

## Re-Invoking Freire

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While it was only last year that Antonia Darder published her book *Reinventing Paulo Freire*, I am inclined to believe that to truly reinvent Freire for this contemporary moment in American Educational discourse, the very concept of “invention” may need to be displaced. Darder, of course, takes her title as an homage to the mentor himself:

The progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context.

-- Paulo Freire (1997)

As all education for Freire is historical in kind, such reinvention is continuous with the onward flow of social development and liberation struggle and it is “moving out” – not as eviction – but rather as individuation process and self-discovery. Darder figures her own tutelage under, public break with, and textual reconciliation with Freire as a dialectical example of one form of Freirean reinvention qua her own life as an educator.

Freire also speaks of “invention” early in his career too. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for instance, he writes: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” It is famously, then, the opposite of banking-method didactics, dialogical in nature, something which finds knowledge by founding it, and which creates knowledge-situations by plotting them – that is, recognizing and imagining the emplotment and narrative quality of the educational moment. Again, for Freire, this emplotment was unquestionably the movement of history towards the democratic liberation of the educands (and hence the educators themselves).

Reinventing Freire is both open and closed therefore – there are strict rules, the domestication and misappropriation of Freire is *not* reinventing him, and yet there is a sense in which only the future realization of approaches can be the final arbiter between deciding whether one has re-

discovered Freire as flesh and blood or produced him as a pedagogical artifact and so conscripted his demise.

Technology educators who uncritically use the myriad tools of today's technocapitalist fantasy – who build webpages as examples of liberation, without analyzing the mass-production of hardware and software and its socio-cultural costs – are not in my opinion Freirean educators (though there are many doing just this who claim to be). Such technology, they point out, is liberating, dialogical, inquiry-based; and the more cogent will even demonstrate the political opportunities afforded by such technology. However, there is little to no discussion (or action) regarding reinventing the technologies themselves – for this is a knowledge that is lacking in this cultural vision. Rather, and Freire makes this point quite plain in his President's Forum speech delivered to Claremont Graduate University in 1989, information-communication technology is the vision of a cartel of technocapitalist scientific elites – at the level of the technology itself, it is “banking method” because most of the people who are asked to use it (towards liberation or otherwise) have no hand in its creation and do not understand the knowledge by which it arises. Re-inventing means sharing in the history of the knowledge, not just playing with its end results in some laissez-faire manner.

I use this example pointedly because I share with Douglas Kellner the opinion that increasingly our current moment of oppression manifests along technocapital lines – the Matrix, while probably little more than an entertainment spectacle, arises as such now because it mirrors the logic of the age. We stand on the dividing line between worlds – between invoking the precautionary principle that says we will be cautious with our inventions until we have properly investigated their potentials and democratically thought them out or invoking the principle of free-trade, capitalist models of global development, and hegemonic technoculture. In other words, there is the staff of Moses and the staff of Pharaoh: which then will we have it be, which shall we wield, and what will be the nature and legacy of our magic?

Previously, I suggested that the notion of “reinventing” Freire may need to be refigured for contemporary needs, but hopefully I have shown that in displacing the old, we must honor it. The notion of “invention” goes far beyond the American dream of corporate science and

technology, of the New Frontier, and of bigger, better, and more and I believe that Freire's use of the term emphasized these other qualities, even if he himself fell victim to some of the historical baggage of its meaning by valorizing the restlessness of invention and the cult of the new. During the radical shakeup of the late 1960's, one should not fault Freire for trying to generate the energy necessary for the young to unshackle themselves, but now it is not clear that these meanings have endured the implosion of the computer (and Freire) into the Academy. In truth, "invention" is still there to be contested and if Freireans want to use it, then I will listen and make sure that they use it well.

But all battles have a strategy and sometimes contest for contests sake is not a winning mode. As the military-industrial complex, that which post-WWII has given birth to our new "global village" takes on unprecedented amounts of new spending for development, and as the corporations it feeds become ever-more unfettered of regulation on a transnational scale, the notion of invention exceeds itself and reaches the calculus of monstrosity. Freireans, in my opinion, need to out this and center the struggle against the sort of restless invention of technocapital culture and hegemony. They can do this by returning to the source, understanding it, and repositioning it for struggles that it could never itself have imagined, but which have arisen out of the history that it helped to produce. I suggest we re-invoke Freire now towards this venture, for as I look around me, his re-invention signals our over-run at the hands of the machine's machinery.