

Revolutionary Leadership↔Revolutionary Pedagogy: Reevaluating the Links and Disjunctions Between Lukács and Freire

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INTRODUCTION

A major problematic in Marxist theory is how to conceptualize, or reconceptualize, revolutionary organization. A useful topography of the various historical modes of organization is provided by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their highly controversial and conceptually rich book *Multitude*.¹ Here the authors suggest that any theory of counterhegemonic resistance must be framed by a historical materialist understanding wherein (a) resistance is always in relation to a specific form of oppression, (b) resistance is determined in the last instance by changing forms of economic and social production, and (c) each new form of resistance organization is an attempt to correct the antidemocratic failures of the previous forms. Thus we see correspondences between the formation of people's armies and the rise of an industrial working class out of a peasant/feudal system. While these hierarchically organized armies might very well have been necessary at that historical phase, they had increasingly antidemocratic tendencies that negated their stated goals of liberation. In the nineteen sixties, there was a turn to guerrilla organizations in response to the failures of the "party" and the growing restructuring of productive relations on a global scale. Yet even here, the supposedly democratic and decentralized form of organization led to reterritorialization by the guerrilla leader. Now a new crisis/historical opportunity has opened up calling for a reimagining of revolutionary organization. According to Hardt and Negri, transnational, networked production acts as the material precondition for a struggle against "Empire" capable of finally articulating a democratic praxis of revolution. Yet the question of what this network looks like remains vague and, as many have suggested, highly allegorical. So Hardt and Negri open up a line of inquiry — pinpointing possible tendencies — rather than offer a solution. It is their urgent framing of the issue rather than their final model that remains most important for current grass-root struggles and political theorists.

The crisis of revolutionary organization is also a central issue in contemporary Marxist educational literature. Peter McLaren's recent work indicates a concerted effort to theorize the international organization of the "educational left" into a viable counterhegemonic revolutionary bloc. Thus he ponders what form of organization this coalition should take given the realities of transnational capitalism. McLaren writes, "critical educators need a philosophy of organization that sufficiently addresses the dilemma and the challenge of the global proletariat."² He then lists important new developments in revolutionary struggles that the educational left might find useful in constructing a plausible model for their own praxis: horizontal and not vertical orchestration, social cooperation via democratic dialogue, and so on. While this list is useful, I would like to argue that if the educational left is to be more

than simply another counterhegemonic bloc (and thus comprise more than simply those who are employed as educators), it must realize that within itself there lies an important resource for rethinking the problematic of organization: pedagogy. Marxist theories of revolutionary organization should not simply be imported into the struggles of the nascent educational left. Rather, the educational left itself contains a valuable insight into organization that it can and should export out into broader discussions concerning the direction of revolution today.

This essay is an attempt to reframe debates in Marxism in terms of the question of pedagogy and its relevance to the problem of revolutionary organization. In particular, I will focus on the relationship between Georg Lukács and Paulo Freire. It is my contention that Freire picks up on a question which Lukács raises but never adequately answers: that is, the question of communication between revolutionary actors. It is my goal — through an analysis of these two theorists — to move pedagogy into the center of revolutionary theory and revolutionary theory back into the center of the critical pedagogy tradition.

A REVIEW OF THE PROBLEMATIC

Pedagogy has always been a concern in Marxist thought. In the preface to the French edition of *Capital: Volume One* (1872), Karl Marx himself posed the question of pedagogy. To the French citizens he wrote, “I applaud your idea of publishing the translation of *Capital* as a serial. In this form the book will be more accessible to the working class, a consideration which to me outweighs everything else.”³ Here Marx enthusiastically endorses the French translators’ attempt to answer the question of presentation, a question that is assuredly pedagogical in origin. Yet Marx is also hesitant, and in the following paragraph he demonstrates more reserve.

The method of analysis which I have employed, and which had not previously been applied to economic subjects, makes the reading of the first chapters rather arduous, and it is to be feared that the French public, always impatient to come to a conclusion, eager to know the connection between the general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions, may be disheartened because they will be unable to move on at once.⁴

Thus Marx reaches a pedagogical standstill. He emphatically states the need for raising the class-consciousness of the workers, yet at the same time recognizes the difficulties of teaching his own text to the masses. In an overtly Hegelian moment, Marx concludes that the only solution is to teach the workers “not to dread the fatiguing climb” towards the “luminous summits” of the dialectic.⁵ As such, the difficult labor of the concept is largely left to the intellectual labor of the workers themselves as part of the historical struggle to attain class consciousness. There is therefore no mediation between the hard labor of the individual and the difficulty of the dialectical conception of capital except the struggle itself. As such the place of pedagogy remains open yet empty in the preface, and the Marxist pedagogical imagination is left for further explorations. In other words, Marx pinpoints the problem of education yet lacks a pedagogical solution to this problem.

The question concerning Marxian pedagogy reaches its crisis point in the work of Lukács who, more than anyone else in the Marxist tradition (except perhaps for

Antonio Gramsci), focused on the issue of organization. Below I will argue that in Lukács's work we clearly see the urgent need in Marxism for a theory of communication between revolutionary leader and workers. While gesturing towards dialogical pedagogy as the tool for facilitating such communication, Lukács's theory of revolutionary education remained underdeveloped. In this essay, I will argue that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is — in part — a response to Lukács's unfinished yet highly suggestive intonations of a Marxist pedagogical project. Lukács must be read in conjunction with Freire in order to understand how to think through pedagogy from within a revolutionary Marxist framework.

Besides passing reference to Lukács in Freirian scholarship, there has yet to be a serious investigation of the links between the Hungarian Marxist critic and the Brazilian educator. For instance, Paul Taylor argued that Freire acquired his view of history from Lukács.⁶ Here Freire is presented in terms of a continuity with Lukács, a continuity that in many ways misses the very real disjunctions that appear between both theorists (disjunctions caused by differing historical locations and differing intellectual traditions). Raymond Morrow and Alberto Torres on the other hand have more recently asserted that Freire represents a radical break from Lukács's vision of the vanguard party.⁷ Here Freire reacts against Lukács, exchanging vanguardism for dialogical pedagogy. Yet again, this argument misses its mark. In suggesting that Freire rejected Lukács in full, very real continuities are missed, continuities arising from the shared intellectual investigation of political and revolutionary organization. More perplexing still are those who advocate for a revolutionary reading of Freire (see McLaren⁸) yet have failed to recognize the intimate relationship between the Lukácsian problematic of leadership and Freire's pedagogy. Thus what is needed is a dialectical model to understand this relationship. Through a dialectical framework we can argue that the very disjuncture highlighted by Morrow and Torres is in fact the continuity suggested by Taylor. When read closely in conjunction with Lukács, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* presents not simply a break from Lukács but rather a serious investigation into the problem that evolves throughout his writings yet remains unconscious. An analysis of this largely forgotten relationship is necessary on two accounts. First, I will correct dominant misconceptions within the Freirian tradition, and second, I will strongly realign Freire with a Marxist problematic of *revolutionary* organization. What I must emphasize at the outset is that this essay is not simply an obscure commentary of interest only to those specializing in the narrow field of Freirian praxis. Rather, I hope to issue a challenge to Marxist scholars in general who have yet to realize the full ramifications of Freire's dialogical praxis for historical materialist theory.

LUKÁCS AND REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

In the essay "Toward a Methodology of the Problem of Organization," Lukács argues that Marxists have ignored a vital issue of revolutionary praxis. Instead of seeing organization as an intrinsic problematic within Marxism, theoreticians have dismissed it as an anti-intellectual pursuit, thus reinstating a classical division between mind and body, theory and practice. Lukács on the other hand saw organization as a mediation point between the two and, as such, a vital component

for furthering a revolutionary struggle. Opposed to models of “spontaneous revolution,” Lukács realized that organization was vital to overcoming the historical obstacles preventing the subjectivization of class consciousness, which included a divided and fragmented consciousness in the proletariat, an ongoing antagonism between momentary gains and the ultimate goal of liberation, and the general internalization of the reified world. Highlighting the urgency for a theory of organization, Lukács warned that “large sections of the proletariat remain intellectually under the tutelage of the bourgeoisie; even the severest economic crisis fails to shake them in their attitude.” In other words, the relation between the development of the proletariat standpoint and the objective economic laws of capital could not be conceptualized as mechanistically related. Thus, the crisis of the proletariat involved “not only the economic undermining of capitalism but, equally, the ideological transformation of a proletariat that has been reared in capitalist society under the influence of the life-forms of the bourgeoisie.”⁹

This subjective crisis demands an organizational solution, which for Lukács meant the formation of a Communist Party. The party, as the highest stage of revolutionary organization, embodied, in Lukács’s language, the “conscious collective will” of the proletariat and as such could guide the progress of the revolution. Here the party form offered the mediation point Lukács was searching for. A party exists between the volunteerism of the “group leader” and the “unimportance” of the masses. To sustain this mediation, a party must contain two important elements. First, members must have the highest level of dedication to the revolution. They cannot in any way waver in their discipline and clarity of purpose, and as such, must abandon notions of bourgeois individualism. Second, members must also maintain the correctness of leadership through their sustained relationship to the masses. Rather than become a reified and institutionalized party as in liberal democracies, a revolutionary party has to sustain a concentrated interaction between itself and the proletariat. But what is the nature of this vital link? Lukács argues against two prevalent notions of leadership. On the one hand, a revolutionary party could embody the “unconscious” of the masses and thus act on their behalf. Rather than work with the proletariat, such a party would drive the struggle from behind, pulling secret strings and managing behind closed doors. On the other hand, a party could simply “merge entirely with the spontaneous instinctive movement of the masses.” Here, leadership no longer leads, abnegating its ability to make critical judgments concerning correct action.¹⁰

Opposed to either alternative, Lukács argues that the proper relationship between party and proletariat is a “dialectical alliance.”¹¹ Although there might be organizational differentiation separating a revolutionary party and the masses, they are nevertheless conjoined through the objective reality of class-consciousness itself. To ensure that the organized body does not degenerate into a detached cult of personality or regimented institution, Lukács argues with Lenin that it must adhere to the historical necessity brought to fruition within the revolution. Thus Lukács is able to state with certainty that the Communist Party, composed of dedicated revolutionaries, represents “the tangible embodiment of proletarian class-

consciousness.”¹² As such, the final role of party politics is to clarify where the “true interests” of the proletariat lie, thereby “making them conscious of the true basis of their hitherto unconscious actions, vague ideology and confused feelings.”¹³ To make these interests conscious, the vanguard wing of the Communist Party has to remain “a step in front of the struggling masses” and “show them the way.”¹⁴

Here we reach a crucial step in Lukács’s theory of the Communist Party. While the vanguard is to remain “one step ahead” of the hesitating masses, it nevertheless cannot, as stated previously, lose its connection to the proletariat — hence the dialectic of leadership. On the one hand, a vanguard party must distance itself in order to lead, but on the other hand, it must, according to Lukács, “be so flexible and capable of learning from them [the working class] that it can single out from every manifestation of the masses, however confused, the revolutionary possibilities of which they have themselves remained unconscious.” To remain in this critical point of mediation, Lukács turns towards a theory of education through which the vanguard does not impose its tactics onto the masses but instead *learns* from the masses. As Lukács argues, a truly radical party “must continuously *learn* from their [the workers’] struggle and their conduct of it.” Here the masses teach the leaders, and the leaders in turn lead the masses.¹⁵

In sum, Lukács sets up a problem of organization — a problem concerning the orientation of a purely praxis-oriented type of thinking unique to historical materialism. He turns towards a theory of the Communist Party as a form emerging from within the necessity of revolution to guide the proletariat and to unite the oppressed masses. Yet a party itself must resist reification or isolation from the revolutionary masses. In order to sustain the dialectical interrelationship between party members and the struggle, the vanguard must learn from those it represents, thereby adapting to the immediate needs of a particular situation in which crucial decisions must be made. Hence, Lukács gestures towards a theory of revolutionary education in which leaders and masses learn from each other. And yet, this theory remains underdeveloped in his work. What are the specific pedagogical tactics necessary to remain in communication with the proletariat? What are the specific ways in which leaders can gain the trust of those they represent without replicating alienating or exploitive models of social interaction? Without answering these questions, “faith” in the sincerity of the vanguard is the only guarantee that it will *not* transform into a dictatorship. These are precisely the questions raised by Lukács’s more “egalitarian” form of vanguard organization yet left open for further development. It is my thesis that Freire’s dialogical pedagogy addresses this void in Lukács’s work, providing the educational tools necessary to achieve the praxis-oriented thinking Lukács advocated.

THE TURN TOWARD REVOLUTIONARY PEDAGOGY

What I am suggesting is that Freire did not simply critique Lukács, but rather found within Lukács the opening for developing a pedagogy of the oppressed.¹⁶ In this sense, Freire, as a close reader of Lukács, furthered his project by providing the pedagogical techniques necessitated by, yet lacking in, the theory of the vanguard. Key here is that the introduction of dialogic pedagogy addresses the problem of the

vanguardist position through negation — a negation that does not result in a simple tactical add-on but rather necessitates a total transformation of the theory and practice of organization. This constitutes its truly revolutionary potential.

Agreeing with Lukács (and supplementing his theory with the realities of colonization), Freire argues that the oppressed cannot come to consciousness of the causes of their systemic oppression. Due to an internalization of bourgeois ideology, the potential subjects of revolutionary action are caught in a vicious cycle of identification with the oppressors, and thus remain objects of exploitation. For Freire, “the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom.”¹⁷ They remain passive, fatalistically locked into their position, bound to their object status. For Freire, the oppressed cannot simply come to consciousness on their own but instead need an external facilitator in the form of the teacher.

In the final chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire clearly outlines how the question of pedagogy evolved from within a debate concerning revolutionary leadership. Although some would like to detach the pedagogy of the oppressed as a method from its connections to leadership (and thus the thorny question of Marxist revolution), Freire himself clearly saw his pedagogy as a tool to be used within revolutionary organization to mediate the various relationships between the oppressed and the leaders of resistance. Separating earlier chapters in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on banking education from this final chapter on revolution misses Freire’s most important contribution to thinking through the profound political implications of pedagogy, and in particular dialogical pedagogy. Through dialogue, Freire is able to make a critical move away from a vanguard position while still remaining within the problematic of revolutionary leadership inaugurated by Lukács. In Freire’s model, leaders have to enter into solidarity with the oppressed in an authentic revolution. This process demands the “sharing” of knowledge through dialogue (*PO*, 164). Here Freire cites Che Guevara and the early Fidel Castro as two revolutionaries who engaged in *authentic* revolution through dialogue.

What is authentic revolution? It is a revolution that not only overthrows oppressors but also is revolutionary in its organization. Thus it does not replicate the modes of leadership adopted to maintain or sustain inequalities. These qualities of oppression include conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion. All these techniques of the oppressor result in a decisively antidialogical form of leadership. It follows that an authentically revolutionary leadership would be dialogical in form and critical in its content. Such dialogue opens up the channels of communication between leaders and oppressed, facilitating an exchange of ideas through which trust and mutual commitment are fostered. So central is dialogue for Freire that he writes, “cultural revolution develops the practice of permanent dialogue between leaders and people” (*PO*, 160). Dialogue offers the crucial mediation through which the leader can learn from the experience of the oppressed, and the oppressed can learn from the critical knowledge of the leader to understand the totality of social relations.¹⁸ Here Freire understands the internal and largely

unconscious movement in Lukács's own position. He sees that Lukács, in theorizing the vanguard, was in reality signaling towards its ultimate transformation. In this light, Freire's comment that "the requirement is seen not in terms of explaining to, but rather dialoguing with the people about their actions" is not so much a critique of Lukács, as Morrow and Torres would have it, but rather a furtherance of Lukács's project *despite* Lukács — a realization of Lukács's own revolutionary organizational theory via its negation (*PO*, 53). Hence the charge that Freire himself was nothing more than a vanguard is both right and wrong: right in the sense that Freire's project arrives through an interrogation of the vanguard position and wrong in that such an observation merely collapses dialogical pedagogy into a vulgar notion of leadership.

In short, Freire makes an interesting move away from the traditional Marxist version of vanguardism towards a new language of the witness. In Lukács's model, the leader of the Communist Party was the embodiment of class consciousness, but for Freire, the dialogical leader has become the "humble and courageous witness" that emerges from "cooperation in a shared effort — the liberation of women and men" (*PO*, 53). The witness is in Freire's hands dialectically fused with the teacher, becoming simultaneously one who records the experiences of others as well as one who actively intervenes into the very processes which silence, marginalize, and exploit the oppressed by creating spaces where their voices can be heard. Unlike the leader who stands in for the implicit consciousness of the proletariat, the witness conceives the other as subject and recognizes this subjectivity without owning it or dictating to it.¹⁹ Emphasizing a latent strain in Lukács's writings, Freire asserts "the leaders cannot say their word alone; they must say it with the people and resist anti-dialogic manipulation or institutional rigidification" (*PO*, 178). For Freire, dialogue thus emerges as not simply a practical tool but as an important theoretical category for understanding what it means to enter into revolutionary organization.

In conclusion, Freire recounts an example worthy of quoting in full. In a given situation, the aspirations of the oppressed end with the singular or particular demand to increase wages. Here the pedagogue is faced with a central dilemma: external invasion by imposing his or her vision for revolution onto the peasant workers or acquiesce to the demands of the oppressed. In a dialectical maneuver recalling Lukács's own theory of party politics, Freire argues this is in fact a false choice and that the real revolutionary leader would engage in a dialogical pedagogy to articulate both positions. Thus Freire's solution:

The leaders must on the one hand identify with the people's demand for higher salaries, while on the other they must pose the meaning of that very demand as a problem. By doing this, the leaders pose as a problem a real, concrete, historical situation of which the salary demand is one dimension. It will thereby become clear that salary demands alone cannot comprise a definitive solution. The essence of this solution can be found in the previously cited statement by bishops of the Third World that "if the workers do not somehow come to be owners of their own labor, all structural reforms will be ineffective... they [must] be owners, not sellers, of their labor... [for] any purchase or sale of labor is a type of slavery." (*PO*, 183)

Through dialogue, totality is conceptualized. Dialogue as a strategy for consciousness raising not only poses reality as a problem to be solved but also leads to

critical self-reflection concerning the goals and aspirations of the oppressed. As such, dialogue is the pedagogical model of communication in an authentic revolution, cultivating consciousness raising with the oppressed as a collective subject of history. Lukács's "imputed consciousness" becomes a consciousness that arises from within the productive activity of the oppressed: the activity of education (acting as teachers and students). No longer is this education simply left to historical chance (volunteerism) or to imputation (vanguardism). Rather it emerges from a shared practice of dialogue in which leadership locates teaching as witnessing and witnessing as learning.

CONCLUSION

In sum, Freire's intervention is a rupture that distinguishes him from Lukács and yet furthers Lukács's organizational theory of revolution by centering dialogical pedagogy as a necessary tactic of mediation between leadership and the oppressed. What must be emphasized here is that pedagogy is not a mere refinement of a gap in Lukács's thinking (how to open up communication between leadership and the masses), but rather, Freire's insistence on dialogue ends up transforming the structure of organization in its totality. By taking up Lukács's project, Freire must move beyond Lukács, supplanting the vanguard model of leadership with the dialogical model of the teacher as witness whose mission it is to work along side of and learn from the oppressed while also providing critical perspectives on this development. As such, the "break" with Lukács is in reality a dialectical negation. In conclusion, pedagogy issues a profound challenge to Marxist organizational strategy and, as Lukács would argue, such a challenge strikes at the heart of Marxist *theory*. While Freire was able to transform our understanding of revolutionary organization, it remains for Marxist scholars to theorize how this shift in practice demands a rethinking of the theory itself. Thus I return to my opening comment: If the educational left is to move the revolution forward in terms beyond simply numbers, it must make its theoretical intervention into broader debates.

I offer one final comment. If Lukács can be read as a critical rethinking of vanguardism and Freire as the dialectical realization of this critical rethinking in terms of a viable revolutionary praxis, then vanguardism exists within the very concept of critical pedagogy as a negation. The figure of the vanguard (and its "imputed" attribute) *haunts* critical pedagogy as part of its unconscious. To examine the relationship of Lukács and Freire is thus not simply a clarion call to political theorists to take education seriously, but in the end, it is also a warning to those who argue for a pedagogy of the oppressed: beware of history for, as we all know, the unconscious always returns as a symptom.

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005).

2. Peter McLaren, *Capitalists and Conquerors: A Critical Pedagogy Against Empire* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 63.

3. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 104.

4. *Ibid.*, 104.

5. Ibid., 104.
6. Paul Taylor, *The Texts of Paulo Freire* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993).
7. Raymond Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).
8. Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
9. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Cambridge (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), 70–81, 304, and 311.
10. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 315 and 322.
11. Ibid., 332.
12. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 27.
13. Ibid., 35.
14. Ibid., 35.
15. Ibid., 35 and 36.
16. While it might be disconcerting to Marxists that Freire's theory of the oppressed does not focus exclusively on the working class, this shift could be reinterpreted in light of Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude as an expansive notion capable of articulating working class struggles with third world struggles, feminist struggles, and other forms of anti-oppressive revolutionary formations.
17. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 47. This work will be cited as *PO* in the text for all subsequent references.
18. Perhaps this dialectical negation opens a space for thinking of education within politics that does not result in the totalitarianism that Hannah Arendt feared. See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin, 1993).
19. See Michalinos Zembylas. "Witnessing in the Classroom: The Ethics and Politics of Affect," *Educational Theory*, 56, no. 3 (2006): 305–24.