

Farewell to the "Bewildered Herd": Paulo Freire's Revolutionary Dialogical Communication in the Age of Corporate Globalization

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Introduction

A bomba: A terrivel bomba atomica; E a radio-atividade; Significam terror; Ruina e calamidade. Se acabassem com a Guerra; E tudo ficasse unido; O nosso mundo de hoje; Nao seria destruido¹

In these times of pre-emptive war, univocally declared by George W. Bush and Dick Cheney [both of whom have been appropriately described as "eminences of the imperial mafia" (Blum, 2004)], in flagrant violation of international law, we feel obliged to start with the above poem included by Paulo Freire (1973, 76-77) as part of study material in his literacy campaigns in 1960's Brazil. The leitmotif of the poem — a desire for a world, united, without war—may seem like a utopian fantasy given the unflinchingly dystopian world which we inhabit. But, amidst the carnage wrought by imperialist misadventures around the globe we agree with Studs Terkel's (2003) assertion that "hope dies last." Clinging to that sentiment while at the same time recognizing its fragility, we are emboldened by the enduring legacy of Paulo Freire and the lessons we can still garner from his life's work. His voice and his message, much like those of the poem's author (a land worker), are too often obliterated by the information super-highways of capital accumulation which are, for the most part, used to promulgate the agenda of neoliberalism and corporate global hegemony in the interest of the ruling elite and to the detriment of those who are forced to sell their labor power in order to survive. And while they echo against the current decline and deceit of what used to be called "progress" towards a humane and peaceful world,

they nonetheless remind us, as do the choruses declared in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, that “Another World Is Possible.”

Freire encountered many harsh realities throughout his lifetime and witnessed the suffering and oppression of many. The urgency of his pedagogical project did not permit him to live his life indulging in utopian illusion. Yet his work was always animated by the principle of hope regardless of personal and historical circumstances. As is well known, Freire was arrested in Brazil in 1964 when a right-wing military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of President Joao Goulart. Freire had worked tirelessly to develop an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist literacy praxis that served as the foundation for a more broadly based struggle for liberation. The military government accused Freire of preaching communism, likened his teaching method to Stalin, Hitler, Peron and Mussolini, and charged that he was trying to turn Brazil into a “Bolshevik” country. They considered Freire to be an “international subversive” and “a traitor to Christ and the Brazilian people” and imprisoned him for 70 days (McLaren & Scatamburlo, 1999:16). After his incarceration, he was exiled for sixteen years. Freire’s sixteen years of exile were tumultuous and productive times—Freire served in several positions and visited dozens of countries. His observations, experiences, triumphs and disappointments eventually culminated in the creation of some of his most famous texts including, among others, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973).

When Freire was writing at that time, the left was still using a language of imperialism and grappling with the possibility of nuclear annihilation. The Cold War was raging, and the U.S., as one of the two world hegemony, was engaged in fighting the 'communist threat.' Radical educators were concerned with resisting imperialism through education for critical consciousness via Freire, Ivan Illich, and many others. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the U.S. as the sole superpower, the voices of commentators like Frances Fukuyama grew louder. It was Fukuyama, of course, who declared in his famous essay on *The Death of History*, that freedom’s train had achieved safe passage to the station at the endpoint of history and that capitalism had finally triumphed. The refrain of capital’s harpies, “there is no alternative” became increasingly common among Fukuyama and his ilk. Such

proclamations eventually entered the lexicon of the “left” which had already begun to purge the language of imperialism from their “discourses” in favor of the seemingly more “urgent” slogans of postmodernism. Post-political ideas such as post-Marxism and postmodernism—which rejected universality and the concept of ideology in favor of discourse and contingent ‘truth effects’—became popular in the left academy in North America, and the Marxist critique of political economy was banished as an irrelevant, antiquated metanarrative.

Moreover, while Marxism failed to make a serious impact in schools of education, whatever influence it did have spectacularly vanished into the thin air of academic tracking, competition, and lust for merits. Though critical educators had grown accustomed to the academic marginalization that often followed in the wake of attacks by the more churlish and reactionary conservative educationalists among them, proponents and practitioners of critical pedagogy had long feared being cast into the pit of academic hell for being perceived not only as dangerously irrelevant to “democratic progress” but also as politically treasonous. While the earliest manifestations of critical pedagogy were inspired by the revolutionary work of Freire and others who drew upon the legacy of the Marxist tradition and the language of imperialism, present-day North American critical pedagogical discourse is no longer the dangerous critic of American imperialism and capitalist exploitation that it was several decades ago.

We believe that this unfortunate state of affairs can and must be challenged vigorously. While there are numerous educational and communicational developments on our campuses—in grassroots movements, in alternative media and elsewhere related to the anti-war and anti-corporate globalization movements that give us hope that the voices of our youth will be much more politicized or open to what Freire called “conscientization” than in previous decades—such dissent is often “demonized” in “mainstream” discourses and/or marginalized in more recent forays exploring “globalization.” This has especially been the case since September 11, 2001. We need to remind ourselves and others that Freire's work has always stood on a revolutionary basis and that it always sought to confront the sordid nature of imperialism, but became progressively domesticated by “post-al” and liberal left educators who willingly stripped Freire's *oeuvre* of its radicalism in order to make it more acceptable, and hence more ‘marketable,’ in bourgeois academic circles.

Unlike those armchair “radicals” who revel in impressing their intellectual bedfellows with their command of “academese” and who relish in the production of abstract theory as an end in and of itself, Freire was a passionate pedagogue and activist who took the theory/praxis nexus seriously. Moreover, his dialectical understanding of the social world—of the subjective and the objective, of the culture of everyday life and the broader matrices of capitalist organization and political economy, bear mentioning especially since many have sought to bury objective reality beneath the priority of significations, discourses, and texts. Freire’s work reminds us that the polarization of wealth and the rampant poverty, exploitation, alienation, misery and death engendered by the ravages of global capitalism and war (not to mention the Bush doctrine of ‘preventive war’) are brute historical realities whose material and objective existence can hardly be denied. Freire’s work speaks truth to power in an intellectual climate where critical explorations of imperialism have too often been marginalized and where the very concept of class has been firebombed by conservative scholars hectoring endlessly on about capitalism’s in-built fairness and ultimately buried along with the victims of imperialism’s unholy marriage of capitalism and militarism.²

We believe that Freire’s work on revolutionary dialogical communication and education can be used as a vehicle for developing alternative globalizations and local educational (see Diniz-Pereira 2005) as well as other practices that are socialist and democratic. This is crucial if North American and other educators are to have an impact on thwarting the steady devastation of Latin America (and other regions) by neoliberal capitalism and American imperialism. In short, the time has never been more precipitous in taking Freire back from the Wax Cabinet of the Educational Hall of Fame and giving his ideas a renewed look and a central stance in the revolutionary front of communication and education studies. In recent years, imperialism (once a term that elicited shudders in the mainstream) has been proudly and boldly reintroduced into the lexicon of the American government and media (Mahajan, 2003:181). Given this context and the fact that present-day imperialism is “particularly aggressive and egregious” (Wallerstein, 2003:23), we need to revivify the work of Freire, re-materialize it (i.e. emphasize its materialist dimensions) and use it to challenge the present-day imperialism which fuels the capitalist world order.

Full Spectrum Dominance in a Media(ted) Culture:

Never before has censorship been so perfect. Never before have those who are still led to believe, in a few countries, that they remain free citizens, been less entitled to make their opinions heard, wherever it is a matter of choices affecting their real lives. Never before has it been possible to lie to them so brazenly. Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 1988

Rahul Mahajan (2003:181) notes that it is already passé to say that the Bush administration's foreign policy is a form of new imperialism—a statement echoed recently by Arundhati Roy (2004:11) who concedes that the “New Imperialism”—while a remodeled, streamlined version of what once was—is “already upon us.” Of course, the history of American imperialism is a long and tortuous one. What is important to recognize is, along with Roy, that for the “first time in history, a single empire with an arsenal of weapons that could obliterate the world in an afternoon has complete, unipolar, economic and military hegemony” (Roy, 2004:11). Remarkably, few Americans today would entertain “the idea that their nation stands for anything but peaceful, democratic, humanitarian ends,” but the uncomfortable reality “scarcely fits this kind of fanciful mythology” (Boggs, 2003:1). And, contrary to the benevolent rhetoric espoused by Bush—namely that the United States has been “called” upon to defend “the hopes of all mankind”—these are the dark and stench-filled days of Empire.

The current drive towards “American empire” may not constitute a classic imperial mission for control of other territories and the desire to establish a set of colonies around the globe, but it does reflect the use of political and military power on behalf of an ideology—a radical, pro-corporate, anti-government, free market fundamentalism that accumulates surplus value on behalf of the global capitalist elite. While the new imperialism uses different weapons to break open different markets (trade policies in some instances, bombs in others) there “isn't a country on God's earth that is not caught in the cross-hairs of the American cruise missile and the IMF checkbook” (Roy, 2004:11). Today, the ethos of militarism permeates the American economy, political institutions and culture and, according to Boggs, it “could hardly be otherwise given the country's position as sole remaining superpower, as unchallenged world hegemon” (2003:2). No rival centers of power or countervailing military forces exist—or will likely exist in the foreseeable future—that can contain this behemoth which strides so arrogantly across the world's stage. Framed by its

cardinal imperative of full spectrum dominance, the new militarism is witnessing far-reaching changes in the U.S. armed forces and their role in world affairs. Mahajan (2003:27-28) goes so far as to claim that the United States has

reached a new zenith of political dominance—capable of flouting the express wishes of the vast mass of humanity and the vast majority of nations and still force them to assimilate into its ever-expanding structures of control. There is no longer any pretense that the United States is not an empire, or even that it is a reluctant one.

Given the victorious history of U.S. propaganda operations during the last century (Snow, 2002), the present role of the mainstream mass media in reproducing and perpetuating a culture of militarism within the United States cannot be underestimated. Nor, for that matter, can the media's role in aiding and abetting U.S. propaganda and military interventions abroad. Indeed, the build-up to the recent war in Iraq clearly illustrated how the American media were transmogrified into hollow echo chambers that gleefully valorized U.S. military might and an unthinking "patriotism" and served as but one example of how the elite, agenda-setting western media fulfill a propaganda function by adhering to an imperialist ideology and by legitimizing deceptive and duplicitous U.S. interventionist forays (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, forthcoming). In this regard, Debord's comments, cited above and penned several years ago, have taken on a new (and indeed chilling) significance as we survey the contemporary social, political and cultural landscape of the United States.

It is a landscape dominated primarily by a military-industrial-media complex whose main function is to serve up spectacles that reinforce the Manichaeism (good versus evil) favored by the current Bush administration.³ This apparatus conveys a very particularized and ideologically-laden worldview that suggests, among other things, overdetermines the notion that free market capitalism is the best economic system in world history; that private monetary gain and profit making are central objectives of life; that US military force is directed only towards good purposes and laudable goals; that US military might has been, and continues to be, a 'civilizing' force for the benefit of dispossessed and disenfranchised people throughout the world; that dissent lends support to the minions of evil terrorism; and that the only alternative is to embrace the manic logic of American imperialist capitalism disguised with the patina of "democratic" platitudes. Such ideologically varnished assumptions are part and

parcel of the “necessary illusions” needed for “thought control” in democratic societies (Chomsky, 1989). They are assumptions that are constantly reinforced in the so-called “informational” media as well as in the realm of the entertainment media. As James Petras (2003:19) has pointed out:

The state, the mass media and the corporate world encourage mindless, passive engagement in mass spectator entertainment . . . and reinforces the empire world view of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ where the ‘good guys’ defeat the ‘evil doers’ through violence and destruction.”

It is within this context that government administrations have demonstrated their increasing media savvy and learned to make “ideological warfare as important to its operations as military and economic warfare” (McChesney & Foster, 2003:1).

The preferred site for such ideological warfare is undoubtedly media culture. John McMurtry (2002:xii) reminds us, the “mass media, dominantly owned by military-industrial and infotainment corporations,” are in the business of promulgating a specific mind-set and value system which blinkers out whatever may reveal a “disorder in the existing system of rule.” This mind-set is an ideological ‘effect’ that operates as a narrative that in turn obfuscates the “value system disorder” that lies at the heart of American empire including “US logistical and financial support of death-squads, terrorist networks” and other such practices that have systematically fomented chaos around the globe—long before 9/11 (McMurtry, 2002:xii-xiii). It is a narrative we call “Hummer pedagogy.”

While the United States has always been a highly militarized nation, we are using the phrase “Hummer pedagogy” to refer to the even more egregious and progressive militarization of “post-9/11” American society as manifested in a multifaceted and multileveled narrative which has permeated the realms of education, politics, science, technology, the media, and popular culture. Hummer pedagogy also refers, to a large extent, to the Schwarzeneggerization of US domestic and foreign policies—it is a posturing where might equals right, where obtrusive, intimidating and bullying tactics are valorized as displays of moral fortitude, and where old-fashioned ‘ass-whupping’ courtesy of the “red, white and blue” substitutes for rational political discourse. Perhaps more insidious is that in the world of Hummer pedagogy, image and spin trump ‘reality.’ Witness the recent effort by James M. Inhofe, Republican senator from Oklahoma, who attempted to defuse the public firestorm that resulted from the

release of photographs and descriptions of prisoner abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by claiming that the prisoners had American blood on their hands and that Saddam Hussein's regime was far more brutal than that of George W. Bush. Hummer pedagogy discourages people from thinking, from asking too many questions, and from looking beyond the surface of the manufactured images that shape the public mind. It deals in powerful tools of fiction—in images that both please and deceive. It is a world of dramatic visual effects, artificial dreams, counterfeit emotions and preconceived spontaneity. It is a world where appearances are preferred over reality and where "truth" is that which sells—that is, if people "buy it," it is right and true.

In such a context, the "big lie" circulates all the more freely, often without contestation. In his discussion of the "new totalitarianism," McMurtry (2002:88-89) argues that,

the big lie—in the sense of *omnipervasive lie*—is disseminated by round-the-clock, centrally controlled multi-media . . . the omnipervasive lie operates through a total conditioning apparatus . . . [The] collapse of the distinction between truth and fictions opens the way to totalitarian occupation of consciousness . . . In the old totalitarian culture of the Big Lie, the truth is hidden. In the new totalitarianism, there is no line between the truth and falsehood to embarrass the lies. The truth is what people can be conditioned to believe. In a cultural field where corporate symbols and roles, commodities, ads and PR campaigns dominate, what used to be called 'lies' are no longer an issue. Ronald Reagan is a cultural icon of this *fin de siecle* politics . . . Reagan's media triumphs for eight years set the stage of the new culture of no line left between truth and falsehood. Postmodernism then played its unwitting theoretical reflection.

We might add that the Bush *hijo* administration has, arguably, taken such practices to a level unimaginable to even the savviest of Reagan's spin doctors. Indeed, when the current White House realized that it was time to address the rising tide of 'anti-Americanism' around the globe, it hired "one of Madison Avenue's top brand managers" in the form of Charlotte Beers who was commissioned to "perform an overhaul of the U.S. image" (Klein, 2002:184). The ultimate aim of the campaign—replete with the requisite buzzwords 'freedom,' 'democracy,' etc.—was to sell 'America the brand' to the world. Most citizens of the global community, especially those who have experienced the jack-boot thuggery of US might first-hand and/or those who have suffered under American-led neoliberal "globalization" policies,

didn't "buy" it but it played well with the hometown crowd—most of whom have been content to immerse themselves in the dizzying vortex of plastic flags, stars and stripes paraphernalia, and the bellicose chorus "America is #1" while remaining oblivious to the machinations of the American government, multinational corporations, and the domestic and foreign policy deceptions by our Boy Emperor and his Praetorian Guard at the White House and Department of Defense.

The recent film, "Matrix Reloaded," offers a useful analogy for those attempting to make sense of the chasm that has opened between "what's real and what Americans perceive is real" in what Robert Parry dubs the "American Matrix." According to Parry (2003:1), some of those living in the American Matrix appear to be simply oblivious to what is "going on beneath the surface" of the images presented or too busy or bored to investigate. Others, he contends, are reminiscent of Ciper (a character in the original movie) and seem quite content to choose the "fake pleasures of the Matrix over what Morpheus calls the 'the desert of the real'" (Ibid). Whatever the case may be, it appears as though the "perception managers" and spinmeisters employed by the Bush administration have capitalized on such tendencies, since most Americans appear to relish positive images of U.S. military operations and, in the case of the Iraq intervention, to have developed an appetite for a "Thomas Kinkade war, prettified, romanticized, glorified war" (Goldsborough, 2003:1). In the American Matrix, image trumps reality.

While some sectors of the American population have grown increasingly skeptical about the war on Iraq given the revelations about bogus intelligence, the financial costs of the military occupation, the escalating number of casualties, and more recently the disarming and brutal photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured, a considerable majority still cling to the belief that the war was "just" and that it was intended to spread the seeds of "democracy" and "freedom" in the Middle East. Of course, such rhetoric is all too familiar to those in other parts of the world—particularly in Latin America—where American-style "democracy" has often been accompanied by immiseration and death. Yet, the mythology of a benevolent America persists among large sectors of the U.S. population. In order to understand how such a myth circulates, it is necessary to revisit the concept of the "bewildered herd."

The 'Bewildered Herd' and the Subversion of Democracy:

The public must be put in its place, so that it may exercise its own powers, but no less and perhaps even more, so that each of us may live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd. Only the insider can make decisions, not because he is inherently a better man but because he is so placed that he can understand and can act. The outsider is necessarily ignorant, usually irrelevant, and often meddling.

--Walter Lippmann

The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.

--Alex Carey

The phrase "bewildered herd" is, of course, derived from the work of Walter Lippmann, in particular his well-known work, *The Phantom Public*, published in 1925 (a book that in many respects was a sequel to an earlier text penned in 1922—*Public Opinion*). While Lippmann flirted briefly with progressive socialist politics during his educational stint at Harvard, his political views underwent a dramatic shift to the right during the course of his life. That shift was certainly exemplified in the aforementioned publications—both of which expressed considerable doubts about the practical feasibility of establishing a true democracy in modern society. Not unlike the views of philosopher Leo Strauss, whose works have famously influenced the cabal of hawks that serve as Bush *hijos* innermost circle, Lippmann believed that 'the people' had to be controlled and manipulated by elites, by political insiders, who could shape opinions conducive to maintaining control and the status quo.⁴

Lippmann was quite attuned to the fact that there was the world "outside" and the "pictures" in people's heads. For Lippmann, it was the responsibility of "insiders" to manipulate and shape those pictures and hence to control the flow of communication. The questions which preoccupied Lippmann—namely, how to think about "the public" and "the people," the nature and function of "public opinion" and "public relations" are questions which, for the past century, have continued to interest researchers and scholars in the fields of communication and education. In the communication model (often referred to as the dominant paradigm) preferred by Lippmann, a restricted number of "responsible" people have the power and capacity

to shape perceptions of what is “good” and “right.” Indeed, in a proper democracy, according to Lippmann, this small elite would be in a position to take a leading role in society. They would shepherd the public or the “bewildered herd.”

If we wish to understand Lippmann’s concept of the bewildered herd, it is imperative to locate the communication model which he valorized in the historical context of the emergence and development of the public relations industry. In his magisterial social history of “spin,” Stuart Ewen (1996) examines the way in which the “fathers” of public opinion and public relations—which includes Edward Bernays along with Walter Lippmann—unabashedly expressed a hierarchical view of society in which there existed an “intelligent few” who were charged with the responsibility of contemplating and influencing the tide of history. Ewen also situates the emergence of public relations (essentially the science of manufacturing public opinion) in terms of historical power relations and struggles. For Ewen (1996:13), it is necessary to acknowledge that the earliest practitioners and theorists of public relations and public opinion (including Lippmann) were motivated by a fear of democracy and “the fear of an empowered public.” Clearly, this is an unflinchingly bleak assessment yet not surprising in a hegemonic culture cheerfully unburdened by a commitment to equality and democracy. In the eyes of the public relations cadre of Bernays and Lippmann, the tradition of progressive muck-raking journalism, which had stirred the passions of “the people” and which had been highly critical of the privileged classes and business magnates, had to be quelled lest the masses demand reform. Journalism “that challenged the equity of the business system itself” (i.e. capitalism) had been toying “with the forces of revolt” (Ewen, 1996:63) and was therefore viewed as a palpable threat to the dominant class. It therefore became necessary to “educate the public” about the wonders of capitalism, the benevolence of the capitalist class, and to engineer consent to its rule. As Ewen (1996:157) notes, Lippmann’s main concern was how to make “rule by elites, *in a democratic age*, less difficult.”

It is not difficult to see how a “properly functioning” democracy would necessarily entail and utilize class divisions. First, there are those who take an active role in common issues. They consist of a specialized or coordinator class who would teach, analyze, execute and run political, economic, and ideological matters. Then there are those, the majority of people, who are expected to obey. They form the bulk of the “bewildered herd” and are expected to fulfill a very specific function in a democratic

society—namely as spectators who from time to time are allowed to “lend their weight to one or the other member of a specialized class” (Chomsky, 2002:17) in elections. As Chomsky (2002:17) notes, there is a dominant logic which animates such beliefs and according to Chomsky, such beliefs constitute a “compelling” moral principle: “The compelling moral principle is that the mass of the public is just too stupid to be able to understand things. If they try to participate in managing their own affairs, they’re just going to cause trouble.” Following such logic, it is in the best interest of *all* concerned if questions pertaining to labor conditions, civil rights, corporate hegemony, capitalist exploitation, imperialist wars, and the like be marginalized or framed in particular ways by the “insiders,” the “punditry” and the “elites.” Anyone familiar with Chomsky’s work and with Freire’s revolutionary ideas of participation and learning would hardly find this “compelling” moral convincing and yet they would be quick to acknowledge the role played by the corporate media, popular culture, and educational institutions in manufacturing consent to capitalist and class rule. Such cultural institutions act as pedagogical machines loading our consciousness with their “study” materials, and giving destination to our social existence. This is true insofar as thinking and consciousness are rooted in and arise from our daily interactions with the material world.

We can take the concept of the “bewildered herd” a step further in order to examine the imperial machinations of the United States for it is not enough to tame the bewildered herd in the political corral of domestic decision-making. Indeed, aspirations of empire and global hegemony necessitates taming the “masses” the world over—by any means necessary. In this context, the work of Freire can help us to understand precisely how the militant language of U.S. imperialism follows the dominant paradigm of communication (Servaes, 2001; Nain, 2001). This paradigm has a similar unipolar optic to the liturgies of patriotism and homilies to capital incanted by the White House cleric of empire. Both the evangelical tone and dominant logic of this message suggests, among other things, that the United States of America knows what is best for the world and that the edicts issued by the American empire are those which must be “obeyed” if “democracy” is to flourish. It is one that implies that “disobedience” will not be tolerated and that it will be punishable in the form of military attack, sponsorship of coup d’etats (as in Haiti, Venezuela and elsewhere) and other activities designed to squelch critical and dissident thought.

Such a posturing is clearly evident in Iraq. The Bush administration, presumably intent on “democratizing” Iraq, saw fit to shut down the presses of local newspapers that weren’t promulgating the American propaganda line. In order to “inform” the Iraqi people, the United States government has been funding a newspaper (Al-Sabah) and a television station (Al-Iraqiya) among other media outlets, run by Harris, Inc., a Florida-based communications company that won a \$96 million Pentagon contract to “develop” the media in the war-torn country. Such is the nature of the “democratic” media strategy favored by the current United States government.

One way to highlight the radical differences between the dominant paradigm of Lippmann and others referred to above, and what we call Freire’s revolutionary dialogical communication, is to briefly study Freire’s philosophical roots. It is evident that the major influence animating the dominant paradigm is a conservative right-wing interpretation of Plato’s philosophy.⁵ In contrast, Freire’s roots are more eclectic, and his inspiration comes from various sources. As Godonoo (1998:31) points out: “Freire’s philosophical posture has a rich menu of *an intellectual socio-human recipe* that is capable of empowering the different spatial needs of humanity” (italics in original). At the very core of his educational manifesto is a conviction that education must be linked and eventually lead to political liberation. He also believed from the beginning to the end of his educational pilgrimage that long-lasting political changes could not be made by the elites, but *by the people*. This conviction developed partly from his experiences from the field in the 1950s and 1960s, and partly from his widespread reading of revolutionary literature during those decades. To some extent, there is a phenomenological inflection in Freire’s work since he seemed to adopt from Husserl the idea that “exploration of consciousness is a prerequisite to knowledge of reality” (Godonoo, 1998:33). Additionally, Godonoo (ibid) claims, that “Freire uses a phenomenological investigation of reality and consciousness in order to unveil the mode of human knowing.”

While Godonoo’s point is well taken, we would not call Freire’s philosophical “method” phenomenological. Rather, we see Freire’s work in the frame of radical hermeneutics for at least two reasons. First, Freire did not believe in separating the method of investigation from the socio-political context and second, he maintained the idea of syncretism in his theorizing by mixing diverse voices together in demonstrating the strength of revolutionary dialogical thinking. As Freire puts it:

We must know, or at least we must make clear here, we are not falling into an idealistic position where consciousness changes inside of itself through an intellectual game in a seminar . . . Liberating education can change our understanding of reality. But this is not the same thing as changing reality itself. No. Only political action in society can make social transformation (Freire & Shor, 1973:175).

In this sense, Freire emphasizes the *active* and *actionable* component of liberating education and, by extension, of liberating communicative forms.

Essential to a comprehensive understanding of Freire's core ideas of the education of critical and actual consciousness is his essay "Education as the Practice for Freedom" (1973) in which he developed the basic concepts that then formed a frame of reference for the famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his own words, Freire (1973:44) sought to offer "the people the means by which they could supersede their magic or naïve perception of reality by one that was predominantly critical, so that they could assume positions appropriate to the dynamic climate of the transition." Freire taught that in order to get a good grasp of the ongoing capitalist world order, of students' ideas, and their everyday consciousnesses and communications it was imperative for a critical teacher to step out of the solitude of her/his classroom and hit the neighborhood, the streets, (and we would extend this to the growing virtual communities on the Internet). As Freire (1973:41) notes:

I had experimented with—and abandoned—various methods and processes of communication. Never, however, had I abandoned the conviction that only by working with the people could I achieve anything authentic on their behalf. Never had I believed that the democratization of culture meant either its vulgarization or simply passing on to the people prescriptions formulated in the teacher's office.

Such a formulation foregrounds the notion of active, engaged, informed, political participation—something which stands in stark contrast to the passive consumption of media spectacles and sound bites encouraged by dominant communication models and conceptions of the "bewildered herd." Freire acknowledged all too well the preference among elites for keeping people submerged in pseudo-reality and discouraging the critical optimism inspired by revolutionary dialogical communication among "common people." Indeed, if common people would begin to question their circumstances as would be the case in a (not yet realized) critical phase of society, the privileged elite would find it necessary to "band together in self-

defense” (Freire, 1973:14). This is similar to Lippmann’s analysis of elites only from the opposite direction. As Freire (1973:14) writes:

The elite defend a *sui generis* democracy, in which the people are ‘unwell’ and require ‘medicine’—whereas in fact their ailment is the wish to speak up and participate. Each time the people try to express themselves freely and to act, it is a sign they continue to be ill and thus need more medicine. In this strange interpretation of democracy, health is synonymous with popular silence and inaction. The defenders of this ‘democracy’ speak often of the need to protect people from what they call ‘foreign ideologies’—i.e. anything that could contribute to the active presence of the people in their own historical process. Similarly, they label as ‘subversives’ all those who enter into the dynamics of the transition and become its representatives.

One of the strongest medicines for decades has been the corporate media which celebrates the irrational myths of its own creation, plays “patriotic games” to extract super profits from the military-industrial complex in times of war, objectifies the audience and tries to reduce them paradoxically to actively reflexive yet ideologically complicit participants through its seemingly democratic, yet often exaggerated, and untruthful image-building. It is therefore important to see how particular discourses are manufactured in the present age of (State) terrorism. For example, when bombs killed scores of people in the Madrid train attacks, Western corporate media covered the incident as a national and Pan-European trauma. And when the socialist party won a “shock” victory in the subsequent election, the media claimed that the attacks were the decisive factor leading to the ouster of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar’s government. On American television, so-called “experts” lamented the election results and repeatedly suggested that *the people’s* vote was both misguided and that it would serve to further embolden terrorists. The implication was that the Spanish populace had, in some way, been infected with an illness. Such “analysis” failed to notice that a majority of Spaniards had been criticizing Aznar’s right-wing, corporate-friendly government as well as his unholy companionship with Mr. Bush for quite some time. In order to grasp this and other incidents in the global arena, it is beneficial to understand how corporate media works and whose “side” they are on. In the case of the World after 9/11, and 911 days after that in Madrid, there can be no doubt about the allegiances of the corporate media. As Roy (2004:11) argues:

It is important to understand that the corporate media don’t just support the neoliberal project. They *are* the neoliberal project. This is not a moral position

they have chosen to take; it's structural. It's intrinsic to the economics of how the mass media work.

Given this context, a

crucial legacy of Freire's work is the opportunity it provides to develop a pedagogy of media education that can both inform those who study globalization and, at the same time, provide insights for understanding processes of local resistance to and for transformations of the globalization of the media by ordinary people in their everyday lives (Richards, 2001:179).

Such a pedagogy encapsulates a three-pronged approach: First, "students" engage in a pedagogy of demystification centering around the identification and denaturalization of dominant sign systems and the historicization of "common sense," where signification (and the manufacture of images and hegemonic discourses) is understood as a political practice that refracts rather than reflects reality, and where media narratives are understood in relation to the larger social universe of capital and imperial imperatives. This is followed by a pedagogy of opposition, where people actively engage in understanding the multifarious workings of various political systems, ideologies, and histories—including the theoretical languages used in the analyses themselves. Eventually students begin to adopt different vantage points to further their understanding, and develop their own political positions through the processes of analysis and synthesis. Additionally, revolutionary critical pedagogy supports a totalizing reflection upon the historical-practical constitution of the world and it has an emancipatory intent. It attempts to make connections among the constituent parts of the military-industrial-media complex from a perspective which acknowledges the larger social totality of capitalism with an eye towards understanding and changing dominant arrangements. As such, a Freirean revolutionary dialogical model of communication and pedagogy points beyond harmonizing students to the capitalist social order or serving as an apologia for social stability.

Dialogical Communication For Humanity and Against Neoliberal Corporate Globalization:

In many respects, the legacy of Freire's work is a constant reminder of the link between communication, pedagogy, and politics. An urgent question that emerges can be formulated thusly: What pedagogical direction should we take? This,

unavoidably, brings us face-to-face with the thorny question of organization, a problem that has exercised both the revolutionary and the progressive left for over a century. Max Elbaum notes that organizations are crucial in the struggle for social justice. He writes that

[w]ithout collective forms it is impossible to train cadre, debate theory and strategy, spread information and analysis, or engage fully with the urgent struggles of the day. Only through organizations can social justice activists maximize their contribution to ongoing battles and position themselves to maximally influence events when new mass upheavals and opportunities arise (2002:335).

Yet, at the same time, Elbaum warns that we must avoid what he calls “sectarian dead-ends” in our struggle for social justice. Reflecting on his own experiences, he explains that if a movement becomes a “self-contained world” that insists upon group solidarity and discipline, this can often lead to the suppression of internal democracy. Problems inevitably arise when “purer-than-thou fidelity to old orthodoxies” is employed.

It is with that in mind that Freire’s concept of revolutionary dialogical communication can prove most instructive. Freire consistently warned against the pitfalls of applying a uniform, dogmatic praxis. Rather, he reminds us that a “truly revolutionary project . . . to which the utopian dimension is natural, is a process in which people assume the role of subject in the precarious adventure of transforming and recreating the world” (Freire, 1985:82). Hence, rather than complying with the rigid, vertical, and top-down models of communication that have often characterized labor movements and party organizations, Freire’s dialogical praxis supports horizontal systems of communication. It is thus axiomatic for the ongoing development of revolutionary dialogical communication and critical pedagogy at large that it be based upon an alternative vision of human sociality; one that operates outside the social universe of capital and one that challenges the military-industrial-media complex and its attendant communications model.

One of the most notable aspects of some recent activist formations (particularly those associated with ‘anti-globalization’) has been the powerful integration of the movements with the development of ‘alternative’ media. In many respects, activists involved in contemporary social movements have heeded the call of the Zapatistas to

‘become the media’ and to cultivate networks of alternative communications rather than relying on established media forms and organizations. In this sense, the boundaries “separating grass-roots activists and radical media makers” are increasingly blurred (Downing, 2001:206). Through ‘alternative’ media networks, those involved in social movements are increasingly able to “speak for” themselves, to articulate and document their own experiences directly (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Kellner, 2001; Perlstein, 2001).

Just one example of this can be found in Argentina where we are witnessing new forms of organized struggle as a result of the recent economic collapse of the country. We are referring here to the examples of the street protests of the *piqueteros* (the unemployed) currently underway, and which first emerged about five years ago in the impoverished communities in the provinces. The *piqueteros* have evolved into one of the largest and most tactfully organized social movements in the country. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, the *piqueteros* have demonstrated success organizationally and through formal acts of nonviolence and self-defense designed to halt the continued exploitation and repression of the unemployed. Revolutionary and creative forms of communication have also become central to the movement. The media collective, Grupo Alavio has most recently launched “TV-piquetera,” a news broadcast which transmits live pirate TV signals during road blockades and from marginalized working class neighborhoods (Trigona, 2004). For women *piqueteros* (*piqueteras*) alternative and revolutionary forms of communication have allowed them to participate more fully in the movement by offering them a medium from which to transmit their specifically gendered struggles. More recently, new neighbourhood *asambleas* (assemblies) have arisen out of local street corner protests. Numbering around 300 throughout the country, these assemblies meet once a week to organize *cacerolas* (protests) and to defend those evicted from their homes, or who are having their utilities shut off, etc. The *asambleistas* (assembly members) also coordinate soup kitchens to feed others and themselves. This anti-hierarchical, decentralized, and grassroots movement consisting of both employed and unemployed workers, mostly women, has taken on a new urgency since December, 2002, when four governments collapsed in quick succession following Argentina’s default on its foreign debt. Canadian activist Naomi Klein (2003) captures the spirit surrounding the creation of the *asambleas* by the following words:

In Argentina, many of the young people fighting the neo-liberal policies that have bankrupted this country are children of leftist activists who were "disappeared" during the military dictatorship of 1976-'83. They talk openly about their determination to continue their parents' political fight for socialism but by different means. Rather than attacking military barracks, they squat on abandoned land and build bakeries and homes; rather than planning their actions in secret, they hold open assemblies on street corners; rather than insisting on ideological purity, they value democratic decision-making above all. Plenty of older activists, the lucky ones who survived the terror of the '70s, have joined these movements, speaking enthusiastically of learning from people half their age, of feeling freed of the ideological prisons of their pasts, of having a second chance to get it right.

The anti-hierarchical, decentralized, and democratic character of the aforementioned movement is reflected in one of the major independent media conduits for the *piquetero* movement—Indymedia—which is, arguably, one of the most dynamic examples of a revolutionary dialogical communications model⁶

The Zapatistas were, of course, among the first to acknowledge the importance of using emerging communication technologies, particularly the Internet, to circumvent corporate media and reach audiences sympathetic to their cause. In 1996, the Zapatistas held the first international *encuentro* gathering for humanity and against neoliberalism. It was there that they called for a network of international solidarity that would communicate autonomously and horizontally. The “dream of an international network of networks came closest to realization with the Seattle protests and the founding of the Independent Media Center movement (IMC)” (Kidd, 2002:1). The first Independent Media Center was established in 1999 just prior to the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests that took place in Seattle—an event that many have identified as both a watershed moment for independent media and as representing a significant shift in the configuration of contemporary social movements (Light, 1999; Zinn, 2000). Since Fall 1999, the IMC has grown rapidly and certainly beyond anything anticipated by its founders. Indymedia has multiplied itself, rhizomatically branching out into a decentralized global network that (at the time of this writing) boasts more than 120 sites worldwide (including 15 in Latin America) on every continent, with more in the planning stages.

Since its inception, Indymedia has been informed by the belief that an innovative media/political project had to entail more than “a site for creating and distributing progressive content” (Perlstein, 2001:335). Rather, IMC founders aspired to create

physical and virtual spaces for interaction, dialogue, and political mobilization. In many ways, Indymedia has awakened activists of all stripes to the urgent need to resist, contradict and supplant the hegemonic power of capital, to tell different versions of the story of “globalization” than the corporate media, and to tell it by using an entirely new “communications” model. Kidd (2002:2) suggests that the development of Indymedia was “especially stunning” for it created a communications platform that represented a “quantum leap in scope and scale from earlier alternative media networks.” This was largely due to Indymedia’s commitment of free software distribution, the sharing and on-going development of technological resources, an “open publishing” philosophy that enabled unprecedented levels of interactivity, and a non-hierarchical, participatory organizational structure. According to Korytko, the model modestly conceived by pioneers of Indymedia constituted a “paradigm-shattering” experiment in the free and open exchange of information, knowledge and resources (Korytko, cited in Nogueria, 2001:71).

There is no doubt that the IMC movement posed a creative and significant challenge to established ways of thinking about the communication model typically employed by even the most progressive ‘alternative’ media outlets. That model, referred to as the “broadcasting model,” is defined as one in which a single media institution or “large entity sends its message out to as broad an audience as possible” (O’Connor, 1999:4). Unlike the broadcast model where representation tended to be centrally controlled and/or managed, Indymedia’s open communication model put the “means of production” and dissemination in more hands than ever before and made it possible to experiment with a new, multi-point, multimedia network model and a more participatory media approach. While we have no way of knowing the extent to which Indymedia activists may have been exposed to the works of Freire, those familiar with his writing on revolutionary dialogical communication will recognize the latent Freirian flavor of this model for, in addition to other things, it has provided an avenue for underrepresented groups to tell their own stories, in their own voices. The cacophony of voices that constitute the many factions of the global justice movement are, for the most part, represented on the Indymedia network. As Klein notes:

The IMC is doing more than breaking the corporate monopoly on storytelling, it is inventing new media models that are uniquely equipped to mirror the international and diverse nature of this protest movement. This is media that

crosses borders and issues like no communication network we have seen before.
(<http://seattle.indymedia.org/accolades.php3>)

The voices—however diverse—are nonetheless united by their commitment to a “better world, despite corporate media’s distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity” (<http://www.indymedia.org>).

In Argentina, Indymedia has proven to be a valuable resource for the *piquetero* movement on several levels. It has provided “voice to the voiceless,” it has helped to facilitate local protests against oppression, and it has helped to forge alliances among activists of all stripes (<http://argentina.indymedia.org>). The rationale for establishing Indymedia Argentina is stated quite clearly in the organizations mission statement: “because those that are not in agreement with the interests” of the great “corporations” do not have a voice through traditional means. The “television, the newspapers, the magazines” with massive circulation are “in the hands of a handful of economic groups that inform according to their own interests.” The camera and the microphone of these means are “never” on the side of those who do not have voice”—the “workers”, the “students,” or the “unemployed” (<http://argentina.indymedia.org>). Indymedia Argentina, like the entire global Indymedia network, is dedicated to “horizontal” and “non-hierarchical” forms of communication and organization and among its stated objectives is the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. As in many other parts of Latin America, Indymedia Argentina represents *media for the oppressed*. In this regard, it is crucial for those dedicated to social justice and democratic media forms to be cautiously optimistic about the potential that the Indymedia initiative has unleashed. And, while a network such as Indymedia cannot, in and of itself, “pose a threat to the status quo and corporate power,” its promise lies in its ‘organizational’ apparatus, its ability to coordinate *social* networks of activists and improve communication between them (Herndon, 2002).

Given the success of Indymedia, we cannot underestimate the current and future meaning of the Internet as a communicational and organizational force, or as “the other superpower” in the possession of the people, especially those of the younger generation. That said, it is also imperative to recognize that the “digital divide” among the people of a world based on capitalist logic, is deep and growing. This digital divide must, therefore, be addressed when discussing the democratic potential of the Internet since it separates developed nations from underdeveloped nations, and

stratifies Internet access by economic, racial and gender classifications (Milberry, 2003:81; Suoranta, 2003). It is also worth noting that less than 10 percent of the world's population has Internet access. Nonetheless, we still need to acknowledge and be curious about the communicational and revolutionary possibilities of the Internet as a new sort of organizational force that has been used already in building up worldwide protests against corporate globalization and ongoing wars.

Additionally, there are further lessons we can take from Freire for the issue of internet access is not defined exclusively by the availability of software, hardware and connection. Rather, it is also a question of media literacy and communication skills (Ford & Gil, 2001). In this sense a pedagogy which foregrounds media literacy and which nurtures the progressive use of 'local' communicational capabilities is essential. Revolutionary critical pedagogues must work, in the tradition of Freire, to build deeper relationships with alternative media including community, campus and microradio stations, fostering print media projects and training indigenous populations worldwide in the use of various communication technologies. Here we are reminded of Freire's consummate commitment to communication in its many and varied forms. He writes that human beings "cannot be truly human apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures. To impede communication is to reduce men *{sic}* to the status of "things"—and this is a job for oppressors, not for revolutionaries" (Freire, 1970:123).

Talking to the dead is, of course, impossible but their presence can always be felt through their ability to influence the living. Were he alive today, we believe that Freire would be encouraged by the progressive communicative coalitions and global social movements being forged. Yet, he would also likely point out that the social movements afoot today need to be attuned to the lessons which the past offers. His revolutionary humanism would suggest the need to move beyond the politics of reformism and the need to project a positive alternative to capitalism and imperialism so as to avoid the tendency of revolutions and radical movements to transform into their opposite (cf. Hudis, 2004). In the words of Raya Dunayevskaya:

Without a new vision of revolutions, a new individual, a new universal, a new society, new human relations, we would be forced to tail-end one or another form of reformism just when the age of nuclear Titans . . . threatens the very survival of civilization as we have known it. The myriad crises in our age have

shown, over and over again, from Russia to China, from Cuba to Iran, from Africa to Pol Pot's Cambodia, that without a philosophy of revolution activism spends itself in mere anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, without ever revealing what it is for (cited in Hudis, 2004:4).

Freire's radical humanism, much like Dunayevskaya's, provides a constant reminder that the project of humanity remains unrealized in the most profound sense. Freire's commitment to human emancipation and the extension of human dignity, freedom, and social justice to all people reminds us that we must remain dedicated to the struggle for socialism. In light of current world historical circumstances marked as they are by imperialist adventures, war, and corporate control over most aspects of "public life," critical pedagogues must re-dedicate themselves to revolutionary dialogical communication and work to shed light on the undemocratic character of contemporary mainstream media, dominant communications models, and capitalism itself. They must point to the potential of existing and nascent communications developments and social movements and, above all, they must imagine a "public" beyond the "bewildered herd."

Notes

1. The Bomb: The terrible atomic bomb/ And radioactivity/ Signify terror,/ Ruin and calamity./ If war were ended/ And everything were united/ Our world/ Would not be destroyed.

2. We refer to this intellectual climate as one that is, for the most part, enamored with the cultural but generally blind to political economy. The current romance with the cultural among large sections of the educational "left" and the concomitant ignorance of political and economic conditions has helped to advance the importance of cultural identification, especially for marginalized constituencies, but at the same time has obfuscated the political and economic roots of marginalization. The focus in left educational circles continues to be centered on some form of identity politics and critiques of master narratives for their Eurocentrism, sexism, racism, etc. These critiques have been especially important in drawing attention to the many blindspots of earlier formulations—including those in Freire's work. Indeed, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Freire began to address such issues in his own work *but* he always

acknowledged the perils of imperialism and capitalism and the centrality of *class* even though he did not operate within a purely Marxist framework.

3. While it would be patently unfair to attribute all the blame to the current Bush administration in light of the many American misadventures since at least the Cold War, the nature of Bush's unilateralism and pre-emptive war strategy is virtually unprecedented in modern history.

4. The historian Herbert Aptheker once said the following about Walter Lippmann:

All of his political activities and intellectual endeavors since 1913 have been directed towards preserving monopoly capitalism and bringing to the rich responsible thinking geared to their interests, by urging upon them a 'reasonable' approach and by attacking democratic concepts and practices. Mr. Lippmann, with the exception of his extreme youth, has always been anti-democratic.

5. Paradoxically, such an interpretation of Plato is clearly on display in the Straussian machinations of the current Bush administration and their use of the media to obfuscate the undemocratic thrust of their domestic and foreign policies. Bleifuss (2004:15) notes that Leo Strauss advocated "the need for an all-knowing elite to conspire to guide public policy." For Strauss, the vulgar masses are not fit for truth or liberty. However, because the vulgar masses have numbers on their side, they cannot be merely ignored. It therefore becomes necessary to engage in an active program of manipulation—Strauss was, after all, "a great believer in the efficacy and usefulness of lies in politics" (Bleifuss, 2004:15).

6. For a more in-depth examination of Indymedia, see Scatamburlo-D'Annibale & Chehade, 2004.

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