an objective pole. The subjective pole of a generative
theme is a person's perception of reality and the mode of
action flowing from that perception. The objective pole of
a generative theme is the concrete situation which chal-
lenges the person and to which a response is given.

Themes are called generative because " . . . they
contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many
themes, which in turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled." [8]
The investigation in the first phase looked for words that
could generate the entire set of phonemes of the language.
The investigation in the second phase looks for the themes
that can generate an ever more critical perception of real-
ity as a totality.

The themes provide the program content of education
for the follow-up or post-alphabetization stage. They are
received from the people and returned to them as a problem
during the discussions in the culture circles. This dia-
logue between educator and students is mediated by the
objectified situations, and it enables both to sharpen
their perception of the themes and to challenge each other
as they criticize their own perceptions.

If the themes function in roughly the same way as
generative words do, then one would expect to find roughly
similar criteria to guide the search for these themes. Al-

though Freire himself does not make a comparison between generative words and generative themes, it will be helpful to inspect their similarities.

1. Generative themes must belong to what Freire calls the "minimum thematic universe" (or "meaningful thematics") which is the complex of people's visions and aspirations. [9] This criterion corresponds exactly to the demand that generative words belong to the "minimum linguistic universe" of the people in the area.

2. Corresponding to the criterion of phonemic richness for generative words, generative themes are chosen and presented according to the capacity they have to lead to a critical perception of reality. Freire maintains that the thematic investigation is "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." [10] The effort of investigators to follow the unfolding of the themes into other themes and the interplay of opposite or contradictory themes corresponds to the search in the first phase for the words that could be generated from the families of syllables of each generative word. Freire recommends an arrangement of the codifications of the themes into what he calls a "thematic fan." [11] Since it is crucial for the participants to get a sense of totality, the codifications reflecting an existential situation must open up in the direc-

tion of the other themes contained in the situation. People immersed in reality experience great difficulties in moving beyond the stage of just _feeling_ their needs. To help them arrive at a critical perception of the causes of those needs, the coordinator presents to them a codification which is directly related to the felt needs of the group. This codification is called an "essential" codification, since it represents the nucleus of the situation for the participants. After this codification is presented (as a slide, diagram or photo) and discussed, "auxiliary" codifications (representing related themes in the make-up of the totality) are displayed alongside the essential codification. The participants are thus enabled to reach a synthesis of the diverse elements that interact in the situation, and they can begin to emerge from the immediacy of their felt needs.

3. The criterion of gradualism or of increasing difficulty in the presentation of generative words has no exact parallel in the second phase. Freire warns against the introduction of situations that are unfamiliar to the participants and specifies that the thematic nucleus of codifications should not be overly explicit nor overly enigmatic. In the first case, there is no room for decodification and no stimulus for discussion; the presentation can easily degenerate into propaganda and manipulation. In the second case, the decoding process can turn into a

guessing game. [12]

4. Finally, if generative words are chosen according to their capacity to elicit the existential involvement of people, generative themes must fulfill the same requirement of affective and emotional resonance and of existential "weight."

After the themes have been chosen according to these criteria, they are codified and presented to the people at the culture circles for debate and discussion. The process here, as I remarked above, is not different from that used during the literacy stage. The sessions are taped and, along with the notes made by the observers, become a new object for reflection by the members of the team. New themes will have arisen in the debates. Themes not suggested by participants may be introduced by educators in order to highlight better the relationships between themes. Freire calls these "hinged" themes, and, as indicated before, they do not negate the dialogicity of the process.

The themes that have come out of the initial phase of the investigation and of the preliminary discussions at the culture circles are then subjected to an interdisciplinary treatment. Different specialties will converge in the treatment of a theme such as "development," where economists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists will approach the topic from complementary perspectives. The

only caution Freire offers here is that "specialism"--a
narrow, one-sided view or treatment of the themes--is to
be avoided. [13]

The process, ideally, is never-ending. Reality is
constantly changing and so are the participants in the
process. Every formulation of the themes comes back to its
authors as a problem and as the starting point of new in-
sights, refinements, and developments.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , pp. 57-74

2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. For example, the word "tijolo" (brick) is broken down as "ti-jo-lo." The families of syllables are "ta-te-ti-to-tu," "ja-je-ji-jo-ju," and "la-le-li-lo-lu."

4. A sample of Portuguese generative words: favela (slum); chuva (rain); arado (plow); terreno (land); comida (food); batuque (Afro-Brazilian dancing); poço (well); bicicleta (bicycle); trabalho (work); salario (salary); profissão (profession); governo (government); mangue (swamp); engenho (sugar mill); enxada (hoe); tijolo (brick); riqueza (wealth).

5. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 98.

6. The Spanish word here is "concepciones," which the English version of Pedagogy translates as "concepts." "Outlook" seems to be a more adequate translation. "Concept" is synonymous with "idea," and it is difficult to see why Freire would use two words that are not really different in meaning.

7. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , pp. 91-94.

8. Ibid., p. 92, note 19.

9. Ibid., p. 86.

10. Ibid., p. 99.

11. Ibid., pp. 107-110.

12. Ibid., p. 107.

13. Ibid., p. 113.

CHAPTER IV

FREIRE'S VISION OF PERSONS IN SOCIETY

Generative themes are quite central in the pedagogy
of Paulo Freire. They afford a way of bringing together the
central ideas of Freire's educational philosophy. For the
sake of description, I tried to locate the themes in the
context of Freire's two-phase strategy. I will enlarge that
context now to include a more comprehensive statement of
Freire's vision. Such a perspective will validate the af-
firmation about the centrality of the themes and will re-
veal the interconnections with other elements of Freire's
theory.

The goal and supreme value for the human person in
life is humanization. What is humanization for Freire? What
does it mean for a person to become fully human? Humaniza-
tion can be defined as the process of bringing about a sit-
uation in which it is possible for all persons to fulfill
their ontological vocation to become a subject and to engage
creatively and freely with other subjects in the transfor-
mation of the world. This definition calls for some clari-
fication of its terms:

1) Humanization is a process.

Freire does not envision humanization as some ideal

state of things or paradise on earth. It is not a plateau
to be reached, a new status quo to be enjoyed once it is
established. His language leaves no room for doubt: the
goal of the transformative action and struggle of the op-
pressed is to bring about a "new situation, one which makes
possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity."[1] The "new man"
born out of that struggle is no longer oppressor or op-
pressed, but "man in the process of achieving freedom."[2]

2) Of bringing about a situation in which it is
possible for all persons to fulfill their ontological voca-
tion to become subjects.

This part of the definition affirms three things:

a) Every human being has an ontological vocation to
become a subject.

The human condition is one of incompleteness. Among
all incomplete beings, humans alone are aware of their in-
completeness, alone capable of making their actions and
themselves the objects of their reflection. Unlike animals,
human beings are able to decide from within and to set goals
and purposes to their activity. In this way they can tran-
scend the limits imposed on them by their situations. They
can transform the world, perceived as a "not-I," and in
doing so they can transcend their incompleteness. The chal-
lenges presented by the world demand from them reflection,
criticism, ingenuity, choice, organization of responses,
and action in settling upon the most appropriate response

to the situation. All these activities, in bringing about a transformation of the world, create and re-create the person as subject.[3]

b) <u>There</u> <u>are</u> <u>situations</u> <u>that</u> <u>prevent</u> <u>human</u> <u>beings</u> <u>from</u> <u>becoming</u> <u>subjects</u>.

Many people live reduced to the condition of objects. They are deprived of freedom and of a voice in the shaping of their lives. Decisions are made for them. They are politically, economically, culturally, and emotionally dependent on the people that prescribe choices for them. This situation is the result of violence on the part of this latter group. This group of people, the oppressors, have exerted, or at least profited from, violence upon the oppressed and have reduced them to silence, to a role of spectators and victims of history, to a marginal position in society. As a consequence of this violent situation, the oppressed are effectively prevented from entering history as its authors. Freire insists that this situation of oppression dehumanizes not only the oppressed but also the oppressor, though in different ways. The oppressed are dehumanized because they are prevented from becoming subjects of history. The oppressors are dehumanized because, in attempting to reduce the oppressed to <u>things</u> which they can control and possess, they reduce themselves to beings that no longer <u>are</u> but merely <u>have</u>. For the oppressors, "<u>to be</u> <u>is</u> <u>to</u> <u>have</u> and to be the class of the 'haves'."[4] Following

Erich Fromm explicitly, Freire identifies this possessive-
ness toward life and the urge to control and dominate it
as sadistic love, as love of death and not of life.[5]

c) <u>For humanization to be possible, a concrete,
objectively verifiable situation has to be brought to exist-
ence.</u>

Humanization cannot be reduced to an idealistic
process. Important as it is for Freire to help develop a
critical consciousness in people, he insists that a criti-
cal perception of oppressive situations is a necessary but
insufficient condition for their transformation. This word
of caution should be kept in mind before accusing Freire of
idealism, an impression easily obtainable from his writings
due to the emphasis on consciousness-raising. A critical
perception must become a motive for liberating action. A
clear recognition of the right of every person to enjoy
freedom and to become a subject, unaccompanied by any visi-
ble effort to ensure the respect of that right, is a farce.[6]

3) <u>To engage creatively and freely with other sub-
jects in the transformation of the world.</u>

a) <u>To engage creatively and freely.</u>

If humanization as a permanent process is the goal,
freedom is a necessary condition for this process to begin
and an essential ingredient to keep the process going. Free-
dom, like humanization, is not a static thing. It is not
simply freedom from the chains of oppression. <u>It is freedom</u>
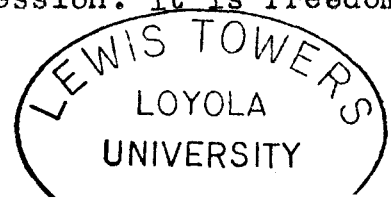
to engage in a process of creation, of permanent transformation of reality. This freedom is constantly being sought and struggled for.

b) With other subjects.

Freire preaches no individualistic gospel of salvation. The recognition of other people as subjects carries in itself a demand that they be treated as such and never manipulated as objects, not even in the interests of their own liberation. The oppressed "cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become men."[7]

c) In the transformation of the world.

Dialogue between persons is always mediated by the world. The transformation of the world is not an absolute end in itself. It is subservient to the permanent humanization of human beings. The praxis of persons, their creating and re-creating of the world, is always for the sake of making possible a world where it is easier to love.[8]

This process of humanization which we have defined takes place in history. Dehumanization, its opposite, is also a historical possibility. Neither is a spontaneous, pre-determined process. Each results from concrete, historical actions of human beings. History is made by the interplay between the creative actions of persons and the effect these actions have upon their creators. By means of their creative activity, human beings make culture, and culture, in turn, conditions their subsequent actions.

Humanization, therefore, demands that certain actions be placed by persons as subjects of history, in order to transform the situations that prevent those persons from becoming subjects.

How can those who are prevented by a situation of oppression from being subjects act as subjects in order to transform that situation? An analysis of this apparent contradiction will give us an insight into Freire's understanding of the process of humanization and its strategy.

A situation of oppression implies the existence of oppressors and oppressed. These two terms are defined by the relationship of oppression that exists between them. The relationship has diverse cultural as well as psychological aspects to it. Culturally, the relationship is articulated in a complex network of social, economic, and political bonds between oppressors and oppressed. Psychologically, the relationship is manifested in terms of emotional dependence, projection, introjection, aggressiveness, and destructive behavior.

The relationship conditions the thought of the people locked into it. Unable to see themselves except in terms of the relationship, both oppressor and oppressed are prevented from perceiving their reality critically. They do not recognize the situation of oppression as a human creation and, consequently, are either unwilling or unable to transform it. This inability takes different forms in the

oppressor and in the oppressed. The oppressed, lacking a
critical perception of reality, engage in magical forms of
action or adopt a fatalist attitude and become passive and
resigned with a situation perceived as unchangeable. For
the oppressor, a change in objective reality will be highly
threatening: it will mean a loss of privileged status. In
both cases there is an absence of critical intervention in
reality.[9]

This lack of intervention by the oppressed raises
the question of means and strategy. How can the relation-
ship of oppression be transformed so that both oppressor
and oppressed can be free to become subjects? Freire answers
that liberation from the bonds of oppression cannot come
from the oppressor.[10] Why? It follows from the analysis in
the previous paragraph that a necessary, though insuffi-
cient, condition for the liberating process to begin is that
the people who are enslaved by the situation be able to
perceive it critically. Freire claims that this critical
perception is impossible for the oppressors qua oppressors.
This impossibility stems from the fact that the oppressors,
attempting to perceive reality, take one of three attitudes:

a) The oppressors recognize the situation of oppres-
sion for what it is, but they realize too well that any
change in the situation would be to their disadvantage. The
oppressors must proceed to rationalize their decision to
maintain the status quo and will appeal to mythification as

a way to block the emergence of the critical consciousness
of the oppressed. In this way, they attempt to domesticate
time and history so that the future will reproduce the pre-
sent and, correspondingly, attempt to domesticate also the
oppressed so that the latter will accept the oppressor's
values. Only those who consciously pursue this domestica-
tion process deserve the name of oppressors.

b) A second possibility is for the oppressors (in
the milder sense now of those who profit from the situation
of oppression without awareness of its dehumanizing aspects)
to want sincerely to do something to alleviate the condition
of the oppressed. But since their perception of that condi-
tion is naive, the action they take will be misguided, no
matter how well-intentioned it may be. They will attempt
to offer salvation to the "sick," "marginal" masses. They
will assume a paternalistic attitude toward the masses and
will often wonder why their generosity is not appreciated
by the oppressed. Freire applies this criticism not only
to well-intentioned welfare programs but also to leftist
sectarians who attempt to carry out a revolution _for_ the
people instead of incorporating the oppressed as actors in
the revolutionary struggle.

c) The third possibility is that the oppressors,
recognizing (as do those in the first group) the situation
for what it is, decide to do something about it and (unlike
those in the second group) recognize and accept the radical

demand that the oppressed be subjects of their own struggle.
The oppressors, then, decide to take sides with the op-
pressed and, in a spirit of true solidarity, make a commit-
ment to struggle with the oppressed. Freire refers to this
conversion as a "rebirth" for the oppressors, who must "die"
as oppressors in order to rise as "new men" in the process
of liberation.[11] If it is true that the oppressor who has
undergone this rebirth can become a genuine revolutionary
leader in the struggle of the oppressed, this development
does not contradict the previous assertion that the oppres-
sor does not liberate the oppressed. One reason is that,
in going through their rebirth, the oppressors cease to be
oppressors. Also, to the extent that the oppressors succeed
in "shedding" the oppressor consciousness, they will begin
to acknowledge the oppressed as subjects and will reject
any attempt at manipulation.

Whatever the social origin of the leaders of the
process of liberation, it is the capacity to respect the
oppressed as subjects that authenticates their leadership
as truly revolutionary.[12] The crucial difference between
populist[13] manipulation and revolutionary leadership is not
that the former takes initiatives in the political struggle
and the latter does not. The difference is rather that pop-
ulist leadership perpetuates dependence through conscious
or unconscious manipulation, while revolutionary leadership
is determined from the outset to "die" as giver of libera-

tion and to "be born" again as partner of the oppressed.[14]

So far, this summary of Freire's over-all vision
reads more like a political pamphlet than like an educa-
tor's philosophical position. Where does education fit into
the struggle for humanization? Freire's position can be
summarized in the form of the following theses:

a) A political action for liberation must be edu-
cational in character.

b) Education is never a neutral process: it is ei-
ther an instrument of domestication or a process of libera-
tion.

The meaning of the first thesis should be clear
from the preceding analysis. If the aim of the political
struggle is humanization and liberation from oppression, if
liberation is possible only when the oppressed intervene
critically in changing their situation, then political lead-
ers must seek to explore with the people the objective sit-
uation of oppression as well as the possible courses of ac-
tion aimed at transforming the situation. That inquiry into
the objective situation is certainly educational in charac-
ter.

The second thesis requires some clarification. "Ev-
ery educational practice presupposes a concept of man and
the world."[15] That is to say, a pedagogy is always, cons-
ciously or unconsciously, built on an anthropology. The vi-
sions of human beings are widely ranging: materialism, ide-

alism, subjectivism, individualism, collectivism. Freire

attempts to simplify this maze of different and conflicting

opinions and chooses to examine two positions which are

extremes in a continuum. Those extremes are subjectivism

and objectivism. For subjectivism, the world is the crea-

tion of human consciousness. For objectivism, consciousness

is a mere copy or reflection of reality. In the case of sub-

jectivism, if one wants to change the world, all one has to

do is change the consciousness of persons. In the case of

objectivism, any change in objective conditions will result

automatically in a corresponding change in consciousness.

Both of these extremes forget that consciousness is always

in interaction with the world. By establishing a false di-

chotomy between subject and object and emphasizing almost

exclusively one to the neglect of the other, they make it

impossible to effect a true transformation of the world.

The educational practices that flow out of these extreme

visions will in the end coincide in that they will strive

for the adaptation of persons to reality. By leaving social

structures and objective conditions untouched, subjectivism

winds up attempting to make persons conform to either ac-

tual or imagined reality. By ignoring the role of subjectiv-

ity in the transformation of the world, objectivism seeks

to manipulate consciousness into conformity with changed

conditions.[16]

An education whose primary function is to adapt per-

sons to reality will serve, willingly or unwillingly, the status quo. If the status quo is one of oppression and domination, education becomes an instrument for the domestication of human beings and contributes to the perpetuation of the dehumanizing situation.

In contrast to these extremes of subjectivism and objectivism, Freire views the person and the world as a dialectical unity. Subjectivity and objectivity cannot be dichotomized. They exist in a dialectical relationship to each other. Human beings act upon the world, and the products of their actions condition them in turn. An educational practice flowing from this view of the person will attempt not to adapt human beings to reality, but rather to integrate them into a constant process of creation and re-creation of that world. So conceived, education is not really distinct from humanization and liberation. It is also easy to see how education and politics complement and demand one another. I will come back in a later chapter to explore other dimensions of this relationship between politics and education. At this point, it can be said that Freire's pedagogy implies an anthropology, and that both demand politics.

Education, for Freire, is a necessary and permanent constituent of the process of humanization. It is not an absolute value nor an end in itself. As every other element in Freire's theory, education is subordinated to the supreme

value of humanization. It is, however, the most important

means in the process.[17] The practice of education demands

faithfulness to the ideal of humanization outlined above.

The structure of the educational process is determined by

Freire's anthropology, which views the human being as:

a) An incomplete being who is aware of that incompleteness;

b) A being situated in space and time and yet capable of transcending spatio-temporal limitations;

c) A being with an ontological vocation to become a subject, a vocation that can be realized only in solidarity and in dialogical relationship with other subjects.

Education will be authentic to the extent that it respects this fundamental anthropological vision.

> Education, to be valid, must take into account simultaneously man's ontological vocation--vocation to be a subject--and the conditions in which man lives: in a particular place, at a given time, in a definite context.
> More exactly, for education to be a valid instrument, it must help man to become a subject by building upon everything that constitutes his life.[18]

Education attempts to integrate persons into their

concrete situation. It integrates by challenging persons to

arrive at a critical perception of the situation by means

of reflection. Persons make themselves and their relation-

ships with the world the objects of their critical reflec-

tion.

> Man becomes a subject by reflecting on his situation,
> his concrete environment. The more he reflects on that
> concrete reality, the more he "emerges," fully conscious

and committed, ready to intervene in reality in order
to change it.[19]

The reflection of persons upon their situation in
the world leads them to discover themselves as beings of
relationships: with the world of nature, with other sub-
jects, with their Creator. It is through these relationships
that persons constitute themselves as subjects. Animals do
not establish relationships with the world nor with each
other. They are beings of "contacts,"[20] which are determined
exclusively by instinctive endorsement. The world acts for
them as support and stimulus only. Human beings, on the
other hand, are at least potentially free to choose their
responses and follow alternative courses of action. Their
environment is truly a "world," a "not-I." Their situation
is not merely stimulating; it is also problematic, challeng-
ing.

Freire seems so concerned with stressing the dis-
tinction between human beings and animals that he conceives
of the relationships of persons with the world almost ex-
clusively in terms of conflict and struggle. Nature opposes
persons and constantly challenges them. Even relationships
with other persons have this conflicting character:

> The relationships of man with other men and with social
> structures are also conflicting relationships to the
> extent that man is continually tempted to reduce other
> men to the status of objects, of things to be used for
> one's own advantage.[21]

In these relationships, persons respond constantly

to the challenges of their reality. These responses trans-
form the world and transform also the persons that make
them. This transformation of persons occurs in two ways.
First, through the process of reflecting, weighing alter-
natives, choosing a path of action, organizing means to
carry it out, and executing plans, persons are actually
becoming subjects. Secondly, the products of human activity
(understanding "products" in the widest possible sense)
come back to condition and determine future actions of hu-
man beings.

All these products of human activity constitute
culture. Culture is the result of human praxis over nature.
Since this praxis is always the praxis of concrete human
beings who can build upon the achievements of others, who
can foresee the consequences of their own actions, and who,
therefore, can temporalize their existence, praxis creates
also history.

Given the logical extension Freire assigns to the
concept of culture, it is perhaps easier to see how, in his
view, education and politics are moments in the same strug-
gle. Humanization demands that all persons have access to
culture; that is, that they become involved in the process
of creating and re-creating culture.[22] Since culture extends
to cover the wide range of human praxis upon the world, this
demand is translated as a radical imperative for participa-
tion of all persons in the social, economic, and political

decisions that affect their lives.

As a force that shapes history, education must also take into account the particular juncture in time where human beings must insert themselves. Our epoch witnesses a crucial dilemma for the Latin American societies and other countries of the Third World. As these societies emerge slowly into the world of technological development, they face a choice between modernization and development. By "modernization" Freire means technological development within a relationship of dependence on First World societies. Authentic development includes political, cultural, and economic independence besides technological development.

In his brief work, Cultural Action: A Dialectic Analysis,[23] Freire offers his clearest and most concise statement on this dilemma and on its implications for education.

Latin American societies were born as "beings for another" as a result of the colonization process. Their entire life was a reflection of the colonizing society. The necessary condition for this domination to continue was the creation of a "culture of silence." Only the dominant society could have a voice, and this voice was to be imposed on the colonized. In the name of the superiority of Western culture and the need to evangelize the "natives," the culture of the colonizer was implanted in the new country. At

that stage of development, the Latin American societies were <u>closed</u> societies in a dialectic relationship with the colonizing societies. Freire applies the Hegelian dialectic of Master and Bondsman to interpret the relationship of Latin American societies to Spain and Portugal.

Political independence for the Latin American countries did not mean a resolution of the contradiction between the colonizing societies (as false "beings for themselves") and the colonized societies (as "beings for another"). Political dependence was replaced by economic dependence first upon England and then the United States.

Freire makes it clear that the phenomenon of dependence is not an exclusive characteristic of Third World countries. There are sectors of oppressed people in the First World countries. The difference between them and the oppressed of the Third World is that the latter are twice oppressed: in being members of an object society and in being oppressed by the power elites within the object society.

Technological advances begin to appear in the traditional society. As industry develops, patterns of relationships between members of the society change, and the traditional culture is challenged. Society is "splitting" and enters a phase of transition. This is true mostly of urban areas, since the rural areas in Latin America remain, by and large, as closed or semi-closed areas. A society in a state

of transition experiences a rising demand for political participation on the part of the urban masses. It is important both for the elites of the central societies as well as for the elites of the dominated societies to prevent this process of emergence from disturbing the effective control these elites have enjoyed. The yearning for development must be channelled into modernization as an alternative that preserves the position of both elites. A new style of leadership, populism, comes into existence as a historical response to pressure from the masses. Populism is manipulative in character, although Freire will admit that it does allow for at least an incipient participation of the masses in the political struggle.

The society in transition can follow one of three paths of development: a) its elites can opt for modernization; b) pressure from the masses may lead, through a process of cultural action and/or political revolution, to at least the possibility of an "open" society (defined as a society in process of authentic development); c) faced with the possibility of an open society, the elites may block this development through a military coup as in Brazil and Chile.

Corresponding to these developments in society, there are levels of consciousness. The difference between the levels is to be understood in terms of preponderance, not of exclusivity. "Submerged" or "semi-intransitive"[24]

consciousness corresponds to the closed society. Reality cannot be perceived structurally: the field of perception is restricted, and an understanding of true causality is almost impossible. God, the power of destiny, and fate are blamed for conditions that are the responsibility of human beings. "At this level of consciousness, man's behavior is properly characterized as magical."[25] With the split in society, characteristic of the period of transition, there appears an "emerging" consciousness that begins to be "transitive." At this level, transitive consciousness is naive: it begins to perceive reality in a more objective way, but it retains many of the myths of the culture of silence and reaches for superficial explanations. It is easily manipulated by the dominant elites who try desperately to block the emerging consciousness of the people by an effort of mythification of reality. Thus, the naive transitive consciousness can degenerate into an irrational, fanatic consciousness. The latter Freire calls a floating consciousness: falling back into many of the characteristics of the culture of silence and accepting the myths of the ruling class, people are unable to insert themselves critically and decisively in the process of transformation of the world. Instead, they become a floating group, enslaved to the demands of the system for efficiency and conformity. But naive transitive consciousness can also develop into a critical consciousness, a prerequisite and necessary condition for the

establishment and preservation of a truly open and democratic society.

The correspondence between the levels of consciousness and the stages of society is not to be understood deterministically. There exists rather a dialectical relationship between a particular stage in society's development and its corresponding level of consciousness. Freire borrows here from the analysis of Louis Althusser to explain this relationship in terms of the dialectic of "overdetermination."[26]

The infrastructure and superstructure of a society are related dialectically. The economic infrastructure determines the superstructure to a large extent, but a change in the former does not necessarily result in a change in the latter. As a society moves from the stage of a closed society into the period of transition, the consciousness of the people may still retain many of the characteristics of the "semi-intransitive" level. In this case, the superstructure has "overdetermined" the infrastructure: people continue to behave as if the infrastructure had not changed at all. It is important for the educator, Freire warns, to keep this phenomenon in mind when dealing with members of the oppressed classes who, even when emerging into a more transitive level of consciousness, may still harbor many of the magical attitudes of earlier levels. It is equally important for the revolutionary leader to remember that many

of the myths of the old order prevail even after the triumph of the revolution, and the internalized image of the oppressor is still harbored in the oppressed. Hence the requirement again that the revolutionary struggle be thoroughly educational in character, allowing the oppressed to discover the oppressor within themselves and cease to be "dual" beings.

The goal, then, of the educational process that seeks to bring about an open society is to lead people to arrive at the level of consciousness that corresponds to that society. Conscientization, the raising of consciousness to a critical level, is, then, the goal of education.

Consciousness is critical when it can disengage itself from the situation and look at that situation as a problem and not as an insurmountable barrier; when it can perceive reality as a whole and the elements of a situation in their true perspective and in their objective causal relationships with the totality.

To the extent that the situations in which human beings find themselves cease to be for them "dense" and impenetrable, to that extent it will be possible for them to engage in action to transform the situations. These "limit-situations"[27] are seen in this awakening critical perspective as capable of transformation. Persons involved in them perceive their problematic character and are challenged to place acts that negate and overcome the situation.[28]

Limit-situations do not have in themselves a character of hopelessness. This character comes rather from the fatalistic attitude persons take toward them. In themselves, limit-situations are "not the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where possibilities begin."[29]

The acts through which persons respond to the challenge of the situation are called "limit-acts." These acts aim at making viable the opposite of the limit-situation: a new situation that appears to the actors as an "untested feasibility."[30]

Education attempts to integrate persons into their concrete situations so that they can transform these situations. Since persons must engage in the transformation freely, education must begin with the students' perception of their situation, even if that perception is naive.[31] Attempting to think for the people leads to domestication or at least to manipulation. Any attempt to bestow critical perception on the people as a gift will keep them in the condition of objects of history rather than its subjects.

For people to become subjects of history, they must see critically their objective situation as well as their own original, naive perception of it. It is here, in this capacity of human beings to "split their consciousness" by making themselves the objects of reflection, that we find the evidence for the existence of generative themes.[32]

Themes exist "because men are capable of creating their own
world, a world of specific, historical, cultural situations,
or climates, that delineate the profiles of epochs."[33]

Freire's discussion of the stages in a society's
development implies this notion of "epochs" or "epochal
units."[34] Although he never defines exactly an "epochal
unit," he does give some indications of what he means by
the term. For example, the period of transition in Latin
American societies is such an epochal unit. This epochal
unit is characterized by the emergence of the popular clas-
ses and by the phenomenon of populist leadership. It is
further characterized by the dramatic choice between modern-
ization and true development. In the case of Brazil, the
military take-over of 1964 would represent the beginning of
a different epochal unit. Each epochal unit is characterized
by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and
challenges of the people in that epoch. "The concrete rep-
resentation of many of these ideas, values, outlooks, and
hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede man's full hu-
manization, constitute the themes of that epoch."[35]

Here Freire brings together the two closely related
ideas of themes and epochs. If persons are to be subjects
of history, they must perceive critically the themes of
each epoch. A critical perception of the themes implies a
critical perception of the limit-situations, and this per-
ception was seen to be an indispensable requirement for the

transformation of those situations. A failure to recognize the themes of an epoch or a distorted perception of them will lead to inauthentic forms of action, and, as a consequence, persons will be the objects of historical processes.

A critical perception of the limit-situation involves a recognition of the "untested feasibility" that lies beyond the situation. This untested feasibility has meaning only to the extent that perceiving subjects engage in concrete action to bring the new situation about. Every theme has a task associated with it. These tasks require limit-acts.[36] Because a limit-situation implies an antagonistic relationship between those who benefit from the situation and those who are oppressed by it, the tasks of these two groups of persons will also be antagonistic in character. For the oppressors, the limit-situation is an advantageous situation to be maintained at all costs, and the untested feasibility is a threatening limit-situation which must not be allowed to materialize. For the oppressed, on the other hand, it is the maintenance of the limit-situation that is not only threatening, but actually an assault on their dignity as human beings.

As the antagonism between these contradictory positions deepens, there is a tendency on the part of the oppressors to mythicize both the themes and reality. These myths foster a climate of irrationality and sectarianism

that deprives themes of their true significance, and irrationality itself becomes the predominant theme of that epochal unit. This irrationality is opposed by the theme of critical consciousness and its implied task of conscientization.

There are many dimensions to the conflict and strife between themes or, to be more precise, to the strife of human actors as they take conflicting positions. A critical analysis of the situation of oppression reveals that oppression and domination occur at different levels: international, national, regional, local. Accordingly, we find that epochal units are articulated into a diversified range of units and subunits, and the themes associated with them are likewise "located in concentric circles moving from the general to the particular."[37] At the broadest possible level of epochal units, themes are found of a universal character. Freire identifies the theme of _domination_ (with the theme of _liberation_ as its opposite and as objective to be reached) as the fundamental theme of our epoch. At the other end of the spectrum, the end of most particularity, Freire prefers to talk about "subjects" rather than themes. Following a distinction made by Professor João Coutinho, a teaching colleague at Harvard, Freire refers to a person's isolated perception of a vital necessity as a "subject."[38] For example, a topic relating to better cultivation of the land could be a subject whose theme would be the socio-eco-

nomic development of the country. The criterion to differentiate a subject from a theme seems to be whether the perceiving persons are able to grasp the relationship of their more immediate need to the larger context of their reality. Freire does not enlarge on this theme-subject distinction, but he seems to imply here that one has themes only when one can perceive immediate situations in relation to national projects. This restriction seems to contradict his statement in Pedagogy that themes can be located in concentric circles (thus allowing for perception of themes at a local level) and also that themes may be perceived in isolation from other themes.[39]

Summary

Education is the practice of freedom and an indispensable requirement for the initiation of human beings into the process of humanization. This process is made possible when human beings are able to intervene critically in reality. Education seeks to mediate this intervention by raising the level of consciousness of the people to the point where they can perceive their situation structurally, that is, when they can recognize the objective causes of that situation. This critical perception is unattainable outside of action upon reality.

Educators who engage in education for liberation recognize that the whole educational process must be adequate to the goal sought. The content and methods of educa-

tion must respect the ontological vocation of human beings to be subjects, help them to realize their potential to transform the world and their capacity to establish relationships of reciprocity with other persons and with God, and enable them to enjoy their right to be creators of culture.[40] Hence the need to find the content of liberating education in the generative themes of the people, investigating those themes by means of a dialogical and problem-posing methodology.

Generative themes, received from the people and submitted to the critical analysis of both educators and people, form the backbone of the educational process. The centrality of the themes in Freire's pedagogy derives from the fact that they are the content and program of education and from their being the locus where Freire's axiology, philosophical anthropology, epistemology, and theory of learning come together to complement and illumine each other.

In this chapter, I have attempted to summarize Freire's vision of humanization and the place of education in this process. The summary provides a more adequate framework to discuss now, in more detail, the generative theme.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , p. 32 (italics mine).

2. _Ibid._, pp. 33-34 (italics mine).

3. _Ibid._, pp. 87-89.

4. _Ibid._, p. 44.

5. _Ibid._, pp. 45-46. For Fromm's treatment of "biophilic" and "necrophilic" orientations, see Erich Fromm, _The Heart of Man_ (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), chapter 3.

6. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , p. 35.

7. _Ibid._, p. 55.

8. _Ibid._, p. 24.

9. _Ibid._, p. 37.

10. _Ibid._, p. 32.

11. _Ibid._, p. 47.

12. For Freire's most articulate statements on revolutionary leadership, see _Cultural Action for Freedom_ (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review and Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1971), Part II, pp. 42-52. Hereinafter referred to as _Cultural Action for Freedom_.

13. For a good analysis of populism, see Francisco Weffort's Introduction to Freire, _La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad_ (Santiago, Chile: ICIRA, 1969), pp. 17-39.

14. Paulo Freire, "The Political Literacy Process-- An Introduction," unpublished manuscript translation of an article prepared for publication in the _Lutherische Monatshefte_, Hannover, Germany, Oct., 1970.

15. Freire, _Cultural Action for Freedom_, p. 5.

16. For Freire's clearest and most concise statement

on the problem of subjectivism and objectivism, see <u>Cultural Action: A Dialectic Analysis</u> (Cuernavaca: CIDOC Cuaderno No. 1004, 1970), pp. 2/1-2/6.

17. Denis E. Collins, "Two Utopians: A Comparison and Contrast . . . , p. 111.

18. <u>Concientización</u>, p. 37 (my translation).

19. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 38 (my translation).

20. Freire, <u>Cultural Action: A Dialectic Analysis</u>, p. 1/5.

21. <u>Concientización</u>, p. 40 (my translation).

22. Paulo Freire, "Cultural Freedom in Latin America," in <u>Human Rights and Liberation of Man in the Americas</u>, ed. Louis M. Colonnese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), pp. 162-179.

23. See chapter 4, pp. 4/1-4/18.

24. "Semi-intransitive" is a metaphorical term used by Freire to describe a level of consciousness where persons are so immersed in their situation and so unable to distance themselves from it that they cannot act upon it to transform it.

25. Freire, <u>Cultural Action: A Dialectic Analysis</u>, p. 4/10.

26. Louis Althusser, <u>For Marx</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 87-128. Hereinafter referred to as <u>For Marx</u>.

27. Freire, <u>Pedagogy</u> . . . , p. 89.

28. <u>Ibid.</u>,

29. Alvaro Vieira Pinto, <u>Consciência e Realidade Nacional</u> (Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1960), Vol. II, p. 284, quoted in Freire, <u>Pedagogy</u> . . . , p. 89.

30. Freire, <u>Pedagogy</u> . . . , p. 92.

31. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 100.

32. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 87.

33. Paulo Freire, "Education as Cultural Action," in

Conscientization for Liberation, ed. Louis M. Colonnese
(Washington: Division for Latin America, United States Cath-
olic Conference, 1971), p. 114. Hereinafter referred to as
"Education as Cultural Action."

34. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 91.

35. Ibid.,

36. Ibid., p. 92.

37. Ibid., p. 93.

38. Freire, "Education as Cultural Action," p. 117.
"Subjects" is used here with a different connotation from
that in the rest of the paper. Here it means "topic," not
"person."

39. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , pp. 93-94.

40. Concientización, pp. 42-43 (my translation).

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF GENERATIVE THEMES

1. The Problem of Evidence.

Freire addresses the problem of evidence with respect to generative themes before he discusses their nature and structure. It is difficult to understand why he does this since it makes little sense to ask whether something exists when you do not know what it is that you are looking for.

A possible explanation for this fact could be that the third chapter of Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a combination, revision, and enlargement of two articles written during Freire's work in Chile. In the first of these articles, entitled "Investigation and Methodology of the Investigation into the Generative Theme," Freire explains how the educator goes about discovering generative themes and treating them pedagogically. In the second article, entitled "On the Generative Theme and the Thematic Universe," Freire provides a more detailed analysis of themes and their nature.[1] It is at the beginning of this second article that he discusses the evidence for the existence of generative themes. In the present form of the articles, however, this section on evidence looks awkward and out of place.

In defense of Freire, I will admit that his consideration of evidence, although strange from a logical point of view, does open up into a discussion of the nature of generative themes. For this reason, I have respected Freire's arrangement in my own analysis.

Generative themes are not an arbitrary creation nor a working hypothesis to be verified. One could apply the Carthesian method of critical and systematic doubt and question the objectivity of these themes. Freire, however, replies that

> it does appear possible to verify the reality of the generative theme, not only through one's own existential experience but also through a critical reflection on the men-world relationships and on the relationships between men implicit in the former.[2]

Freire's strategy to convince the reader of the reality of generative themes is the following:

a) There is a peculiarly human way of relating to the world as indicated by a comparison and contrast between human beings and animals.

b) The most significant difference between them is that human beings can "distance" themselves from the world and objectify it in thought and language.

c) Through the objectification of the world in thought and language, human beings give expression, also in language, to their orientation in the world.

d) Generative themes are then defined as the expression and exteriorization of the person's vision of the

world.

One may object that what we have here is evidence by definition. The objection is justified. All Freire is doing is directing our attention to the specifically human realm of language to discover there the richness, the significance, the plurality, the transformation, and historical composition of the themes as the expression of the human mode of being in the world.[3]

Freire's emphasis on language is understandable in light of his background in the philosophy of language, which he pursued prior to his involvement in the literacy campaigns in Brazil.

2. The Nature and Structure of Generative Themes.

A generative theme is a concrete representation of ideas, values, outlooks, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede man's full humanization in a given historical epoch.[4]

A. A Generative Theme.

The word "theme" does not present too many difficulties. As used by Freire, it means a topic of conversation. As such, a theme's function is to mediate dialogue between human beings. It is the content or subject matter of dialogue.

The "generative" nature of the themes will be discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter.

B. **A** concrete representation.

1) First of all, a theme is a representation of something, an expression of some aspect of reality.[5] A representation of reality is possible only for a being who can establish some distance (in a psychological sense) from the reality which is present to that being. It presupposes the capacity to recognize reality as a "not-I" and, consequently, the capacity to recognize the "I" standing before reality. A representation implies also the existence of someone to whom reality is represented. This "someone" is not necessarily distinct from the being who represents reality. Most often, however, the representation is done for the sake of somebody else. It can be argued that even when the recipient of the representation is identical with its producer the representation necessarily involves a third party. This will become evident as we explore further the nature of this representation.

2) What is the nature of the representation? The representation, according to Freire, is the exteriorization of the vision of the world that persons have.[6] From the context (Freire is here talking about the decodification process that takes place in a culture circle), the exteriorization of persons' views of the world and of their ways of thinking and acting upon it is done by means of language.

3) To investigate the generative theme, according to Freire, is to investigate the thought-language of per-

sons in reference to their concrete situation. Thought and language are intimately united: it is impossible to have dialogue without critical thinking, and critical thinking appears only in the process of dialogue.[7] Quoting Chomsky's _Cartesian Linguistics_, Freire reminds us that mastery of language leads to an expansion of thought and feeling.[8] During the initial investigation phase into the linguistic universe of the community, the members of the team pay special attention to the syntax of the people, which, for Freire, is the way in which the people construct their thought.[9]

4) Given the intrinsically social character of language, a representation of reality that takes place "only" in thought is possible only because of concepts and relationships developed through communication with other subjects by means of language. So even when I am "thinking to myself" I am not alone; there are others "with me" through our common language.

5) The representation is concrete. By concrete Freire does not mean simply that the representation refers to actual events or situations. Given the dialectical character of his thought, the use of the adjective "concrete" modifying "representation" suggests a distinct similarity with the Hegelian "concrete universal."

In the Hegelian dialectic, concrete universals are the most adequate type of concepts and the proper components of the dialectical method.

They [concrete universals] include the individual dif-
ferences explicitly and actually, along with the common
features of things. They are formed not by evacuating
the field of individuals but by assuming it into a ra-
tional unity. . . . The concrete universal expresses
the rationality of being, and hence signifies the uni-
ty-in-difference and the connectedness of actual beings.
The more the togetherness of things is comprehended,
the more adequate is the concrete universal. There are
various grades of such concepts, based upon mounting
degrees of concreteness and comprehensiveness. Ulti-
mately, however, every concept, on this side of the ab-
solute idea itself, bears a certain trace of abstract-
ness or one-sidedness. There is only one unconditional-
ly adequate, concrete universal: the absolute or divine
idea, which is one with the absolute mind in the state
of self-possession.[10]

Themes are not concrete universals in the Hegelian

sense: there is no absolute spirit in Freire's ontology.

Consequently, human beings are not reduced to mere moments

in the development of the Absolute Mind. Freire is no ide-

alist in a philosophical sense. However, Freire's themes

share many of the attributes of concrete universals:

a) Being the exteriorization of the visions of the

world that human beings, always tied to a specific here and

now, have, the themes include the differences in situations

along with the features those situations have in common

with others. For example (my example, not Freire's), the

theme of education will include, for the people of a par-

ticular area, many needs, hopes, and challenges that are

quite peculiar to that area, as well as more universal as-

pirations and needs which are common to people in different

areas.

b) To the extent that a theme captures more and

more of the totality in which people of an epoch live, more
and more of the "togetherness" and interrelationships of
things, it will be more adequate as a representation of
reality and as a motivation to action.

c) There are also various grades of themes, based
upon their degree of inclusiveness and comprehensiveness.

d) In Hegelian terms the one unconditionally ade-
quate concrete universal is the absolute or divine idea.
For Freire, the only adequate perception of reality is a
critical perception of its totality. The more comprehensive
one's view of the whole of reality, the more critical one's
knowledge will be.

e) The abstractness or one-sidedness of concrete
universals accounts for the dialectical movement that
strives to overcome that abstractness. Freire's themes also
call forth their dialectical opposites. I will return to
the dialectical conflict between the themes in a later sec-
tion.

C. Of ideas, values, outlooks, and hopes.

The "something" that is represented is a cluster of
cognitive and affective responses of human beings to their
world. Some of those responses are specifically listed by
Freire in the definition, but I doubt that he intends to
give us an exhaustive list. His concern seems to be to em-
phasize that it is the whole person that is engaged in the
orientation to the world.

D. As well as the obstacles which impede man's full humanization.

The wording in Freire's definition is ambiguous. Two interpretations are possible:

1) The themes are representations of ideas, values, outlooks, and hopes and a representation of the obstacles which impede full humanization.

2) The themes consist also of the obstacles themselves.

Freire's formulations tend to support now one, now the other of these alternative interpretations. Sometimes, his formulation even seems to imply a more objectivistic variation of the second interpretation, one which would identify the themes with just the objective situations themselves. Let us take a look at some of Freire's own statements in Pedagogy.

In support of the second interpretation:

> To apprehend these themes and to understand them is to understand both the men who embody them and the reality to which they refer.[11]

At times, Freire's language seems to imply what he himself criticizes as the mistaken notion that themes "exist, in their original objective purity, outside men--as if themes were things."[12] For example:

> 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 men are still submerged.[13]

If individuals do not perceive a generative theme,

then it follows that themes are there, outside, ready to be perceived. If the themes can be perceived in a distorted way, then there must be a "right" way of perceiving them, which means that they must exist in "objective purity, outside men."

In spite of the above-mentioned examples, I think that Freire would reject this extreme interpretation to which his own lack of precision gives rise.

A stronger case can be made for the position that themes consist also, though not exclusively, of the objective situations to which people respond. First of all, the text does allow for such an interpretation. Secondly, if to understand the themes is "to understand both the men who embody them and the reality to which they refer,"[14] then the themes must include both the affective and cognitive responses of persons to situations and the situations themselves. Thirdly, given the dialectical character of Freire's thinking, one would expect to find this character reflected in his understanding of the themes. In this perspective, the themes would be the result of the dialectical relationship between the perceptions of human beings and the situations which they perceive.

Against this interpretation, however, the following passage could be adduced:

> Actually, themes exist in men 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 men have of this fact, and the generative theme.[15]

Freire's clearest statement on the subject also seems to militate against the objectivist interpretation:

I must re-emphasize that the generative theme cannot be found in men, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from men; much less in "no man's land." It can only be apprehended in the men-world relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate man's thinking about reality and man's action upon reality, which is his praxis.[16]

Opting for the interpretation that sees themes as linguistic representations of affective and cognitive responses and of the situations which elicit such responses does not mean that themes are entirely subjective. Thought and language exist always in reference to reality. The danger in the objectivist interpretation is that investigators may easily emphasize more the study of the situations neglecting the apprehension of people's perceptions of that situation.

E. In a given historical epoch.

Themes are not timeless entities. They are as historical as the human beings who incarnate them.[17] The fundamental theme of our historical epoch is the theme of domination. Why this is true of our epoch and not of other epochs in history is never explained by Freire. As I indicated in the last chapter, the probable meaning of that affirmation is that the Third World's choice of modernization (which implies dependence upon metropolitan societies) can-

not lead to authentic liberation. Since many Third World
countries are faced with the modernization-development di-
lemma, Freire wants to emphasize that there is an urgent
need to recognize the possibility of domination and the
challenge toward liberation as the key tasks of our epoch.

3. The Generative Function of the Themes.

Freire calls the themes "generative" because of the
possibility they contain of unfolding into other themes
which call for new tasks to be fulfilled. A first approxi-
mation to the meaning of the adjective "generative" as
applied to the themes thus reveals two distinct, though
related, "effects" of the "generative" function:

1) Themes can generate other themes.

2) Themes can generate new tasks, that is, they can
generate action.

As indicated in the descriptive presentation of
Freire's method, the word "generative" is used by him first
as applied to words. In the literacy phase of the education-
al process, the members of the team seek to identify and
select, from the linguistic universe of the people, the
most appropriate "generative words." These words, fifteen
to eighteen in number, can generate the entire vocabulary
of the language (in Spanish and Portuguese.) When each word
is broken down into syllables and each syllable is present-
ed with its "family," the learners can combine these sylla-
bles in different ways to "generate" other words.

In what sense are themes "generative"? It seems to me that although Freire himself sets up a parallelism between generative words and generative themes as corresponding to the two phases of the educational process, a closer analogue for the concept of generative themes might be found in the notion of a generative grammar. It may be reasonably assumed that Freire is familiar with the work of Noam Chomsky, since he quotes Chomsky in several places. I must admit I have only a very superficial acquaintance with Chomsky's linguistic theories, and to that extent my attempt to identify Freire's use of the term "generative" as a metaphor drawn from Chomsky's linguistic theory is open to the charge of risking serious oversimplification. Fully acknowledging that limitation, I think it will be worthwhile to try to get some understanding of Freire's metaphorical use of the term "generative" by looking at Chomsky's usage of the term as applied to grammar.

In _Aspects of a Theory of Syntax_, Chomsky defines a generative grammar as "a system of rules that in some explicit and well-defined way assigns structural descriptions to sentences."[18] A generative grammar, therefore, attempts to describe the structure of a language, basing this description on actual utterances by native speakers/hearers of that language. Although essentially descriptive, a grammar nonetheless reflects the "intrinsic competence" of an idealized native speaker/hearer. By "intrinsic competence"

is meant the knowledge of the language and of its structure that the idealized performer possesses. That knowledge is reflected in the capacity of the native speaker to produce and to understand indefinitely many new sentences.

According to Lyons,[19] the term "generative grammar" has two possible senses in Chomsky's usage:

1) The grammar is generative in the sense that it "projects" any given set of sentences upon the larger, possibly infinite set of sentences that constitute the language being described: "it is this property of the grammar that reflects the creative aspect of human language."[20]

2) The grammar "generates" the set of all sentences in the language by means of a precise specification of the rules of the grammar and the conditions under which they operate.[21] In this sense, the term "generative" is closest to a mathematical usage.

Freire's use of the term "generative" appears to be much closer to the first rather than to the second sense of Chomsky's usage. Freire begins with an examination of actual linguistic utterances which reflect the themes of the people. After collecting a prudentially representative sample of these utterances and submitting them to a process of discussion and analysis, he makes a tentative determination of the "minimum thematic universe" of that area. This universe or complex of themes functions in roughly the same way as the given set of sentences which a generative grammar uses

in "generating" the set of all sentences in the language:

    a) The linguistic expressions (which reveal the themes) represent "performances" of the people;

    b) These "performances" are perceived by the investigator (the analogue of the professional linguist) as being capable of "generating" (through problem-posing techniques) a more critical perception of the larger thematic universe of an epoch;

    c) The intrinsic competence reflected in the utterances is the capacity of persons to make their own past perceptions the object of a critical reflection, and thus to move from more partial and narrow to more total and comprehensive visions of reality;

    d) That capacity belongs to an idealized performer, the oppressed, who is at least potentially aware of the larger thematic universe and potentially critical in consciousness.

The comparison, however, has its limitations. First, the "intrinsic competence" of Chomsky's idealized hearer/speaker is an actual capacity to produce and understand an indefinite number of new sentences in the language, while, in many cases at least, the capacity of Freire's student to comprehend reality critically is only potential. Secondly, in a descriptively adequate grammar, the set of rules implicit in the actual performances of native speakers/hearers gives rise (through the precise specifications

required by the second sense of "generative") to the set
of all the sentences of the language. Dealing with genera-
tive themes, however, has no such precise and specific set
of rules to guide investigators and people into "accepta-
ble" thematic universes. There are only formal guidelines
and ethical requirements for the investigators; Freire
presupposes a critical attitude in his educators and de-
mands of them a scrupulous respect for the dignity of the
people.

Thirdly, the identification of the idealized per-
former raises questions that are not easily answerable in
Freire's terms. Even though Freire admits the possibility
of people turning away in fear from a critical perception
of reality, only with difficulty does he avoid the charge
of over-optimism, since he seems to assume that people will
respond critically to the posing of their own responses as
a problem. It is even more difficult to avoid the subtle
trap of elitism in the process of making the identification
of the idealized performer. Normal tendencies of the inves-
tigators will be either to identify with those themes that
agree with their own perceptions, or else to try to impose
their own visions and values, projecting them onto the
people.

The problem of identifying the idealized performer
raises still another question: are there themes that are
"non-generative"? Freire affirms that themes always exist.

As we will see later in examining Freire's use of the dialectical method, the expression of the themes in the linguistic discourse of the people may be marked by an attitude of fatalism, in which case the attitude itself becomes a fundamental theme. But even in this extreme case, there is a generative theme, since it is possible to pose this fatalistic attitude to the people as a problem.

The only place where Freire contrasts anything to generative themes is in a passage where he makes the distinction between a theme and a "subject," which he describes as an isolated perception of a vital necessity.[22] There is, then, a representation of people's responses to a situation that leads nowhere, that does not unfold into other themes, that is, in other words, "non-generative." I fail to see how this "subject" is any different from a theme which is perceived in a distorted manner.

What, then, makes a theme "generative"? In Pedagogy, Freire says that he calls the themes "generative" because of the possibility they contain of unfolding into other themes. This possibility exists regardless of how themes are perceived and regardless of what kind of action they evoke. It seems that if Freire wants to hold on to the distinction between themes and "subjects," he would have to admit that there is another "ingredient" that has to be added to the themes before we can describe them as "generative." In making the distinction between themes and "sub-

jects," Freire says that the "ingredient" to be added is the ability to grasp the relationship of the isolated vital necessity to more inclusive national projects. If he says that, then it is difficult to see how themes contain in themselves the possibility of unfolding into other themes.

To acknowledge this difficulty is to recognize, from a different perspective, a fundamental characteristic of the themes, a characteristic of which Freire is well aware. Themes do not exist in isolation from each other; much more importantly, they do not exist apart from the human beings who embody them. What I think needs to be made more explicit than Freire makes it, is that the generative capacity of the themes does not arise only from the perception people have of them. The themes, as linguistic representations of people's visions, values, attitudes, and hopes, need to be re-presented to them as problems, as challenges. The agent that represents is the educator, and themes become generative in the dialogical interaction of educator and learners.

In this perspective, what is really opposed to a generative theme is not a "non-generative" theme, since I think there is no such thing as a "non-generative" theme given Freire's explanation of themes. The opposition lies rather, it seems to me, between two epistemological (and by derivation, educational) views: a theory of knowledge that reduces consciousness to an empty receptacle that is to be

filled with the contents of reality, and which implies or
leads to a "banking" concept of education[23] and a theory of
knowledge that recognizes the dialectical and dialogical
nature of the act of knowing and which calls forth a dia-
logical, problem-posing methodology.[24]

How does the process in which themes become genera-
tive unfold? I will attempt to provide an answer in the
next two sections. In the first, I will examine Freire's
use of the dialectical method, and in the second, I will
examine the nature of the dialogical method employed in the
pedagogical treatment of generative themes.

4. The Use of Dialectic in Freire.

Freire identifies his thinking and his method as
dialectical, and he certainly uses the term "dialectic"
quite frequently. Freire's emphasis on the apprehension of
the totality as a mark of a truly critical perception of
reality; his frequent use of the term "contradiction"; his
use of the word "resolution" (similar in meaning, as we will
see, to the Hegelian Aufhebung): all these indications alert
us to the fact that Freire intends to place himself in the
Hegelian-Marxist tradition of dialectical thinking. Since
themes are the expression of reality, and since they cannot
be found in isolation, but only in dialectical interaction
with their opposites, it is important to try to understand
how Freire uses the dialectical method in relationship to
the themes.

I will approach this task by probing into the meaning of these related terms: "contradictions," "limit-situations," and the term "dialectic" itself.

During the initial phase of investigation, the members of the team, through their curious and sympathetic observation of the area and through their efforts at "breaking down" the codification that the area, as a cultural totality, represents for them, isolate the nuclei of the "principal and secondary contradictions which involve the inhabitants of the area."[25] In an interview conducted at the time that Freire's team was involved in the thematic investigation of one of the asentamientos (provisional settlements for peasants during the process of redistribution of land that was part of the agrarian reform program in Chile), Freire gave a few examples of these "contradictions" in which the peasants were involved: landlord-tenant; technical action-magical action; parents-children; landlord-settler; man-woman; foreman (as representative of the boss)-worker; leadership-masses.[26] In another place, Freire refers to the "teacher-student contradiction."[27] He also speaks of the "principal contradiction in society,"[28] which, although he never explicitly identifies as such, is the contradiction oppressor-oppressed.

By "contradiction" Freire obviously does not mean logical contradiction. On the contrary, in most of the contradictions listed above, the two terms of the contradic-

tion cannot exist nor be conceived apart of each other.
They are totally dependent on each other for their exist-
ence. This is particularly true of the principal contradic-
tion of society, the oppressor-oppressed contradiction. In
his analysis of the relationship between the consciousness
of the oppressor and the consciousness of the oppressed, an
analysis which is almost a paraphrase of the "Master-Bonds-
man" dialectic in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Freire
points out that the oppressor stands in absolute dependence
on the oppressed in order to be able to exist as oppres-
sor.[29]

A "contradiction," in Freire's usage, has always
the connotation of conflict, and conflict, in turn, has as
its prime analogate the reality of social conflict. Even in
relationships of a more personal or individualistic nature,
like the relationships of parental authority or of conjugal
interaction, there is a definite influence of the prevail-
ing patterns of relationships in the larger society. Since
the consciousness of the people is shaped to some extent by
the objective structural conditions of domination in socie-
ty, relationships between parents and children, husbands
and wives, men and women, teachers and students, often re-
flect those structural conditions.[30]

Freire's treatment of contradictions is heavily
influenced by Mao Tse-Tung's essay on the same subject.[31]
A significant difference between Freire and Mao is that

Freire has chosen to identify the two aspects (or poles in
tension) of the principal contradiction in society as "op-
pressor" and "oppressed" rather than as "bourgeoisie" and
"proletariat" as Mao does. In doing this, Freire attempts
to make the principal contradiction of our epoch much more
inclusive. I mentioned before that Freire considers the
theme of domination to be the fundamental theme of our his-
torical epoch. The principal contradiction of this epoch
is, in Marxist terminology, the "dialectical unity of the
opposites" oppressor-oppressed. That contradiction can be
detected at many different levels. The oppressors can be
nations, classes, individuals.

What is the relationship between contradictions and
generative themes? Themes are the expression of reality.
Reality is not only the empirical and the concrete world,
but also the perception that human beings have of the empir-
ical world. Human beings are engaged in relationships of
transformation and recreation with the world, and, mediated
by it, engaged also in relationships with each other. While
the vocation of human beings is humanization, achieved only
through relationships of reciprocity and cooperation, there
appears de facto in history the phenomenon of dehumaniza-
tion: some subjects refuse to acknowledge the right of other
human beings to be subjects, and through violence and coer-
cion reduce those human beings to the condition of objects.
Those who initiate violence become oppressors and try to

perpetuate the situation of violence by different means, ranging from physical force to mystification of the situation. Reality is, then, conflictive, pregnant with struggle and contradictions, the principal contradiction being that which exists between the initiators of violence and the recipients of it. The generative theme reflects the perception people have of the situation in which they are immersed. The concept that links generative themes and contradictions in Freire's perspective is the concept of "limit-situation."

In a structural situation of domination, created by the violence of the oppressors, one finds the principal contradictions of the particular situation along with the secondary contradictions that are shaped and influenced by the principal ones. Those contradictions constitute limit-situations, which are obstacles to the humanization of the people involved in them. As I pointed out before in describing the limit-situations, the people involved in those situations may perceive them as insuperable obstacles, as blind alleys. When the limit-situation is so perceived, the reaction of people to it is characterized by hopelessness, apathy, and despair. Their discourse about the situation will reflect their perception of the different aspects of the situation and of the contradictions involved in it. The fundamental theme, or perhaps, to be more precise, the background to all other themes, is a fatalistic attitude. This background

functions as an enveloping blanket that shrouds the themes

and distorts them.[32] I think that Freire has this fatalis-

tic attitude in mind when he affirms that at times the lim-

it-situations conceal the themes and make an authentic,

critical, historical action by the people almost impossible.

There is a difficulty, however, and it arises from

Freire's own ambiguous statements. At times, his expression

of the relationship between themes and limit-situations

seems to imply that they are identical.

> Any given society within the broader epochal unit con-
> tains, in addition to the universal, continental, or
> historically similar themes, its own particular themes,
> its own limit-situations.[33]

Also, Freire affirms, "the themes both contain and are con-

tained in limit-situations."[34]

The first statement seems to envision a relation-

ship of identity. The second statement is even stronger. If

something both contains and is contained by another thing,

then these two things must be identical. The clearest exam-

ple I can think of is the relationship between sets (collec-

tions of objects or elements) in mathematical theory. If a

set A contains set B (meaning that all the elements in set

B are also in set A), and if set A is contained in set B

(meaning that all the elements in set A are also in set B),

then sets A and B have the same elements, and are, there-

fore, equal, which means that they are really one and the

same set. By analogy, Freire's statement seems to say that

themes and limit-situations are identical. But if that is

the case, it is difficult to see how the limit-situations could conceal the themes.

The ambiguity can be resolved, in my opinion, if we remember two things:

a) Freire does not think it possible that there be no themes, even when people do not give any expression to them. This lack of themes is rather extreme, but even here a theme appears, that of silence as a result of the introjection of the culture of domination. Much more often, though, themes are perceived but in a distorted fashion. In either case, it is not the limit-situation that really conceals the themes, but rather the fatalistic perception that people have of the situation.

b) The ambiguity we find here is closely related to the one we found in analyzing the nature and structure of the themes. In themselves, the themes are constituted in the dialectical relationship between objective situations and human responses to those situations. Similarly, it may be that the "identity" Freire has in mind is identity in the sense of "unity of opposites."

In the perception of contradictions there is an implicit demand for their resolution. The study of contradictions and their resolution is the dialectic. Let us examine now the meaning of "dialectic" in Freire.

Freire identifies dialectical thinking with critical thinking. He opposes dialectical thinking to two epis-

temological errors: subjectivist idealism and mechanicist objectivism. By subjectivist idealism he means an extreme position that would make of consciousness the determinant of reality. For him, this position always ends logically in solipsism. By mechanicist objectivism, he means a position that would make of consciousness a mere copy of reality. While dialectical thinking alone perceives the interdependence (and conflict) between elements in a reality which is seen as process, as becoming, and as giving, both subjectivist and mechanicist thinking distortedly perceive reality as static, as being, and as given. For Freire, as for Marx and Mao, this distorted perception of reality as static is not neutral: epistemology is conditioned by an ideology and serves in turn to legitimate it as well as to influence educational and political practices that have as their goal the adaptation of human beings to the given reality. That ideology is one of domination and oppression. "Ideology" always has a pejorative connotation for Freire. We would expect to find, for the sake of parallelism, an "ideology of liberation" behind the epistemologically correct position of dialectics. Instead, Freire speaks of a "choice" for liberation. Regardless of whether we call this choice an ideology or not, the epistemology it determines influences educational and political practices that have as their goal, not the adaptation of human beings to reality, but their integration to that reality as free and creative agents in order to

transform it.

What is the theory of reality behind Freire's dialectic? We may perhaps best answer that question by contrasting Freire's ontology with that of Hegel and Marx.

For Hegel, the dialectic is inseparable from his doctrine on Absolute Spirit. The dialectic is the only true method in philosophy because it is dictated by the creative struggle of Absolute Spirit, a struggle that has as its goal the overcoming of every form of alienation. Alienation is the result of the Absolute Spirit's objectification of itself.

Marx rejects the Hegelian ontology. The truth of the myth contained in the development of Absolute Spirit is the story of the development of mankind. The successive forms of self-alienation of Absolute Spirit are in reality forms of human alienation. Marx interpreted Hegel as saying that every objectification is alienation, while he himself held that alienation is a form of objectification that occurs only in a given historical setting. In his exposition of Marx's theory of praxis, Bernstein says:

> When man exists in a social situation where the objects he produces and the "system" in which these are exchanged is such that his products gain a mastery over him and dehumanize him, then _this_ form of objectification is alienation.35

While alienation for Hegel is a necessary moment in the life of Absolute Spirit, for Marx alienation has no ontological status. Objectification is a necessary condition

for human material existence; it is a distinctive charac-
teristic of human beings. Alienation, although a historical
occurrence, does not necessarily follow from the process
in which human beings objectify the products of their ac-
tivity.

Praxis, the specifically human form of activity,
becomes the fundamental concept in Marx's philosophy. It is
through praxis that human beings achieve the unification of
opposites in the basic dialectical opposition of conscious-
ness and nature. For Marx, the scope of praxis is primarily
the fulfillment of physical needs, the production of mate-
rial existence. Social relationships arise from the rela-
tions of production that human beings establish. A critical
analysis of the relations of production and of the social
relationships determined by them reveals the alienation of
human beings and also "allows one to envisage a previously
unknown possibility of ultimate human self-actualization."[36]
In other words, the ideal of what it is to be human is re-
vealed in the actual situation. An ongoing criticism of suc-
cessive actual situations constantly reveals new potential-
ities in human nature, potentialities which are actualized
through the praxis.

Freire has not worked out a systematic theory of
reality. Like Marx, he is primarily interested in working
out a theoretical framework that will serve to guide and
illumine the praxis. Freire makes of that praxis the start-

ing point of all critical analysis. Although he is well
aware of the conditioning power of economic and social
structures on the human beings that created them, Freire
emphasizes cultural creativity as the essential component
of human praxis. Even in fulfilling physical needs and in
producing material existence, human beings create culture.
Freire's emphasis on cultural creativity attempts to correct
mechanicist deviations of Marx's thought. Those deviations,
which can be attributed to Marx's overly narrow description
of praxis as primarily a socio-economic activity, make it
difficult to maintain a meaningful distinction between his-
tory and culture on the one hand and nature on the other.
This creative aspect of human praxis is what Freire tries
to discover and exploit in his investigation and treatment
of generative themes.

To see human beings as creators of culture is to
grasp also the responsibility they have in shaping that
creation according to the ideal of humanization. Freire's
ideal of what it is to be human is discovered, like Marx's,
through a critical reflection on the present, concrete, his-
torical situation of human beings. That reflection uncovers
not only the present but also the past (through the perma-
nence of the effects of previous historical actions in the
present situation) and the future as an "untested feasibil-
ity" (the equivalent of Lobkowicz's "previously unknown
possibility.")

In discussing Freire's conception of humanization,
I pointed out that the human ideal is not an abstract, un-
changeable concept, universally applicable in its content
through history. That ideal must include the objective,
historical situation of concrete human beings. Yet, there
must be some criterion that allows one to recognize humani-
zation in a given historical situation. One can recognize
dehumanization only in the presence of an ideal picture of
humanization.

Freire faces the same problem that confronted Marx,
that of discovering in the critical analysis of a situation
not only what is but also what ought to be. There is no
fact-value dichotomy for Freire, which implies that there
is no such thing as a pure fact, and also that there is no
disembodied and abstract value. Critical reflection on an
objective situation reveals the facticity of the situation
and includes at the same time a value judgment passed on
the situation by the reflecting subject.

The view of human beings as radically different
from animals because of their consciousness of themselves
and of their own actions; the realization that the specifi-
cally human mode of action is characterized by plurality
(the possibility of responding to the same objective chal-
lenge in different ways) and by consequence (the anticipa-
tion of different possible results of alternative paths of
action); the possibility of history that arises from the

human capacity of reflecting on those consequences of past actions and of anticipating future results of actions yet to be placed: all these elements are revealed in a critical analysis of the relationship between human beings and the world. More deeply, an analysis of that relationship reveals that human beings anticipate in thought (which is impossible without language) the action they are to undertake, and this dimension of language reveals the essentially social character of human beings. Furthermore, a recognition of the human person as a subject engaged through thought and language in the transformation of the world suggests at least that this recognition is to be extended to all human beings and not just to a few.

Now, Freire maintains that, if a critical analysis of concrete situations in our epoch is performed, then the analysis will reveal that there are persons whose right to be subjects is substantially diminished due to the fact that they are kept in a structure of silence, of dependence, and of domination. They are not authors of their own history, they do not have in themselves the locus of their decisions, but actually some other subjects make choices for them.

All one has, however, at this stage of the process of reflection is a description of a situation. Admittedly, the description is not entirely void of evaluational content, nor entirely free of assumptions. But, at any rate,

the dimension of necessity is lacking. Freire has described what is, but he has not yet shown what ought to be, nor how the ought is arrived at.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to engage in a systematic exploration and critique of Freire's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. I pointed out before that Freire has not worked out a coherent system of philosophy. But, even at the risk of oversimplification and superficiality, I must attempt to present briefly Freire's understanding of the normative character of his ideal of humanization.

Just as Marx assigned no ontological status to alienation, Freire states that dehumanization, although a historical occurrence, is not the historical vocation of human beings. Human beings have an ontological vocation to humanize themselves, and we have seen that humanization is the process through which human beings strive to overcome their incompleteness by transforming the world and themselves in creative action carried out in solidarity with their fellow human beings. Both humanization and dehumanization are real possibilities in history, but only humanization is an ontological vocation. Freire's argument to support this affirmation can be summarized as follows:

1) There appears in history the fact of the struggle of human beings against conditions that reduce them to the status of objects.

2) That struggle is possible and meaningful only
if the persons involved in it have hopes of bringing about
a different situation.

3) To admit of dehumanization (the condition
against which human beings are struggling) as the ontologi-
cal vocation of human beings, as the way things should be,
is to deprive the struggle of significance. This admission
would lead to either cynicism or despair.[37]

An underlying assumption in this argument is that
human beings are incomplete and conditioned by the situa-
tions in which they live, but that they are not completely
determined by those situations. In other words, human beings
live in a dialectical tension between determinism and liber-
ty. Along with this assumption, there is a commitment to
the meaningfulness of life, a belief in the possibility of
a successful resolution to the contradictions that beset
human beings in a situation of dehumanization, and the con-
viction that this resolution is not confined to a subjective
affirmation of meaning by individuals in the face of the
absurd.

The resolution of contradictions is achieved in
authentic praxis, which for Freire is the unity of action
and reflection. Humanization is the resolution of the basic
contradiction in our society, the oppressor-oppressed con-
tradiction. What appears as the resolution of that contra-
diction is the "new man," no longer oppressor nor oppressed.

In trying to delineate the content of this concept of the "new man," we must be careful to avoid thinking of that content as fixed and unchangeable. The resolution of the contradiction marks only the beginning of a process of constant growth, through which the "new man" is constantly transformed.

We can detect here the influence of another philosophical tradition on Freire, one we have left unmentioned so far. The existentialist strain in Freire's thought is evident in his conception of the "new man" as the being who lives a constant process of self-creation. The new society to be brought about through the struggle of the oppressed is not a paradise beyond criticism. It must be a truly open society, one which refuses to rest complacently in its own achievements but encourages instead a self-critical attitude.

I conclude this section on Freire's use of the dialectic with a sketchy consideration of the tensions inherent in his dialectical thinking. Some of the tensions have an objective foundation in that they reflect basic polarities of human existence. Others result either from lack of precision and clarity in Freire's usage or from philosophical biases, acknowledged or not.

1) The tension between human beings as parts of nature and as "distant" from it through consciousness.

Freire's insistence on the radical difference be-

tween human and animal interaction with the world of nature obscures the fact that human beings are also a part of nature, and that they are as much supported, nourished, and sustained by nature as they are challenged and threatened by it. The reason for this imbalance in Freire's position is, I suspect, that he makes of social conflict the paradigm of dialectical relationships, and so he is forced to stress the dimension of conflict in the relationships of human beings with the natural world.

2) <u>The tension between the active and the contemplative side of human knowledge and existence.</u>

Although Freire does not allow his emphasis on the creative and active character of human beings to suppress the contemplative side in them, still contemplation is made subservient to the demands of action. The tension between contemplation and action is directly related to the tension between passivity and activity in human existence. Human beings are not only what they <u>do</u>, they are also what they <u>undergo</u>. Both their activities and their passivities can have constructive and destructive characteristics. Freire's view of reality as conflictive, however, leaves little room for the undeniable fact that reality also presents itself to human beings as gift (and not only as something they acquire and appropriate through their own creative efforts) and that knowledge is not always the result of painful and laborious struggle with the world.

3) <u>The tension between a conception of the dialectic as a permanent feature of human relationships and the resolution of social conflict in the new society.</u>

If social conflict is the paradigm of dialectical relationships, then it is difficult to see how the dialectic can continue to operate, in the long run, in the new order of things brought about by the revolution. Freire appeals to Althusser's concept of "overdetermination"[38] to explain the need for cultural revolution as a permanent feature of the new society. It is easy to see how this need would exist in the transition period following a revolutionary change in society, but it seems that Freire's insistence on the permanence of the dialectic necessitates the permanence of social conflict, which in turn seems to demand the permanence of some form of oppressor-oppressed contradiction.

4) <u>The tension between the rational and the irrational in human existence.</u>

Freire cannot be faulted for refusing to give up hope in the possibility of resolving the contradictions inherent in a dehumanizing society. But his tacit acceptance of Marx's ideal of a classless society and his basically rationalistic confidence in the progressive awakening of the critical capacities dormant in human beings lead him to neglect the irrationality which plagues the human condition and the darker side of moral failing and imperfection. Not

that Freire is unaware of the irrational side of human existence or of the immoral character of many of the structures in human society, but I question whether he is sufficiently aware of the possibility that the darker side of the human condition may not be entirely eliminated even after a long process of cultural and structural revolution. Freire is careful to maintain a balance between determinism and freedom. The question is whether he is sufficiently critical in his analysis of freedom. He seems to share Marx's basic conviction that the final stage of socialism, the classless society, will entail a "new creature," free of moral failure and imperfection.

5) The tension between immanent and transcendent conceptions of salvation.

This tension is closely related to the previous one. Freire's attitude toward religion is much more sympathetic than Marx's, and he openly identifies himself as a practicing Catholic. His strong emphasis, however, on human beings as creators and authors of their history and the Marxist strain in his thought give at times the impression that transcendence is restricted to the confines of this-worldly progress. Admittedly, the ideal of transcendence and the hope of a supernatural salvation have all too often been used to sanction a passive acceptance of the status quo. Freire is certainly reacting against any use of religion as an instrument of domestication. In criticizing what may be,

from a tactical point of view, a justifiable over-emphasis, one must be careful of not falling into the other extreme Freire is warning against, that of a conception of salvation and transcendence which paralyzes all effort to transform the unjust structures of this world.

6) <u>The</u> <u>tension</u> <u>between</u> <u>individual</u> <u>and</u> <u>communal</u> <u>salvation</u>.

As I said before, I believe Freire emphasizes communal over individual aspects in his conception of the "new man," but it is obvious from his extended treatment of cultural action in the fourth chapter of <u>Pedagogy</u> that he will tolerate no attempt to sacrifice the individual to the "higher" cause of societal transformation. No person can ever be treated as an object, not even in the interest of the liberation of that person. The tension comes in the concrete realization of the revolution. It may be necessary to prevent, even through physical force, any attempt to restore the situation of oppression. Freire seems to waver here between what he has stated as the moral imperative of dialogue with those who are to be authors of their own liberation and a more "practical" (and harsher) stance of preserving the common good. It will not do to answer simplistically that the problem does not really arise, since the imperative of dialogue applies only to communication with the oppressed, and that the use of repression by the revolutionary government has only the former oppressors as its

target. Freire himself admits that not all resistance and
opposition to revolutionary change is necessarily a mani-
festation of a desire for a return to the situation of op-
pression. The problem for Freire lies in determining the
criteria according to which the distinction between mis-
guided friends and real enemies is to be made, and, much
more importantly, in determining who embodies those crite-
ria. This problem indicates yet another tension in Freire's
thought.

7) The tension between democratic participation and
elitism.

A revolution is not authentic, that is, not truly
liberating unless those whose liberation is sought actively
participate in the revolutionary struggle. But people who
are immersed in a situation of oppression and dependence
will not be able to emerge unless they are helped in the
struggle by the witness of revolutionary leadership.[39] The
revolutionary struggle must consist in the praxis of both
revolutionary leaders and oppressed masses, working in uni-
ty. Unity, however, does not mean uniformity, and Freire
acknowledges that the nature of their respective contribu-
tions to the revolutionary process will be different.

Again, the principles behind the dialogical action
that characterizes revolutionary leadership are clear.
Freire runs into difficulties in preserving the purity of
the principles when he attempts to provide a concrete exam-

ple of revolutionary leadership in action. He takes the
Cuban revolutionary process or, more specifically, "Che"
Guevara's role in that process, as the model of a true rev-
olutionary leader. Freire finds himself constantly forced
to interpret what appear to be elitist statements by Gueva-
ra in a way that will leave the principles of dialogical,
non-elitist action intact.[40]

Freire may be justified in each of the qualifica-
tions and distinctions he makes in order to save the model
he has chosen; but I raise the question of the wisdom of
his strategy in so completely tying himself down to a model
which then has to be defended unconditionally for the sake
of preserving the principles he wants to maintain. In any
event, the tension remains: if revolutionary leadership is
credited by Freire with a higher degree of revolutionary
wisdom, and if the oppressed masses are often less than ea-
ger to identify with a revolutionary elite whose "witness"
threatens them and awakens a fear of freedom, will it be
possible for the revolutionary leadership to resist the
temptation of elitist manipulation of masses which are
judged, at a given moment in their experience, to be inca-
pable of revolutionary action? This dialectical tension
between leadership and masses is not unrelated to the basic
contradiction between oppressor and oppressed.

The next section of this chapter will deal with the
pedagogical treatment of the themes, essentially an educa-

tional problem. Due to the intimate connection between education and politics for Freire, it will be necessary to confront again this tension of elitism and democracy.

5. The Pedagogical Treatment of the Themes.

In this section I intend to analyze the structure of the process in which educators and students deal with themes discovered in the investigation phase. At the outset, I want to emphasize that the context of this treatment is the concrete experience of Freire in Latin America, especially in Chile. It is important to keep this limitation of context in mind, since the treatment by Freire in Pedagogy is highly abstract and can give his theory a universalistic connotation which it does not have objectively. Whether Freire intended to give his treatment that connotation at the time he wrote Pedagogy is a different question. One of the most frequent criticisms of his work is that Freire presents a theoretical elaboration of his method in isolation from the experiential context in which the theory was formulated and shaped.

What, then, is the structure of the educational process? In simplest terms, it is a dialogue between teachers and students about something. Given the limitation of context mentioned above, it is a dialogue between teachers and adult students of a lower socio-economic status in an underdeveloped country. The subject matter of dialogue is the program content of the educational process and is con-

stituted by the students' generative themes. The immediate goal of the process is to help the students move toward a critical perception of the real context in which they live. The ultimate goal of the process is to help them engage as subjects in the humanization of their world. The means used to achieve both these goals must be proportionate to the goals: the educators must approach the educational situation critically and must respect the right of the students to be subjects throughout the entire educational process. The means used are a "problem-posing" pedagogical method and a political strategy.

Let us now examine in detail the components of this structure and the questions and problems involved in Freire's treatment. I will isolate the following elements for this examination: 1) the persons involved; 2) the relationship between theoretical context of dialogue and real context of experience; 3) the relationship between critical perception and praxis.

1) The persons involved.

In the structure we are examining, the teacher-student relationship is the central element. The relationship does not exist in a historical vacuum, and so it is important to perceive as clearly as we can the profiles of the elements in the relationship. These profiles represent an abstraction from the concrete context of Freire's actual educational experiences.

A. The teacher.

The ideal teacher in Freire's scheme is a person who approaches the educational situation with a set of convictions, assumptions, and attitudes with regard to the nature of the educational task. Much as Freire dislikes the term, this set of convictions, assumptions, and attitudes is an "ideology." As indicated before, "ideology" almost always has a negative connotation for Freire, since he equates ideology with mystification of reality by the oppressors. There can be, however, an ideology of liberation which does not involve mystification of reality but a critical perception and unveiling of it, and which seeks not to perpetuate the status quo but to transform the world for the sake of humanization.

The real teacher (as opposed to the ideal picture presented in the previous paragraph) is a person who comes to meet the oppressed from outside their world. Freire warns his teacher against two very real dangers. First, even a well-intentioned person may not realize to what extent he or she may have internalized the ideology of oppression with all its myths about the oppressed and about reality. Second, the teacher may unconsciously impose on the students, through manipulation or coercion, the values of that internalized ideology. These two warnings combine to form a single moral imperative: You shall not employ the tactics of the oppressor in the process of liberation of

human beings.

Where do the teachers come from? In the Chilean experience, the typical teacher is the agricultural extension agent, normally a government employee (hence the particular appropriateness of Freire's warnings.)

Freire credits his ideal teacher with a critical attitude toward the objective situation of the students and toward the students themselves, as well as with a capacity for self-criticism. As I pointed out before, the teacher does not approach the situation in a vacuum. The teacher's consciousness is not a tabula rasa whose only function is to record the generative themes of the students. The apparatus with which the teacher approaches the situation includes: a) a thorough acquaintance with the objective situation through an examination of available studies on the area and through personal observations; b) an ideological framework which involves realistic expectations toward the students as beings whose ontological vocation to become subjects may be obstructed by a situation of oppression and by their internalization of the oppressor's values and worldview; c) a humble, self-critical attitude that prevents the teacher from absolutizing the ignorance of the students.

B. The students.

The typical students Freire envisions are persons whose lives and consciousnesses have been shaped by an objective situation of oppression. In the Chilean experience,

the students are the <u>campesinos</u> (peasants) in the <u>asenta-</u>
<u>mientos</u> (settlements). Even though their objective situa-
tion has changed (redistribution of land, new patterns of
socio-economic relationships), their vision of the world
and their attitudes toward it still reflect the superseded
relationships that characterized their existence in the
<u>latifundio</u> (a vast holding of land by one person).

Freire claims that his analysis is valid not only
for the concrete group mentioned above, but also for any
group of oppressed people. The generalized picture of the
oppressed that emerges from his analysis is that of the op-
pressed as dual beings, as beings who have internalized the
image the oppressors have of them and who consequently
"house" the oppressor within themselves. This characteristic
of the oppressed permeates their perception of the themes.

C. <u>The teacher-student relationship</u>

The profiles Freire presents of teachers and stu-
dents indicate at the same time the ideal nature of the
relationship and the obstacles to be overcome in pursuing
that ideal.

If education is to be liberating, it must solve the
teacher-student contradiction. This contradiction is the
manifestation, in the educational sphere, of the basic con-
tradiction in society between oppressor and oppressed.
"Teacher," as pole of the contradiction, has the connotation
of one who is the subject of the educational process, one

who alone knows, one who gives knowledge to the students.
"Student," as the other pole of the contradiction, has the
connotation of one who is the object of the process, one
who does not know, one who passively receives knowledge.
The contradiction is resolved when "teachers" cease to be
"teachers-of-the-students" and the "students" cease to be
"students-of-the-teacher." The resolution includes, in He-
gelian fashion, an _affirmation_ of the elements of truth in
the contradiction, namely, that someone teaches another, a
negation of the exclusive character of knowledge and igno-
rance as properties, respectively, of teacher and students,
and a _transcending_ of the relationship into a new relation-
ship where teachers become also students and students be-
come also teachers. It is important to note here the arbi-
trariness of Freire's definition of "teacher" and "student."
His neat dialectical pattern "works" provided one accepts
the connotations given by Freire to these terms.

The above pattern of resolution represents the ide-
al. The obstacles to the realization of the ideal come from
both teachers and students. Teachers may refuse to "die" as
traditional teachers to "be born" as learners with the stu-
dents; students may refuse to "die" as passive recipients
of the knowledge of the teachers to "be born" as givers of
knowledge and as teachers with the teacher. Teachers may be
unaware of their own unreflected acceptance of the myths of
the oppressor about the oppressed; students may be too

frightened to confront the oppressor "housed" within themselves.

Freire is well aware of these difficulties which arise from the conditioning effect a situation of oppression has on both teachers and students. I am not sure he is sufficiently aware of other problems raised by his analysis.

First of all, Freire's analysis of the teacher-student relationship is heavily influenced by his analysis of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction. As many of his critics have pointed out, Freire's vision of society as the battleground of oppressors and oppressed is overly simplistic, even in highly polarized countries like many of the Latin American countries. He shows the same tendency toward oversimplification when he analyzes the teacher-student contradiction. Making a neat distinction between liberating teachers and domesticating teachers may be very convenient from a rhetorical point of view, but it seems also like a very effective way of creating unnecessary enemies.

Secondly, such an oversimplification leaves Freire open to the dangers of elitism and sectarianism. I think Freire is right in his analysis of the oppressed consciousness as a dual consciousness. But if one remembers that Freire has also said that dialogue with the oppressor is impossible, then honest disagreement on the part of the oppressed will be easily interpreted by a zealous educator as a clear indication that one is dealing with the oppressor.

Freire may be personally too much of a humanist to take
that position himself, but he admits that one of the most
difficult problems the new education encounters is changing
the attitudes of teachers. His analysis, however, of the
teacher-student relationship will have to be considerably
refined.

2) The relationship between theoretical context of
dialogue and real context of experience.

The oppressed live immersed in their world; they
see reality as dense, impenetrable. Living the immediacy of
the present, managing barely to meet basic survival needs,
they are incapable of seeing their immediate situation as
an element in a larger totality. They perceive their own
poverty, ignorance, diseases, unemployment, and the comfort
and luxury of a few people in their society as isolated,
disconnected elements in their experience. They attribute
to fate or to the will of God what is objectively the re-
sult of human actions.

The problem confronting the educator of the op-
pressed is how to break up this dense, undifferentiated
whole. The solution Freire offers involves both a dialecti-
cal interplay of abstraction and concreteness and the es-
tablishment of new patterns of social and cultural interac-
tion. Both elements of the solution take place in what Frei-
re calls the "theoretical context of dialogue." The theoret-
ical context is contrasted to the real context, which is the

real life situation for people.

A. The dialectical interplay between abstraction and concreteness.

In dialogue, teacher and students talk about the concrete situation in which the students live. Elements of that situation are presented in pictorial form as "codifications." But insofar as they are talked about and represented graphically they are abstract and not concrete. A characteristic of the immersed consciousness is an inability to objectify reality, an incapacity to "ad-mire" the world, to establish psychological distance from it. A way of helping people establish that distance is to present to them their own existential situation in objectified form, as a codification. Previously unable to see how they lived, people in the culture circles[41] recognize in the graphical representations their situation. This recognition is two-fold: they see the situation as objective, as a "not-I," and they also see themselves as the "I's" in the situation. A number of psychological factors come into play here. Participants in the culture circle watch a projected slide, which is the codification of an existential situation they live. The darkness of the room and the non-threatening atmosphere which hopefully has been created in the group combine to help them "lose" themselves in the codification which they see and describe at first as "out there" and even as different from their own situation. But this loss

is only temporary as they "rediscover" themselves and their situations through their discussion of the codification.

Freire speaks of the codification as a form of linguistic discourse which must be "read" by the participants in the discussion. There are three moments in this "reading": a descriptive moment, an analytic moment, and a synthetic moment. The codification mediates a form of dialogue between the theoretical context of the culture circle and the real context of the life of the participants. The dialectical interplay between these two contexts can be outlined as follows:

a) The real context, the real life situation as lived, is negated and affirmed by its abstract representation. Affirmed because what is represented is the existential situation of the participants. Negated because the real life situation ceases to be a given and becomes a problem and a challenge to the participants.

b) As the participants engage in the decodification or "reading" process, they are able to see, in the theoretical context, the relationships between the elements of the codification.

c) The theoretical context is also affirmed and negated in this process. Affirmed as a necessary moment in the process of revealing to the participants the reality in which they live. Negated in that it remains abstract. Changes in this theoretical context do not necessarily imply

changes in the real context.

d) Both the theoretical and real contexts are transformed to give rise to a moment of synthesis, when the participants are able to penetrate critically their real life situation and are thereby enabled to commit themselves to transform it.

B. The establishment of new patterns of social interaction.

This second element of the solution to the problem of an immersed consciousness aims at the transformation of existing patterns of social and cultural interaction which reflect the pattern of domination in the larger society. The peasants have appropriated and internalized many of the myths of the culture of domination, one of which is the absolute ignorance of the poor and the uneducated. A manifestation of this internalization is their passivity and sense of inferiority in the presence of the professional investigators and coordinators of the culture circles, the people who really know.

The first element of the solution, the dialectical interplay of abstraction and concreteness, really depends on the successful implementation of changes in the patterns of relationships between coordinator and participants. What the first element amounts to is a "dialogue" between the theoretical and real contexts, that is, a confrontation by the students of their real life situation in the abstract

form of a codification. If the participants in the culture circle adopt a passive attitude, waiting for the coordinator to tell them what the codification is all about, the dialogue between the contexts is destroyed.

It is essential, then, that the coordinator draw all the participants into the discussion. Freire offers both practical and theoretical suggestions to his coordinators as to how this can be accomplished.[42]

C. Critique.

This methodology of codification-decodification is, in my opinion, the most valuable element in Freire's scheme. His theoretical statements on the methodology are most closely related to the praxis which originated them. The only limitation I find regarding Freire's treatment of his own methodology is the lack of concrete examples that would clarify the abstract explanation of the dialectical interplay of theoretical and real contexts.[43]

3) The relationship between critical perception and praxis.

Conscientization is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal of the educational process is to enable people to engage freely and responsibly in the transformation of their reality for the sake of humanization. It is, therefore, imperative that the oppressed move beyond a critical perception of their world and engage in liberating praxis.

Freire emphasizes that critical perception and prax-

is cannot be dichotomized. It is not necessary (nor possible) to wait for a critical consciousness of reality before one engages in praxis. Critical perception and praxis stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. One cannot survive without the other. Praxis both affirms and negates critical reflection which is authenticated and transcended in action upon the real situation.

Real knowledge does not exist outside of the praxis. This thesis is repeated in many forms throughout Freire's entire work, and it is important that we understand the terms of the thesis and also the limitations in Freire's elaboration of it.

Freire speaks of knowledge as an act and as a process. Every act of knowledge is a moment in the process through which knowledge is constantly being transformed. Knowledge, both as an act and as a process, implies a reality which is known, subjects who know, and the operations through which the subjects arrive at knowledge of reality.

Knowledge, for Freire, is never a dyadic relationship involving just a cognitive subject and an object which is the end of the cognitive act. What does he mean by that? I think there are two reasons for his insistence that knowledge always involves more than one subject in relationship to an object. First, human beings relate to their world not only in action, but also in thought, and thought is impossible without language. An object exists as a cognitive

reality for a human knower insofar as this knower can not only perceive the object but also think and talk about it as a non-subject, as a "not-I." But language is a social reality, and, even when a single subject approaches an object in the knowledge relationship, other subjects are also "present" through the thought-language of the knowing subject. Secondly, to know an object is not the ultimate goal of human beings in Freire's perspective. Knowledge is subservient to action, and action authenticates or invalidates knowledge. But human action does not take place in a solipsistic vacuum. Just as knowledge, through language, is a social reality and depends for its existence and authenticity on the social context, so human action cannot exist authentically unless it is also inter-action, unless it recognizes the world as the theater where other actors are present.

Knowledge, then, always involves subjects who examine reality together in order to transform it through their praxis. The relationship between human beings and their world is expressed at the level of knowledge in dialogue and at the level of praxis in cooperation. At both levels, reality serves to mediate the relationship between the knowing and acting subjects. Freire draws far-reaching implications from his analysis of the knowledge relationship: a) reality, as object of knowledge and as field of human action, is never the exclusive property of any person or group

of persons; b) a pedagogical relationship in which educators define themselves as masters of reality through their privileged knowledge of it inevitable reduces the students to objects of the knowledge process.

Praxis, for Freire, is the unity of action and reflection.[44] These two elements must be kept in proper balance. An emphasis on action to the neglect of reflection leads to activism; an emphasis on reflection to the neglect of action leads to verbalism. Human beings act on previous knowledge of reality, and their action must be accompanied by critical reflection both on the previous knowledge and on the action itself. The praxis of human beings is the context in which knowledge arises and in which it is authenticated. Praxis is, then, the necessary and sufficient condition for authentic knowledge.

I believe the above is a sketchy but adequate presentation of Freire's understanding of the relationship between critical perception and praxis. This relationship is extremely important in Freire's work because of his emphasis on liberation and humanization as processes that must be objectively verifiable in reality. I find, however, Freire's theory most unsatisfactory at this point and in urgent need of refinement and development. What are the most important limitations in Freire's understanding of the relationship? What suggestions can be offered for its development?

Freire's initial experiences as an educator were in the area of literacy training. It is tempting to assume that Freire has made literacy the paradigm of knowledge. In fact, such an assumption would be supported by Freire's almost lyrical statements on the educated person as one who "names the world," who can "say his own word." Undoubtedly, Freire's early experience has left a mark on his entire work, but I suggest that we must look at the motivation behind Freire's involvement in literacy campaigns to identify his paradigm of knowledge. Even though he may not have realized fully the political implications of his methodology of literacy training, Freire was quite insistent from the very beginning that his goal was not just literacy training but a fuller, more conscious and critical participation of the masses in the democratic process. The goal of the educational process is to enable people to engage critically in the transformation of their world. For this task, they will need scientific and technological knowledge, but if they are not to be enslaved by technology at the service of domination the most important knowledge they need is political knowledge. If the paradigm of knowledge is political knowledge (or "political literacy," as Freire also calls it), the paradigm of praxis is, correspondingly, political praxis.

In _Pedagogy_, Freire moves a step forward and identifies critical political awareness as "revolutionary cons-

ciousness" and political praxis as "revolutionary praxis."
Revolutionary consciousness is identical with conscientiza-
tion, and authentic revolutionary praxis is "cultural ac-
tion for liberation." This shift in terminology reflects,
in my opinion, a growing conviction in Freire that nothing
short of revolution will lead to the liberation of the op-
pressed. The move, however, raises a host of problems that
must be squarely faced if one hopes to apply Freire's theo-
ries realistically and responsibly.

What happens to the relationship between knowledge
and praxis in a revolutionary context? If knowledge does
not exist outside of the praxis, then revolutionary knowl-
edge needs revolutionary praxis in order to survive. Freire
is enough of a realist to admit that there are extreme con-
ditions of repression which make revolutionary projects not
just dangerous but suicidal. Freire's consideration of the
problem and his tentative solution to it are best exempli-
fied in this quotation:

> Let me emphasize that my defense of the praxis implies
> no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into
> a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of
> action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A
> critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that
> a particular form of action is impossible or inappro-
> priate at the present time. Those who through reflection
> perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one
> or another form of action (which should accordingly be
> postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of
> inaction. Critical reflection is also action.[45]

There are two significant affirmations in the above
quotation: a) critical reflection is itself a form of prax-

is; b) critical reflection is not enough: it may reveal
that a particular form of action is inappropriate or impos-
sible, but then another form of action must be substituted
for the discarded option. Unfortunately, Freire does not
specify what kinds of actions would be appropriate and
feasible under extreme conditions of repression. The prob-
lem would not be so serious if he did not proceed to give
a long and approving account of Guevara's guerrilla activi-
ty in Cuba and in Bolivia. Freire may have intended this
account to be nothing more than a concrete example of a
possible response to a very specific set of circumstances--
an unfortunate choice of examples at that, since it seems
to show a course of action that was objectively inappro-
priate and unfeasible in the concrete situation of Bolivia.
But the absence of other alternatives may lead Freire's
reader to assume that guerrilla activity is _the_ outcome of
conscientization.

Conscientization is a long process. It certainly
has the potential to mobilize people into action. It is im-
possible that the oppressed awaken to a critical perception
of their reality without their choosing to do something
about it. It is true that many will choose to escape the
dangers of freedom and retreat into deeper silence and pas-
sivity, but some at least will be courageous enough to risk
a commitment to transforming action. At this point, revolu-
tionary leaders and conscientized masses can expect little

assistance from Freire. Chapter Four of Pedagogy, which contains Freire's most explicit articulation to date of the guidelines for cultural action (revolutionary praxis), gives no realistic alternatives for revolutionary action in the face of extreme repression. Furthermore, if Pedagogy is taken uncritically as a set of guidelines for immediate application, it will lead to irresponsible and senseless sacrifice of lives. From a purely tactical point of view, Freire's ambiguity toward revolutionary violence can lead, in the absence of realistic alternatives, to an irresponsible choice of violence. Given the present stage of development of revolutionary theory in Freire's published works, there appear to be only three possible choices for the educator of the oppressed: a) to keep the oppressed from arriving at critical consciousness (a choice Freire rejects as unworthy of a truly humanist educator); b) to manipulate students into actions that aim at gradual reform of the existing system (a choice Freire criticizes as naive and supportive of the regimes of oppression, which will not permit reforms to get out of control); c) to engage with the oppressed in a process of conscientization that will issue into (unspecified) revolutionary projects (a choice Freire defends as the only humanist option, but which can lead, because of the vagueness and ambiguity of the notion of "revolutionary projects," to an uncritical acceptance of armed revolution as the only option open to revolutionary

leaders and masses).

I do not think that a humanist educator is neces-
sarily bound to this last alternative. There are elements
in Freire's own educational experience that point beyond
his theoretical formulations in Pedagogy. My own sugges-
tions toward a refinement and development of the relation-
ship between critical consciousness and praxis draw from
these elements of Freire's praxis.

Let me preface these suggestions by acknowledging
the validity of Freire's warning against the "tranquilizing"
effect of purely reformist measures that leave the system
of oppression essentially untouched. The dividing line be-
tween a prudent, realistic assessment of possibilities and
a fatalistic immobilism is tenuous. Given the atmosphere of
irrational repression in most Latin American societies, no
authentic option in favor of the oppressed is free of risk.
I agree with Freire that liberation involves the acceptance
of risk, even the risk of one's own life. But risking one's
life must be a responsible choice. Unfortunately, the narrow
framework of his treatment in Pedagogy can lead, if applied
uncritically, to irresponsible forms of revolutionary ac-
tion.

A. First suggestion.

In my opinion, the most fruitful source for the de-
velopment and refinement of Freire's understanding of the
relationship between critical consciousness and praxis is

to be found in an examination of Freire's Chilean experience. One should not uncritically absolutize that experience as a universally valid model; it is, however, the stage in Freire's development where his theory and praxis are most intimately and productively united. For the sake of brevity, I single out just two elements in that experience which could provide some alternatives in planning and executing an education for liberation. These elements are the participation and involvement of intellectuals and professionals in the educational experience of the oppressed, and the availability of sociologically viable structures through which the awakening critical consciousness of the oppressed could find room for appropriate praxis.

The first of these elements contains possibilities for development in two complementary directions: a) the concrete involvement of intellectuals and professionals helps to enrich the educational process through their theoretical input; at the same time, it saves the theory from losing connection with reality; b) the return of intellectuals and professionals to their own milieu after a deepening of their social responsibility creates new political possibilities: the conscientized intellectuals are now more effectively able to challenge the accepted myths of the dominant culture from within. These new possibilities constitute what Bruce Boston calls the "politics of erosion."[46]

The second element, the availability of sociologically viable structures that can provide a testing ground for the growing awareness of students, suggests a concretization of Freire's somewhat vague notion of "educational projects" under conditions of repression. At the time Freire worked in Chile, one could not speak of an extreme situation of repression in that country. Freire's educational projects were carried out in the context of agrarian reforms initiated by the government. The favorable conditions surrounding Freire's experiments in Chile will not be repeated often in Latin America, but in many cases it is still possible to utilize the existing framework of social and economic programs, even if these are of a reformist nature. Sometimes, it is even possible to create grass-roots organizations that will engage in a long-term process of laying the groundwork for a restructuring of society on a more humane basis. Admittedly, there is no guarantee that these attempts will not succumb to the danger of manipulation by the power elites.

B. Second suggestion.

My second suggestion for refinement and development of Freire's revolutionary theory aims at clarifying the relationship between educational and political contexts. Freire's emphasis on the educational character of political action blurs the distinction between strictly educational activity and political struggle. He may be justified in

identifying the two spheres if he envisions a situation of
intense revolutionary activity, but most Latin American
societies are not presently in that situation.

Only a revolutionary leader could dream of enjoying
almost complete control over the masses, in the sense that
during an intense period of revolutionary struggle, the
leader controls, directly or indirectly, most of the influ-
ences affecting those who are led. A realistic educator
facing a situation where objective conditions do not favor
an out-in-the-open revolutionary struggle must contemplate
a long-range educational process and accept that during
the process many other influences will be affecting the
students, influences which are entirely beyond the educa-
tor's control.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. Freire et al., Educação e Conscientização, pp. 5/1-5/17.

2. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 87.

3. Ibid., p. 86.

4. Ibid., p. 91.

5. Ibid., p. 92.

6. Ibid., p. 97.

7. Ibid., p. 81.

8. Freire, Cultural Action for Freedom, p. 22, quoting Noam Chomsky, Cartesian Linguistics (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) p. 31.

9. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 103.

10. James A. Collins, A History of Modern European Philosophy (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1954), p. 624.

11. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 98.

12. Ibid., p. 97.

13. Ibid., p. 94.

14. Ibid., p. 98.

15. Ibid., pp. 97-98.

16. Ibid., p. 97.

17. Ibid., p. 98.

18. Noam Chomsky, Aspects of a Theory of Syntax (Cambridge: Massachussetts Institute of Technology Press, 1965), p. 8.

19. John Lyons, Noam Chomsky (Modern Masters; New York: The Viking Press, 1970), p. 44.

20. _Ibid._

21. _Ibid._

22. Freire, "Education as Cultural Action," p. 117.

23. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , pp. 57-74.

24. _Ibid._

25. _Ibid._, p. 104.

26. Paulo Freire, "Acción Cultural Liberadora--Una Entrevista con Paulo Freire," _Víspera_, No. 10 (May, 1969), 27.

27. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , p. 59.

28. _Ibid._, p. 105.

29. _Ibid._, p. 44.

30. _Ibid._, pp. 152-153.

31. _Mao Tse-Tung: An Anthology of His Writings_, ed. Anne Fremantle (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 214-241.

32. Freire, _Víspera_, No. 10 (May, 1969), 29.

33. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , p. 94.

34. _Ibid._, p. 92.

35. Richard J. Bernstein, _Praxis and Action_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 45.

36. Nicholas Lobkowicz, _Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx_ (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 315, as quoted by Bernstein, _Praxis and Action_, p. 70.

37. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , pp. 27-28.

38. Louis Althusser, _For Marx_, pp. 87-128.

39. For a discussion of "revolutionary witness," see Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , pp. 176-77.

40. This is not the place to evaluate in detail Guevara's revolutionary leadership. The reader is referred to _Pedagogy_ . . . , pp. 164-171, for Freire's discussion of

Guevara's role.

41. "Culture circles" are defined on p. 14 of this thesis, in note 9.

42. Freire et al., _Educação e Conscientização_, pp. 12/1-12/3 and pp. 13/1-13/10.

43. For a good summary of the steps in the methodology of codification-decodification, see Jose L. Fiori, "Dialéctica y Libertad," in _Ibid._, pp. 6/1-6/12.

44. Freire's treatment of praxis is obviously influenced by the Marxist tradition. For a good presentation of Marx's concept of praxis, see Bernstein, _Praxis_ and _Action_, Part I.

45. Freire, _Pedagogy_ . . . , p. 123.

46. Bruce O. Boston, "Paulo Freire: Notes of a Loving Critic," in _Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator_, ed. Stanley M. Grabowski, p. 90.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

I have discussed in this thesis the place of gener-
ative themes in the framework of Freire's methodology, and
I have analyzed their nature and structure, their function
and dialectical character, and their pedagogical treatment
in the educational context of Freire's experience with
adult education programs in Latin America. This last chap-
ter summarizes the findings of my discussion and analysis.

1. Nature of generative themes.

Generative themes are the representation in lan-
guage of human visions, feelings, and attitudes toward
reality. Themes are expressions of that reality. Themes
have objective as well as subjective components since lan-
guage and thought are always referred to reality.

2. Evidence.

An analysis of the relationship between human
beings and their natural and social world reveals the exis-
tence of the themes. Themes exist because human beings can
reflect on the world and on themselves and can objectify
their world in thought and language. Human beings are,
therefore, capable of creating culture. The culture they
create out of their relationships with the world conditions

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their subsequent actions. Because human beings can reflect on their own creations (past), weigh alternatives (present), and anticipate consequences (future), they can transcend the conditioning of the culture. Through this transformation and constant reshaping of the culture, human beings also create history. Since the themes are linguistic representations of historical beings, they reflect cultural patterns and historical conditions of the epoch in which human beings live, and also visions, hopes, and ideals of what the future could become.

3. Assumptions and ideological options.

Behind the analysis of the human beings-world relationships there are some basic assumptions and crucial ideological options:

a) In the make-up of human beings, creativity and freedom prevail over cultural conditioning and determinism.

b) Human beings live in a meaningful world, and the outcome of history is illumined by hope and not obscured by despair.

c) The ontological vocation of human beings is the humanization of their world through cooperative action and a praxis of liberation.

d) In the process of bringing about a more human society, every human being must be treated as a subject and never as an object.

4. Conditions of possibility.

The process in which generative themes are investigated and pedagogically elaborated must be consonant with the goal of humanization and with the ideological option for liberation. Themes reflect both objective situations and subjective responses to the situations; their generative capacity, therefore, depends on both objective and subjective conditions of possibility.

a) Objective conditions.

Themes are potentially generative--that is, capable of unfolding into other themes--because they are expressions of reality, and reality is objectively a totality and not the juxtaposition of isolated and disconnected elements. Independently of whether human beings perceive their situation as a totality or not, they still live in a network of causal relationships.

b) Subjective conditions.

Themes become actually generative in an educational context characterized by dialogue. The conditions of possibility for this dialogue are faith in human beings and in their potential for liberation and creativity, humility, and hope. Through the establishment of dialogue as the essence of the educational process, a climate of trust and mutual respect is created, where critical thinking is generated by dialogue and in turn authenticates it.

5. <u>Critical</u> <u>evaluation</u>.

The value and usefulness of Freire's educational
strategy is to be judged in terms of the goals pursued,
the analysis of the factors involved, the handling of the
tensions inherent in the process, and the conditions of
possibility for the application of the process.

A. <u>The</u> <u>goals</u> <u>pursued</u>.

The immediate goal of the educational process is
conscientization. The ultimate goal is humanization. A
triple question must be asked with respect to both these
goals: Are they well defined? Are they realistic? Are they
worthwhile?

Freire speaks of conscientization and humanization
both as processes and as goals. In what sense is a process
also a goal? Conscientization is not a privileged state of
consciousness reached once and for all; humanization is not
an ideal state of things to be enjoyed forever once arrived
at. A negative approximation to the definitions reveals
what is excluded in both: a conception of conscientization
and humanization as static realities. A more positive de-
termination of what is affirmed is more difficult to estab-
lish. Conscientization occurs when human beings are able
to perceive critically the reality in which they live; hu-
manization begins when human beings seek to regain their
status as subjects by engaging in action upon that totality.
The goal of the educational task is to initiate both proc-

esses. Any concrete achievement of conscientization and humanization must be considered as a moment in a dialectical process. If the process is to be authentic, every achievement along the way must be affirmed, negated, and transcended in a movement toward a more critical consciousness and a more human world.

The crucial problem is to determine the criteria according to which one can judge whether the processes of conscientization and humanization are taking place. These criteria are not clearly specified in Freire's treatment. Freire explicitly assumes that educators approach the conscientization task with a critical attitude. The implicit, unstated assumption is that the process is self-corrective. Such an assumption leaves us with only a vague criterion of consensus among the participants in the educational search as being sufficient to guarantee the authenticity of the process. In the case of humanization, the criteria are even more elusive. The "new man" will be dialogical and cooperative, self-critical, a scientific humanist. Freire's value options with respect to conscientization and humanization are clear. His criteria to determine the positive content of these concepts are not. He does offer formal ethical guidelines, and these are valuable, but the absence of more specific criteria leaves his position dangerously open to charges of elitism and unconscious manipulation.

How realistic are these goals? The answer to this

question depends to some extent on the answer to the previous question. Freire's expulsion from Brazil seems to provide extrinsic evidence that conscientization is a feasible goal. As far as I know, no systematic evaluation has been made of the Chilean experience. The question of what evidence would be acceptable remains unanswered. [1]

Are the goals of conscientization and humanization worthwhile? The answer to this question will depend on the concrete meaning one assigns to the terms, and I suspect anyone could find a convenient level of abstraction that would make the terms comfortable but rather meaningless. The lack of well-defined criteria cannot become an excuse to escape the challenge Freire lays before us.

B. The analysis of the factors involved.

Defining clearly the goals one pursues is important; much more important, however, is analyzing correctly the starting point of the process and as adequately as possible accounting for all the factors involved in it. Concretely in the process under examination here, it is crucial to start with a correct analysis of the themes and of the human beings embodying them, and of the objective context in which the interaction of the participants takes place.

a) Analysis of the themes and of the human beings embodying them.

I agree fundamentally with what Freire has to say

about the themes and about the relationships of human beings with the world. My problem is with what Freire has not said or not emphasized sufficiently.

Generative themes are representations of affective as well as cognitive responses of human beings to their world. Feelings, hopes, ambitions are reflected in language along with concepts, outlooks, and doubts. Freire is aware of the affective elements contained in the themes, and his definition reflects that awareness. Unfortunately, as he proceeds to describe the pedagogical treatment of the themes, the intellectual or cognitive element becomes almost exclusively dominant. People who have known him well and worked with him attest to his sensitivity to the feelings of others and to his awareness of the role those feelings play in furthering or obstructing communication. But his theoretical statements leave little or no room for the affective responses of people which are an important element of generative themes.

Freire's rationalistic bias affects also his analysis of human beings. Consciousness is most critical when it avoids focalized visions of reality to stick to the comprehension of total reality. The implicit assumption is that a perfectly rational explanation of reality is possible. If one probes critically enough, the "reasons" for a "false consciousness" will be uncovered. In spite of his emphasis on freedom (and even on fear of freedom), Freire

does not take into consideration the irrational side of human existence, the stumbling block of the misuse of freedom, and the inexplicability of moral failure. This dark side of life does not fit neatly into rational schemes, but it must be confronted by radical and critical educators. Most likely it will not go away even after removing the structures of oppression that block the paths of conscientization and humanization.

b) Analysis of the objective context for the interaction of the participants.

The objective context includes the theoretical and real contexts of experience of the participants as well as the relationship between these two components of the objective context. In evaluating Freire's analysis I distinguish the following elements: the methodology used to integrate theoretical and real contexts, the patterns of interaction among the participants, and the influence of factors outside the educational context.

With regard to the methodology used to initiate the "dialogue" between theoretical and real contexts of experience, the main limitation I find is the lack of examples that would show concretely how the method is worked out. [2] Otherwise, the methodology is psychologically and pedagogically very sound. As I remarked in the last chapter, this section is the place where Freire's theoretical statements and praxis come closest together.

With regard to the patterns of interaction among the participants in the educational process, Freire's analysis of the introjection of patterns from the dominant culture by both educators and students and of the corresponding manifestations of those internalized attitudes is penetrating and quite valuable. His oversimplification, however, in analyzing the structures of society into a neat dialectical opposition of oppressor and oppressed affects also the analysis of the teacher-student relationship. It is tempting to define disagreement as manifestation of the oppressor housed within the students. The danger of self-righteous elitism on the part of well-intentioned educators is unnecessarily increased by Freire's oversimplification.

With regard to the influence of outside factors on the educational context, the most significant problems are the lack of control over other contexts in which students participate--such as the familial, the economic, and the political, which have an educational influence of their own--and the availability of viable structures and institutions that can provide a field for the praxis. The problem of availability of structures can be properly considered as an aspect of the problem of lack of control over other significant contexts.

C. The handling of the tensions inherent in the process.

There are basic, permanent polarities in human

existence, and any process which attempts to integrate consciousness to reality will run into tensions which can be constructive if a proper balance between the terms of the polarities is preserved. These basic polarities or tensions include: subjectivity-objectivity, individual-community, freedom-authority, contemplation-action, activity-passivity, immanence-transcendence. With the exception of the first of these, I have some difficulties with Freire's handling of the tensions.

a) Individual-community; freedom-authority.

I treat these two tensions together because I believe that the second is included in the first as an aspect of it. At the root of these tensions lies the problem of reconciling the needs, desires, projects, and ambitions of a person as an individual human being with the obligations and duties that same person has as member of a community. Every culture has its set of norms setting the boundaries within which that reconciliation is to be worked out. In cases of deep conflict between individual and community needs, the tension between freedom and authority becomes a dominant aspect of the individual-community tension.

As in all the basic tensions, both poles, individual and community, must be preserved. To suppress the individual pole would lead to a totalitarian disregard for the value of individual persons; to suppress the communitarian pole would lead to anarchical disorder.

I agree with Freire when he stresses the communitarian aspects of the "new man" ideal and when he insists that the private exercise of an individual's right is not justified if the affirmation of that right implies the effective denial of it to a majority of people in the society. I have problems, however, with Freire's simplistic reduction of tensions in society to the contradiction "oppressor-oppressed." Such a simplistic reduction conceals a totalitarian strain in his thought that threatens to destroy the pole of individuality. I agree with Freire's position that liberation cannot come to oppressed people as a gift from those who oppress them, but I question whether authentic commitment to fight with the oppressed for liberation and humanization necessitates an acceptance of Freire's oversimplification. The tendency to think of people in terms of "oppressor" and "oppressed" obscures the complexity of individual motivations and unnecessarily antagonizes well-intentioned persons who are not "oppressed" in Freire's terms but who may be equally helpless in the face of dehumanizing structures.

The oversimplification has a dangerous influence also on the analysis of the freedom-authority tension. As I pointed out before, an educator who is credited with a critical consciousness, a "right" way of looking at reality, may easily slip into a sectarian, self-righteous attitude.

b) Contemplation-action; activity-passivity.

Freire is reacting against subjectivists and idealists when he emphasizes the active, struggling side of human existence. Reality will not change by changing a person's consciousness of it. But reaction against an extreme position carries within itself the danger of going to the other extreme. This danger is compounded by Freire's rationalistic bias and is most evident in his consideration of limit-situations. Granted, for the "immersed" consciousness Freire describes, most situations of injustice and oppression appear not as limiting and transformable but as "dead ends." But there are limit-situations which are not transformable, no matter how critical the person's consciousness may become nor how courageously the person may seek to change them. Human beings become subjects not only by doing, but also by undergoing. Reality is conquered and dominated through the praxis; it is also, however, given to human beings.

c) Immanence-transcendence.

Freire the Christian affirms that the incompleteness of human beings is transcended in their relationships to their Creator, and these relationships can never be of domination. In transcendent relationship to God, human beings return to their source, who liberates them. Freire the Marxist affirms that liberation is won in the struggle of human beings in history. These two affirmations are not

necessarily contradictory. The autonomy and consistency of
the secular order is an accepted tenet of orthodox Chris-
tian theology. Though not identifiable with any concrete
actualization of human society, the biblical concept of
the "Kingdom of God" is not unrelated to the human struggle
for a more just ordering of social, political, and economic
structures. The supernatural salvation of human beings is
achieved in the world, not in escape from it.

Freire expresses basically the same ideas when he
calls on institutional churches to live the Easter expe-
rience in the world and not to retreat into a pseudo-spir-
itual religious ghetto, where they are condemned to die of
cold. [3]

Again, I am in complete agreement with what Freire
has to say on the relationship between religious transcend-
ence and the human struggle for justice, and again I have
problems with what he has not said. To rephrase in reli-
gious terminology an objection I raised before with regard
to Freire's rationalistic bias, I do not think Freire is
sufficiently aware of the reality of sin. I do not expect
him to write a theological treatise within his educational
works, but, since he himself attempts to relate and recon-
cile his scientific humanism with his Christian belief, I
think it is fair to engage him in critical dialogue on
theological grounds. Freire speaks of the reality of sin
in psychological terms as a necrophilic orientation. I

have no problems with that way of speaking. But when he speaks of salvation for the oppressor as being achieved through a change in the unjust structures that dehumanized both oppressor and oppressed and through "loving restraints" imposed on the oppressor by the former oppressed, he seems to reduce sin to a function of unjust structures. The opposite of sin is conversion and repentance. The Christian view condemns sin but not the sinner, precisely because of the possibility of repentance. I am not sure Freire is quite that generous toward the oppressor; dialogue with the oppressor is not possible either before or after the revolution. In that perspective, "loving restraints" could mean anything from brainwashing to a firing squad.

D. Conditions of possibility for the application of the process.

In considering the applicability of Freire's strategy, we may distinguish internal and external conditions of possibility. By internal conditions I mean the soundness of the different elements in Freire's position. By external conditions I mean the degrees of flexibility and tolerance a particular society may show in dealing with the tensions arising from a conscientization process.

a) Internal conditions:

The elements in Freire's position that I think are sound and readily applicable in their present formulation are his analysis of levels of consciousness corresponding

to different levels in society, his pedagogical treatment
of generative themes, and his humanist option for full
democratic participation of the marginal masses in every
society in the creation and recreation of culture.

A great deal of refinement and development is
needed in his theory of cultural action as revolution. In
particular, a clear and responsible stance toward the prob-
lem of revolutionary violence in highly repressive socie-
ties is urgently needed.

b) External conditions.

Freire's theory was developed in a Third World
context. More precisely, the experiential background of the
theory was primarily Freire's educational experience with
illiterate peasants in Brazil and in Chile. The cultural
problems confronted were those of a traditional, closed
society, basically untouched in the case of the illiterate
peasant and affected by a crisis of transition in the case
of the marginal urban worker. The subjects involved in the
experiences belong to groups Freire identifies primarily
as "oppressed." Freire had these groups explicitly in mind
when he developed his methodology, and the title of his
major work is evidence that he does not attempt to hide his
option.

How applicable, then, is Freire's strategy in mod-
ern, highly industrialized and sophisticated societies
which are not marked by the extreme polarization of social

classes that characterizes most of the underdeveloped nations? For that matter, how applicable is the strategy in the modernized sectors of Third World societies? What are the limitations of applicability even among groups that resemble the original subjects of Freire's educational experience?

The question of the applicability of Freire's model to the North American scene has been asked by many critics of Freire in the United States. The answers given range from uncritical rejection to uncritical acceptance. Most critics agree that Freire's model cannot be transplanted in its original form and applied without modification. They single out different elements that could be adapted to fit the American context. DeWitt,[4] Greene,[5] and Collins[6]--to mention only a few--have suggested that the methodology be incorporated into adult education programs and teacher training courses. Ohliger[7] has explored the possibility of applying Freire's ideas to the use of mass media in adult and higher education. Several educational programs working with disadvantaged minorities have attempted to incorporate Freire's orientation to community organization projects and to the teaching of English as a second language. Unfortunately, no systematic evaluation of these diverse projects has been attempted.

The applicability of Freire's strategy among modernized and marginal sectors of the Third World depends

largely on the degree of tolerance a repressive system shows

toward forms of popular organization and social criticism,

which are expected outcomes of a conscientization process.

If conditions of repression are extreme, Freire concedes

that educational projects of a conscientizing nature will

have to go underground. It is difficult to see how an edu-

cational action which is dialogical in character can at the

same time be clandestine. In climates of "mild" repression,

where there is a possibility of bringing moral pressure to

bear on unjust structures and institutions, conscientization

projects may, in the long run, have an impact on cultural

and social change. I theorize that a lasting impact will

depend on how successful this strategy is in eliciting,

through moral pressure at educational and institutional lev-

els, a commitment from significant sectors of the non-mar-

ginal classes to radical change in society.

6. Final comment.

Intellectual contact with the thought of Paulo

Freire can be a rewarding, though at times painful, experi-

ence. It is not easy to categorize a thought that has been

shaped by so many different, rich, and conflicting philo-

sophical traditions. I am not in a position to dialogue

competently with the traditions that form Freire's intellec-

tual ancestry. I think the dialogue is important and needed

to clarify many obscure points in Freire's theoretical state-

ments, but I have chosen to dialogue with Freire directly as

he presents himself to the reader.

The thesis is the result of that dialogue. It is marked by many of the limitations inherent in human communication: cultural differences, his biases and mine, unavailability of material. I hope it reflects also my respect for Freire as a dedicated and commited educator. He challenges all who find meaning in the educational task at the level of fundamental options and attitudes. We may disagree with him in the articulation of basic values and goals. His intellectual status may be denigrated as faddish and unoriginal. It may well be that all that will endure from his work is his trust in the people, his faith in human beings and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love.[8] Even if that is the case, he rightly deserves a voice in the educational dialogue.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

1. For a good discussion of the problem of finding acceptable evidence, see Manfred Stanley, "Literacy: The Crisis of a Conventional Wisdom," in Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator, ed. Stanley M. Grabowski, pp. 41-42.

2. This criticism applies to most of Freire's writings. He seldom provides the experiential background out of which he has developed his theories.

3. Paulo Freire, "The Educational Role of the Churches in Latin America," LADOC, III, No. 14 (December, 1972), 5.

4. DeWitt, "An Exposition and Analysis . . . ," pp. 178-223.

5. Maxine Greene, "An Educational Philosopher Looks at Paulo Freire," paper read at a meeting of the American Educational Studies Association, Chicago, Ill., February 23, 1972.

6. Denis E. Collins, "Two Utopians: A Comparison and Contrast . . . ," pp. 197-205.

7. John Ohliger, "Use of Mass Media in Higher Adult Education," a talk delivered to the Ohio Council on Higher Continuing Education, Columbus, Ohio, March 18, 1971.

8. Freire, Pedagogy . . . , p. 24.

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The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of
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