

// Andreas Novy

The world is emerging

On the current relevance of Paulo Freire



Aktion & Reflexion
Texte zur transdisziplinären Entwicklungsforschung
und dialogischen Bildung

Heft 3
Wien: Paulo Freire Zentrum, November 2009

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Coverfoto by Gerald Faschingeder. From a poster with the title „one bee alone cannot make pressure - so join the workers union“.

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Abstract

Paulo Freire was the most outstanding popular educator in Brazil and founder of pedagogy of liberation and a mass movement for adult alphabetization. His educational approach based on raising the consciousness (Conscientização) links action to reflection. This article analyses the contribution of Freire's posture and world-view for current development studies and education. The following arguments are presented in four sections: Firstly, reading the world is a critical undertaking to understand the reality based on dialogue, dialectics and a contextualized and problem-oriented approach. Secondly writing the world is acting in a world structured by domination and oppression which calls for a non-dualistic approach that links agency and structure and ethics and rationality in an attempt of overall democratization. Section three is dedicated to case studies which aim at contextualizing Freire's approach for Vienna in the 21st century. Section four summarizes the arguments, focusing on its implications for development studies by pursuing the traditions introduced by Pierre Bourdieu and Roy Bhaskar.

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The world is emerging - on the current relevance of Paulo Freire

The statement "The world is emerging" (Freire 2000: 79) sums up the world view of the Brazilian liberation pedagogue Paulo Freire. Whenever people act creatively, they change the world and therewith themselves. Not static but movement, not status quo but future and change resemble the world and life. A dynamic interpretation of "reality in the becoming" (Freire 1984:67) realizes that "everything flows" (Woods/Grant 2002: 57). Paulo Freire was a liberation pedagogue. He was neither a development researcher nor a systematical philosopher of liberation or development. His contemporary importance does not emerge from a special theory, but rather lies in his dialogical attitude and his non-dualistic approach to the world and the people. This allows acknowledging the world's contradictoriness without becoming cynical or giving up. It is a way of thinking that plays with theories (Freire/Shor 2003: 165) and can be connected to different forms of critical thinking, even if Freire does not expound every single case. There are distinctive relations with religious Humanism and Marxism, in particular the young Marx and the theory of Critical Realism, developed by Roy Bhaskar.

Criticism, dialectics, dialogue and democracy are at the center of Freire's thought and action. Criticism is the precondition to elucidate the world. It enlightens. Dialectics is a reflexive form of comprehension and dialogue a respectful form of communication between equals. Together they lead to the demand for democracy as a form of community that involves everybody and integrates everybody in the decision-making process. But the question remains how to organize dialogue and democracy. Freire doesn't give answers but stimulates an independent way of thinking through questioning and narration. Thereby, he tries to think and act in the correct way in a specific time and a concrete place.

This article starts with explanations of the freirean metaphor of reading and writing the world. The first section focuses reading as a form of comprehension, the second focuses writing as a form of acting. The third section provides an example for translation, from theory to practice and from the peripheries to the centers.. The "Paulo Freire Center for transdisciplinary research and education" experiments with practical examples from Vienna that try to adapt Freire's approach into a rich country in the 21st century in order to learn at this very moment to read and write the world. The last section summarizes the reflections from the perspective of development research.

1. Learning to read the world

Freire describes the desire to understand the world by using the image of reading the world. By that he defines the ability to interpret the world and to give it a meaning in order to orientate oneself. Reading the world implies more than just memorizing knowledge and absorbing unknown wisdom. Knowledge cannot be deposited on a mental bank account but is based on relations to people and the world.

1.1 Criticism

Critical thinking takes into consideration both one's own and the others' actions and encourages independent thinking, so as to avoid clinging to the surface of things but rather to advance to the roots of the problems. Its aim is to illuminate the world, to enlighten it and to understand more than what is conveyed by the first impression. Criticism can be founded either rationally or ethically. Freire's rational criticism is based upon dialectics, his ethical criticism stems from humanistic ideals. Hereby he combines rationality and emotion, reason and ethics. According to Freire they form a dialectic unity. He shares the aim to overcome myths with critical theory (Horkheimer/Adorno 2003: IX). A mythical conception of the world was not only predominant in the rural society of Freire's praxis. The dialectics of enlightenment, criticized by Horkheimer and Adorno, are based on the fact that even the modern world is pervaded by myths – more specifically the myths of a „free society“ (Freire 1984: 118) and the myths of inherent necessities like TINA – „There is no alternative“ – made popular by Margret Thatcher (Bhaskar/Norrie 2004: 565ff.). By overcoming these myths, reason and ethics are combined, for neither a decent nor a solidarity-based society should allow the existence of oppression, hunger or poverty.

Criticism requires accuracy. Therefore reading even reading, in its conventional meaning, is critical unless it is a mere absorption of knowledge. In order to establish a dialogue with the author, a slow and assiduous way of reading is required. It is this critical reading, not the skimming over texts and momentary storage of information that requires endurance and conscientiousness (Freire/Shor 2003:5). Critical reading is the only way to deeply immerse in the text which leads to its appropriation and re-interpretation by the readers. What is written must be critically embedded in a broader context: Who was the text written for? What is its aim

and what does it tell me? What does it provoke? The willingness to relate what has been read to one's own life and work enables a dialogue between author and reader. As the readers integrate their experiences while reading, the text becomes active (Smith 1998: 14).

Criticism starts with questions addressed to oneself and the world; that is to say with self criticism as well as criticism of the world (Freire/Shor 2003: 64). For instance Freire picked up the feminist criticism on his sexist form of writing and thinking in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which he self-critically called „patriarchic“ (Freire 2003a: 66). Thereafter, gender equality started to play an important role in Freire's thinking, writing and acting (Freire 2001). Mutual criticism leads to an „changed mode of interaction between teachers and learners“. In a critical dialogue the status quo can be put into question and together new limits as well as rules can be struggled for (Ribolits 2004: 105).

1.2. Dialectics

Dialectics is a form of critical thinking and a way of interpreting the world. It illustrates that „change and motion entail contradictions and can only take place driven by these contradictions“ (Woods/Grant 2002: 56). Contradiction is an essential quality of all being, for the world is a changing unity, in which everything is interrelated, marked by contradictions. Contradiction and conflict are two features of development which give due credit to human diversity (Bernstein 1983: 223). Formal Logic as a static method of explanation, however, is based on either/or thinking: An electron is either a particle or a wave; a social movement is either progressive or conservative. „Yes or no categories do not bear relation to this changing, unstable and contradictory reality“ (Woods/Grant 2002: 119). Logical thinking seeks to banish contradictions by declaring them irrational. This is true in the realm of ideas. It is not true, however, in a reality in which an apple drifts towards both ripeness and rot simultaneously. The knowledge that „becoming, activity and motion are elements of being“ (Fromm 2001: 36) is known per se, since it marks certain proverbial sayings, like the one about the „straw that broke the camel's back“ or the Chinese philosophy of Ying and Yang. At the same time sophisticated philosophies like Historical Materialism (Woods/Grant 2002) or Critical Realism (Sayer 1984) build upon dialectics.

Natural as well as social scientists of the 19th century such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx or Max Weber realized that change, as a phenomenon of time, is the central characteristic of life. Therefore the present cannot be understood without the past. An ignorant attitude towards the past leads to a naïve perception of future as mere continuation of the present. A historical perception of society accompanies an idea of man, which assumes that every human being realizes possibilities or wastes opportunities. Every person can use his or her potential in different ways and for different goals (Freire 2000: 40). Living means to seize or to waste opportunities. Education in this sense supports the change of oneself and the world, which cause one another (Haug 2006a:19). The point of changing oneself and the world is to liberate the creative potentials from structural straitjackets instead of always repeating the same (Bhaskar 2002:46, 245).

A prerequisite for reading the world is knowledge about underlying structures in economy, politics and society. This knowledge does not present itself as mechanical-dogmatic legality but as an ascertained form of social life and work. Theorizing is a precondition for the capacity to act, as is shown in Critical Realism, which links concrete analysis and abstract research. Experience and previous knowledge acquired in everyday life helps choosing theories and concepts: Such as the experience of the contrast between rich and poor demands a theory of capitalism. Capital and the pressure to make use of everything as profitably as possible do not explain everything (Jessop/Sum 2006: 309ff.) It does not include all forms of domination as ethnical, cultural and political relations are subject to dominant structures like patriarchy and racism too (Klinger 2003). This is why the forms of capitalism have varied significantly throughout the world and the centuries: The concretion of structures is different from the mechanical application of common laws. The concrete is always an expression of multiple and mutually contradictory structural influences, i.e. the concrete always refers to the "unity of the diverse" (Marx 1983: 21).

In 1960 both Austria and Brazil were capitalist market economies, at the same time the differences between the poor north-east of Brazil, where Freire was born and started to work, and Vienna were so significant that it seemed difficult to find a common ground between the first and the third world. The world, however, was and still is a unity, composed of these different parts. The existence of centers and peripheries even constitutes a structure characteristic of capitalism.

Dialectical thinking transcends dualistic thinking, which places contradictions loosely side by side. This will be pointed out by two examples. The first example refers to the dualism of global and local and the related opposition of the love of one's own homeland and cosmopolitanism. Throughout his life Freire felt close to his hometown Recife, yet at the same time he considered himself a cosmopolitan (Freire 2003a: 88). He never considered these two positions as mutually exclusive. Mainly because of his life in exile he was aware of how much his personality had been shaped by his origin and the bond to his homeland. According to Freire being tied to one's roots does not contrast with cosmopolitanism, as the latter is not a universal position beyond space, but can only be made possible within a context and space. The second example concerns a dualistic understanding of school based on a misleading way of thinking where good and evil as well as right and wrong are clearly separable and distinguishable. This leads to the false conclusion that the opposite of bad is good. As school and pedagogy are often deficient, Gustavo Esteva and his school of thought emphasize the need for liberation from pedagogy instead of a pedagogy for liberation (Stuchul et al. 2002). Some might find this radical; I would refer to it as being caught in a dualism of either/or, which often impedes action. The aim of freirean efforts on the other hand is to offer school and education for everyone, even though they sharply criticize the current form of school and their understanding of school strongly differs from that of a privileged place of education. This is where dialectics as the "logic of contradictions" (Woods/Grant 2002: 56) can be applied. Throughout his life Freire stood up for a good, open and public school for everyone. His aim was reforming or revolutionizing the purpose of school and education (Langthaler/Lichtblau 2006), not their abolishment. The project "Secondary School meets University" can be seen as an attempt in this direction (see chapter 4).

In spite of the world's complexity and one's own limits of grasping this complexity, it is possible to act reasonably and morally in specific situations. For this purpose a practical rationality, that concretely analyses what is right here and now, is needed (Haug 2006a: 129). In a world marked by injustice Freire was looking for exactly these ways of acting both reasonably and morally coherent. Neither elitism, insisting on the ignorance of non-experts, nor basismo, always agreeing with the ordinary people as the basis of society and negating the value of theoretical reflection, provide useful help to do so (Freire 2000: 38). Dialectics is a playful and dancing way of thinking. It plays with

authority and freedom, "dancing with it" (Freire/Shor 2003:13) so as to neither turn into authoritarianism nor Laisser-faire (Freire 2000: 34ff.). Authoritarianism insists on its absolute rules, Laisser-faire denies the necessity of rules and asserts the right of the powerful. However, the point is to deal with knowing and not-knowing in a reflective way. Therefore infinite curiosity, which is aware of how little is known and thus still has to be learned, is one of the basic virtues of all teachers and learners (Freire 2003a: 188f.). Freire too was a doubting and seeking person, eager to learn and full of "epistemological curiosity", as pointed out by Marta Gregorcic in this edition. Although he was no omniscient guru (Freire 2001: 83) he neither was an "ignorant teacher" or a mere "participant in the educational process"; expressions that result in "suicide as a teacher" (Freire/Shor 2003: 113) and negate the difference between teachers and learners. The arrogance, manipulation and authoritarianism of some teachers are one thing; it is quite another thing to appreciate the existing differences in knowledge as a precondition to be able to learn: A good researcher for development studies might find it difficult to teach dancing and swimming.

1.3. Questioning

Asking is learning, it arouses the conscience and leads to a perception of the world as a complex and contradictory one. Problem formulating education is learning by asking: What do I want and what am I able to do? Which kinds of constraints am I exposed to? Which possibilities do I have? Why don't we have water when the landlord has a swimming pool? Why are those hungry that work the the field? Why can't the person repairing the car afford one himself? If hunger and poverty are no destiny but are created, who are the ones who benefit, who are the ones being harmed? Who wins, who loses? Where is the world going to? Asking is the starting point of researching and without researching there is no decent form for humans to acquire knowledge about the world. The world as we know it was formed by historical development and changes through the actions of humans.

The didactic of Freire combines the courage to dream with a very down-to-earth way of thinking and acting. The starting point of Freire's approach is the actual social environment, the here-and-now where social relations take place. The teachers do not teach ready-made knowledge to their disciples but accumulate concrete knowledge through fieldwork. In the 1960s pedagogues investigated the world of illiteracy in the

north-east of Brazil using an early form of activating inquiry in order to identify the key problems and later discuss them in cultural circles on the basis of key-words: work, the access to water and land, hunting and feasting were the topics that turned into starting points of dialogues (Freire 1984: 92ff.). Paintings of a local artist were used to initiate the conversations with the illiterate (Freire 2003b: 131ff.). A first picture showed a peasant family during work. This provoked discussions about people's own living and working environments. Peasants, shaping nature due to their work, become the creators of their environment; they detach from nature and shape the world. This key topic accompanies the whole process of the pedagogy for liberation: Humans are subjects, which drive development, even though they often seem like mere objects accepting their fates. To alphabetize means to arouse curiosity and interest and to again feel the childlike desire to explore the world. If this ability gets lost in the course of life, humans lose one of their most essential mainsprings. The actual learning of the alphabet by forming combinations of syllables did not happen until the second step (Freire 2003b: 123ff.). This kind of education does not merely impart skills. It opens eyes and extends visions. It took the peasants only 40 days to learn reading and writing – and much more: "I want to learn to read and write so that I'm no longer the shadow of others." (Freire 2003b: 121). Education empowers. Those people are empowered who are aware of the fact that the world, their surroundings and environment are being created.

Human cultures differ from nature fundamentally: Whereas the latter is based on the laws of nature, humans possess conscience. Consciousness raising (Conscientização) empowers to understand one's social surroundings. Awareness raising is thinking about the world and reflecting one's own actions. Is the world good the way it is? Could it be different? How do I want to live and how do societies manage their coexistence? People are able to influence the course of culture and society. Consciousness raising expands horizons and opens perspectives and chances, which is more than merely becoming conscious. It does not just happen mentally – we do not just think with our heads (Haug 2006a: 78). Consciousness raising concerns the whole body and is related to other people.

1.4 Dialogue

Humans are dialogical beings "in the process of becoming", so that "dialogue proves "necessary for the act

of cognition that reveals reality" (Freire 1984: 68). Humans are autonomous, but still they are connected to others. They are unique, but they need others. Dialogue is a form of exchange, a form of communication in order to jointly read the world. "Dialogue is the encounter of people, mediated by the world in order to name the world" (Freire 1984: 72). According to Martin Buber the basic concept of I / You is the basis of the world as relational (Buber 2005:12). The dialogical me (I) knows that its own existence is only created by the others (You) (Freire 1984: 143). The other person is coexistent since the human being is neither a homo oeconomicus nor an atom, but a cooperative being, a "co-worker of the others" (Haug 2006a: 139).

According to Freire dialogues are respectful encounters and ways of exchange that benefit everyone; under no circumstances he understands them as unidirectional. Not only the researchers are subjects "understanding" the poor and "explaining" them how the world works. It is the poor that often have profound knowledge of certain situations and problems. The researchers didn't obtrude, they observed perceptively and understandingly (Freire 1984: 92). Thereby, all participants became "critical co-researchers in the dialogue" (Freire 1984: 65). Due to the encounter of people from different backgrounds, who possess different types of knowledge and are treated equally, it became possible, emanating from the unity of the diverse, that all the involved persons changed (Freire/Shor 2003: 156). A world of justice is also colorful and multifaceted, as "no one can act humanely while preventing others from doing so" (Freire 1984: 69). Fondness of experimenting accompanies the enjoyment of diversity. Every individual is unique, unmistakable and irreplaceable and everybody has a future that offers opportunities. What kind of future we want is an ethical question that both teachers and learners spend time thinking about in equal measure. If learning is a journey the direction has to be discussed. If every change starts with a first step, a goal or a vision of where the path is leading must be known. Freire's pedagogy of hope emanates from the conviction that utopias and dreams are not only possible, but necessary.

A dialogical stance connects liberty and equality and leaves no space for elitist expertism: "It seems absurd to these experts to respect the people's world-view. Isn't it the experts who have the 'world-view?'" (Freire 1984: 132) Experts and specialists for certain areas are necessary, unless they listen and observe carefully, however, they will neither respect nor understand people. They will inevitably become arrogant and manipulative.

This often occurs when keywords like "participation" or "involvement of the civil society" are claimed (Grote/Gbikpi 2002). In this perspective, dialogue is a method to mediate between different interests. This current culture of dialogue, however, is often elitist, as mostly only the powerful and educated participate in it. Other groups might join the conversations, but they only very rarely participate in the decision-making. Paulo Freire aims for a dialogue with everyone, starting with those who live at the margins of society. His aim is their empowerment. He therewith changes the predominant priorities: he is primarily interested in the marginalized, and only secondarily in the prominent and the powerful representatives of the status quo. In a bottom-up dialogue the world is being read together. It is important to bring to mind that humans "do not just fight for freedom from hunger but for the freedom to create and to build, to marvel and to dare" (Freire 1984: 53). For Freire dialogical research is applied research, it "enters into dialogue with its and our opinions" (Freire 1984: 79), because dialogue and reading are no detached, idealistic activities. The Brazilian Landless Movement, the most powerful non-elitist movement of Brazil, exercises this to this day. The movement has eked out the willingness of dialogue several times by not avoiding conflict if necessary (Harnecker 2003: 183-218), as "conflicts are the mid-wives of conscience" (Freire/Shor 2003: 208).

2. Learning to write the world

The collective reading of the world never has an end in itself, it is merely the first step of encouraging people to use their knowledge and creative abilities and become capable of acting. The point is to "write" the world, to act consciously. This text is not written on paper but in life, which means that this writing exceeds the conventional field of research and education and the realm of ideas. Writing the world is a metaphor for the ability to change the course of things by one's own actions. As far as the shaping of the world is concerned, most humans are still illiterate. This tendency was even aggravated by the 'Lack of Alternatives' zeitgeist propagated by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s: "There is no alternative!" Capital is seen as an unleashed broom that is not to be controlled by the sorcerer's apprentice anymore. It doesn't obey anyone's orders and acts driven by its own logic. Inherent necessities that make political and economic affairs seem like laws of nature went down into the everyday mind as myths. Many people regard it as normal and natural the way they live and the way our society is developing. Some do not find it necessary to change anything, others consider it impossible. "In the name of freedom the impossibility of freedom is proclaimed" (Liessmann 2006; 173). First, this conception of freedom is anti-democratic (Hayek 1978) and second it is merely a negative freedom from constraints, not an active freedom to create. Freire contrasts this with a pedagogy of hope: It could be different.

2.1 Praxis

Dualistic thinking misleadingly regards reading as the passive and writing as the active part. Reading as well as writing, however, are activities to understand and change the world. Understanding and changing are two steps of the same process, two sides of a coin. They can be separated only in the process of analyzing – that is to say during the deconstruction of the whole – but not in reality. Praxis combines thinking and acting. Freire owes this insight to Karl Marx and his "Theses on Feuerbach". This text, written in 1845 and published posthumously, influenced Freire's concept of human nature and the world more than his Pedagogy of the oppressed gives reason to believe (Freire 1984: 40). The theses – "a dwarf the text but a giant the effect" (Haug 2006b) - are directed against the materialistic philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and anticipate many considerations of a non-dualistic perspective. The

last of the eleven theses is best known: "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it" (Marx 1969: 7). Interpreting, thinking and changing are from a dualistic perspective all clearly differentiable activities. Interpreting, reading, understanding and thinking are placed on one side of the duality, acting, changing and reading on the other. Freire as well as Marx aim to overcome the duality of "verbalism" and "actionism", which can be achieved if they are converted into reflective acting, or better, praxis. With a nod to Goethe's Faust, in which the deed comes first (Goethe 2000: 36), Freire states that "to say a truthful word therefore means to change the world" (Freire 1984: 71). These philosophical considerations are at the roots of Freire's attitude, exposed in this essay. Practice is more than mere acting; it is reflective and conscious acting. Therefore neither thinking and acting, nor understanding and changing are opposites. They are linked: "Knowledge is part of being" (Bhaskar 2002: 83).

Marx considers human activities and changing oneself as parts of the changing of society, based on a dialectics of actions and structure. By pointing out that "the educator must be educated" (Marx 1969:6) he anticipates the dialogical-dialectic approach of the educators. In Freire's words: "In order to make it possible that those who know teach those who don't know, those who know must know that they don't know everything and those who don't know must know that they know something" (Freire 2003a: 188). The "Theses on Feuerbach" criticize a supposedly critical theory that remains theoretical without becoming practical. Because of this "epistemological fallacy" reality is reduced to an object without reference to practice. Experiences and corporality are eliminated from theoretical space, following the tradition of Descartes. "The Cartesian subject escapes the body, hence escaping the limitations of the local historical particularities of time, place and relationship. When we started with our experiences as women, however, we were always returning to ourselves and to each other as subjects in our bodies" (Smith 1998: 209). Practice is reflective acting, which is neither possible without consciousness nor without a body.

The "Theses on Feuerbach" demonstrate, that "the separation of authorized expert's knowledge and the average person's knowledge gained by experience is not substantial" (Smith 1998: 22). The experience-based approach, in reference to Antonio Gramsci, acts

on the assumption that everyday culture and everyday knowledge are the starting points of reflective and interfering acting and thinking (Mayo 1999). It discusses the opposition of economy as the objective structure and life as a concrete and diverse activity. The aim is to overcome the gap between the world's development and everyday actions, between structure and action, between global and local processes. A first step can be to unmask the myths of economy and to start an economic alphabetization (Beigewum 2005). Committed students often research migrants without referring to the political and economic roots of their problems. Social workers still have to force themselves not to skip the business section of the newspaper (Haug 2001: 43). It is possible to overcome this gap by starting with experiences, but by thinking and acting in a way that connects experience to structural developments. As people are usually rooted in a concrete place, experiences can be gained right where they are living (Smith 1998: 124), based on (Freire/Shor 2003: 131) the "actually active people and their actual environment" (Marx/Engels 1973: 26).

2.2. Democratization

In the 1960s Freire hoped for a widespread process of democratization in Brazil. His pedagogy for liberation was supposed to help to create a democratic polity. Politics and pedagogy face similar problems, in both cases rules have to be agreed upon but also creatively overcome. The entanglement of teaching and learning reflects the dialectics, which is used by democratic polities to organize the tense relation of freedom and constraint. Democratic polities – like every polity – have to deal with borderline situations that have to be overcome and thus create something new. This process of learning shows the dialectics of constraint and liberty (Freire 1984: 82): racist actions are just as much crossing borders as protective actions for asylum seekers. Neither is change always good nor is it always reasonable. Dialogue – a form of communication building on respect – and democracy – a way of including everyone and giving everyone the chance to speak – do, however, offer the conditions to deal with crossing of lines in a non-authoritarian and non-repressive way. Freire opposes an authority that can only count on the power of arguments, to a dogmatic authority. While mechanisms become visible and experiences are discussed critically, reality is seen from a different perspective and thus becomes shapeable. Dialogical education tries to prevent unstructured thinking and chaotic acting, as its aim is to organize a prudential and democratic com-

munity. In order not to miss possibilities to realize this utopia, the "creative strength of dialogic education" (Freire/Shor 2003: 100) is required. It is about discipline that has to be learned and acquired (Freire 2003a: 83), and about self-discipline and the autonomy to learn. The same considerations are made by Foucault, seeking new ethics and *savoir vivre*, which play with rigour and freedom. A tempered human being is also a dialectical human being (Foucault 1989: 116) that learns how to be less ruled (Schmid 1992:61). Arts as well as sports show that perfection and discipline are necessary in order to creatively transcend rules – be it ballet dancers or soccer players. The tension between rules and freedom, that is also important for democracy and education, can never be definite and can only be loosened within a context.

Democratization is at the core of Paulo Freire's utopia. Yet as he personally experienced capitalism and its consequences, it was clear to him that the aim should be to overcome capitalism. Instead of an economic system where wealth and poverty grow in equal measure, he aims for a society in which everybody's work benefits everybody. Throughout his life Freire stuck to socialism and the utopia of a world of equality and liberty (Freire 2003a: 96). Freire as well as Bhaskar dreamed of a world that was not reduced to dualism and in which "the free development of the individual is a condition for the free development of all" (Marx/Engels 1986: 69). Due to the fatal errors of actually existing socialism and the tendency of leftist groups towards sectarianism and paternalism, Freire emphasized more and more clearly that the core of his vision were dialogue and democracy. Democracy is more than a form of political organization; it is a society where everybody has the right to participate. Freire's main concern was the democratization of education and culture (Freire 2003b: 109). In Brazil the political democratization of the 1980s led to a series of measures of social democratization that went beyond voting rights. Democratization – as well as consciousness raising – affects and changes life and work. Learning and creating can overlap, which can be evidenced by participatory budget conferences in Porto Alegre, which serve as schools for democracy (Novy/Leubolt 2005): the process of concrete political decision-making leads to a new perception of the neighborhood and the whole city. How much do things cost? Where does the money go? What do I need and what do others need? Who decides and how can we shape our environment? Consciousness raising takes place by means of collective reflection and political acting; it is no individual effort in a study, it requires dialogue and often occurs in public space.

2.3. Solidarity

The thinking and action of Freire was based on solidarity but not on paternalism or naivety towards the people. Freire wanted the disadvantaged and exploited persons to become subjects who write their own lives themselves. As educator he sided with the oppressed. 1964 he was banished from Brazil, even though he had been entrusted by USAID, the US-American development organization in the beginning. He found asylum in Chile where he worked for the Christian Democrats who followed a community based reform strategy (Lehmann 1990: 97ff.). Freire himself was influenced by the liberation theology that combined "to see", "to judge" and "to act" and herewith action and reflection (Boff 1984) and that had great influence on the landless movement. He always supported a broad and tolerant alliance of progressive forces, knowing that politics requires concessions but within ethical borders. That is why Freire was a decided opponent of any sectarianism (Freire 2003a: 39). But the rich and the powerful increasingly hardened their position and forced a class struggle from above culminating in a military coup (Freire 2003a: 186f.).

In this situation domination and liberation, respectively de-humanization and humanization, meant poles of substantial and growing social conflicts that became more and more acute (Freire 1984: 85). The continent and even the whole world periphery seemed to be divided into two factions, that suggested placing the relationship between lord and servant, oppressor and oppressed into the middle of an emancipatory education (Freire 1984: 37). Liberation gives the oppressed the possibility to realize their humanity. But the oppressed are not necessarily better people than the oppressors as their conscience is divided and ambivalent (Freire 1984: 142). Frigga Haug summed this up by calling women victims and offenders at the same time, because "the oppressed always carry characteristics of their oppression" (Haug 2001: 10). If the responsibility of the oppressed is neglected, one neglects their subject- being as well. Haug stated, arguing again close to Freire: „If we, the women want to change something, we have to identify the intervention points that enable us to act. This means that in order to act we have to change our own attitude and this [...] is at the same time only possible by changing the structure of our personality" (Haug 2001: 17f.). It is fatalistic to hold only structures responsible for depriving the oppressed of their rights, because it is also their responsibility to change themselves and the world together with others. This is overseen by a condescending and well meaning

paternalism that pretends to desire nothing for oneself but everything for the others. Because of this it remains hypocritical. Solidarity on the other side aspires world development as well as the development of oneself, which means changes that are good for oneself and good for all the others. For Bhaskar, too, the search for the "real self" is at the same time the embracement of the whole world (Bhaskar 2002: 262).

Freire aims for a society without lords and slaves. But how can the ones that have internalized oppression as ideal become subjects of liberty (Freire 1984: 25)? Following the paradox of emancipation and thus a dualistic thinking (Clegg 1989: 95ff.), the oppressed would need the ability to pull oneself up by one's own bootstraps. This approach has often been imputed to Freire, which is why he was criticized for being an advocate of *basimo*, which glorifies the oppressed. The freirean approach of a "social change from below" which was a "modernization from below" (Lehmann 1990: 96ff.) was later taken on by postmodern theories, and along different sorts of alternative development it was further developed to become an anti-modernising theory. Following a dualistic argumentation these anti-developer demanded the end of development as it had caused severe damage. But there is no 'non-development'; least of all in capitalism, which is based on the principle to transform all relations on behalf of profit gaining. This is why allegedly alternative approaches that reify the being, freeze the status quo (Cowen/Shenton 1996: 475). This remains valid, even if these analyses criticize domination.

A dialectical theory of becoming that recognizes contradiction as basic principle of development recommends a more differentiated analysis and strategic action. Departing point of the freirean thinking is the rejection of the traditional, suppressing society in north-eastern Brazil that has not managed to overcome the heritage of the slaveholder society until today. Freire never aimed for a move backwards toward an identity of traditional communities coming from the past. This is also not possible because people and communities are conceived as being in process. It is right to insist on the independent ways of development for the victims of a suppressing system. But the critique of specific experts that make recommendations for development should not end in a simple rejection of all experts as this would only support dilettantism. Criticism on authoritarian teaching has to be differentiated from anti-authoritarian education, which Freire criticized to be a postmodern version of *basimo* (Freire 1984: 49). Freire considered Baron Münchhausen a liar

and did not see any possibility of self liberation without guidance and orientation (Freire/Shor 2003: 135). Again dialectical thinking denies simple solutions: „According to this no one can liberate oneself by one's own efforts, but neither can he be liberated by the others“ (Freire 1984: 52).

Because of dialectical-political reasons Freire's audience were mainly the oppressed and disadvantaged persons. „The oppressed have a direct material interest in knowledge of these relations that the oppressors do not. Is this why there is a constant tendency of those in power in times of (or in revenge for) crisis to repeat the sin against Socrates and education generally?“ (Bhaskar 2004: 662). Because Freire experienced conflicts in the struggle for development, he knew from experience that the ones with power will not dispense power and privileges voluntarily. For this reason he did not approach the landlords in order to encourage them to a moral behavior against their own short term self-interests or to paternalism, but the peasants so that they claim their rights and at the same time justice for everyone. He aimed for the liberation of the oppressed and by this of the oppressors. The former are liberated to shape their lives themselves; the latter are forced to realize that humanization is entirely different from owning. His goal was a different world with solidary people. „The human being that comes into the world is a new human being that can only live if the contradiction between oppressor-oppressed is overcome by the humanization of all people“ (Freire 1984: 36).

2.4. Popular movement and popular education

Freire's life shows that dreaming needs perseverance. Dictatorship and exile were only one of the many throwbacks and disappointments. However, today Brazil harvests in a contradictorily manner and in a process that mixes hopes and disappointments, the fruits of a decade's long fight of the favelados, the unemployed and the landless for a place in society. Freire made a contribution to this fight. His public life started in the 1950s when Brazil experienced a fast process of modernization. Freire saw society in the transition from a closed to a democratic society (Freire 2003b: 55), from a slaveholder society, „from manor house to slave barrack“ (Freire 1992) to a society that is based on dialogue and democracy. For the first time urban and later rural masses gained political and economical relevance. Under President Getulio Vargas and after his death in 1954, the autonomous popular move-

ments became more radical (Freire 2003b: 43). At the beginning of the 1960s, for example, the youth's great euphoria led to the signing up of 6000 persons for only 600 posts as literacy workers (Freire/Shor 2003: 44). This „fantastic time of popular mobilization“ provoked the „reactionary elite“ to undertake a military coup (Freire 1984: 128f.). So the project of social and political emancipation failed in 1964 for the time being. The popular movements regained their strength only after the end of the military dictatorship. A broad coalition of labor unions, base initiatives as well as church and left groups fought for democratization. Its goal was an independent and democratic way of development in order to overcome the slaveholder society (Furtado 1999: 25). They rejected elitist strategies for development because if „you can't trust the people, there is no reason for liberation“ (Freire 1984: 108).

Brazilian history shows that the people which is the „majority of persons on whose expenses one lives“ (Martin Jäggle quoted in: Sabary 2006), slowly but constantly became a more and more important protagonist (Novy 2001a: 320). The political change brought about by democratic elections in the 21st century, swung the pendulum in many Latin-American countries in the direction of change. Even though the media, like in the 1960s, castigated the populism of the power holders and implied the voters' ignorance. The desire to participate in the consumer society became a strong force for the implementation of measures like nationalization, land reforms and to start extensive education initiatives (Azzellini 2006). In Brazil several reforms have been implemented that can best be described as social democratic since they do not mean a systemic change but a participation in capitalism: increase of the minimum wage, reduction of unemployment and family assistance payments for poor households (Mercadante 2006). It is neither a revolution nor is Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva – Brazilian president since 2003 and personification of the tradition of the popular movements (Freire/Shor 2003: 215) – just one neoliberal traitor more. The future of Brazil is open and it might be that the country uses the chance to fundamentally improve the life perspectives especially of the disadvantaged persons in a process of a „modernization from below“ (Lehmann 1990: 214). This at least is the estimation of João Pedro Stedile, who is a mastermind of the Brazilian landless movement. He advises the skeptic to study the dynamics of basic initiatives onsite in order to learn more about the vitality of today's Brazilian social base (Stedile 2006: 190).

3. Paulo Freire here and now

Whether the freirean utopia of dialogue, democracy and solidarity can be realized, is a practical question and is answered through lively experiments. "There is no guarantee; there is no necessity, no 'logic of history' that must inevitably lead to dialogical communities that embrace all of humanity and in which reciprocal judgment, practical discourse and rational persuasion flourish. [...] Such a movement gains 'reality and power' only if we dedicate ourselves to the practical task of furthering the type of solidarity, participation, and mutual recognition that is founded in dialogical communities" (Bernstein 1983: 231). There is no logic realizing dialogue and democracy as realization emerges by committed action. The "Paulo Freire Center for transdisciplinary research and education" in Vienna feels committed to the freirean utopia and follows a research approach that is based on knowledge that comes with experience. People do not investigate mere objects of research, but rather learn together with those knowing their social environment. You can not adopt knowledge that comes with experience behind closed doors but only through exploration of the world and by exchange with others. Development Cooperation, development policy education and development research enable people by reflection and politicization to go through their life with open eyes, to discover new things, to explore their own social environment- and to change it. Thereby intuition, engagement and technical knowledge have to be sharpened simultaneously, as well as the ability to deal with contradiction, changes and uncertainties. In the following, three projects are presented that apply the position and worldview of Freire for education and research to the situation of Austria in the 21st century. All initiatives are documented at www.paulofreirezentrum.at.

3.1 Development Conference

The biggest kind of events that the Paulo Freire Center has been involved in so far are the Austrian Development Conference that initiate a dialogue from below since 2001 (Novy 2001b). Three conferences on the topics of civil society, globalization and property have been organized by committed individuals and non-governmental-organizations in order to allow three days of exchange on world development between tutors and students from the university, representatives from development cooperation governmental and non-governmental- organizations, the interested public and

invited guests from Latin-America and Africa. It was no top down dialogue as the celebrities did not monopolize these days. But it was not a dialogue with those that are marginalized in Austria and the world either - as it would have been Freire's goal. Yet it succeeded to further the exchange between university and development cooperation organizations. The conferences institutionalize the exchange of experience and know how, as they are neither classical training events where knowledge is absorbed. Nor are they annual fairs of basismo, where a scene displays itself and celebrates together. They rather orientate active persons who are committed to development cooperation to reflect their praxis thematically. This is done by pre-events and prepared articles on the website. Consistent with the freirean utopia is the scientific approach based on experience, which decreases the gap between the life world and the world of research by presenting theoretical knowledge as an offer for one's own orientation. This is "because of a research method that requires no other world more than that of human actions and experiences. Indeed the research work itself is part of the world of which it explains" (Smith 1998: 60). Then theorization, that is dealt with playfully and without arrogance, becomes something alive. The Freire Center offers open learning spaces although it introduces its own positions (Freire/Shor 2003: 127). The third conference on property showed the difficulty to open free spaces and to guide thinking at the same time. One of the assumptions of the organizers was that the discussion on property is characterized by ideological assumptions that are rooted in a false dualism of state and private. That is why we considered the solidarity-based economy concept presented by the Brazilian State Secretary Paul Singer as an interesting stimulation to experiment with other forms of property such as public, corporate or communal property. Neither did the organizers have a clear picture of the right form of property, nor was it a goal to export the Brazilian concept of solidarity-based economy as best practice. But there was a broad discomfort with the status quo of a reductionist 'state-private' discussion. Unfortunately, we only rudimentarily succeeded in expounding this problem to the participants and the mainstream of the Development Cooperation. Joint reflection on social spaces beyond state and privacy remained marginal. The self-critical consequence for the forth conference is to clarify in advance the theme selection with the groups that will form the core of participants.

3.2 Secondary School meets University

The project between the "Kooperative Mittelschule Schopenhauerstraße"¹ and the "Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration" is another attempt to implement the freirean education concept. Thereby a problem formulating education is realized in a problem-aware school that builds on curiosity. (Freire 2003a: 141). The project "Secondary School meets University" has been started in a Viennese school where social problems are concentrated. 50 percent of the parents are unemployed; some of the children are refugees, for example from Chechnya and Iraq and went through traumatizing experience during their escape. 86 percent of the children don't speak German as their mother tongue and hardly a child will make its way to university. But today it is uncommon to call this oppression. The technical term used is social exclusion, whereas social inclusion is the political goal. The facts show a clear discrimination and clear forms of social inequality, which do not resemble the misery with which we associate the oppression in the poor countries of this world. Nevertheless the secondary school and university are two socio-spatially clearly separated places, whose members rarely come across each other even if they live in the same city. Vienna is a highly socio-spatially segregated city (Steinbach et al. 2005). This results in fear and prejudice as was brought up by the students that participated in the project. "Foreign homeland", the comprehension of homeland of children that don't speak German as their mother tongue formed the thematically core of the cooperation project. Through exchange, joint working and discussing the one or other prejudice could be revised and the gap between strangers reduced. It became clear that homeland provides likewise an anchor and security while being in flux as well. Also for homeland, apparently fix and eternal, it is true that it is not unchangeable. Homeland as a physical place is less important than the embeddedness of children into family and social networks. Children principally feel at home where they have friends, family and relatives. This successful learning and research project will be carried

1 Here "Mittelschule" is translated as secondary school. This does not however match the German denotation as the Austrian schooling system is different from the British or the American system. In Austria children at the age of 10 are divided into different types of schools. They either continue with grammar school (formerly called Gymnasium) which leads to the qualification for university entrance. Or they are sent to a "Hauptschule" which lasts four years and leads into an apprentice, at the best. The "Mittelschule" is a mildly reformed Hauptschule and remains clearly inferior in relation to the grammar school. Professional prospects are low (remark of the translator).

on in 2007 as students and pupils explore their district and the tension between cohesion and segregation by using different methods of field research. The reflection on local development and on the fact that the own city offers so much that seems unfamiliar, facilitates a better perception of the world as a conflicting unity with manifold relationships between the center and the periphery.

3.3. Popular education today

The symposia "Popular education today" took place in 2006 and focused on the clarification of the role of the ordinary people in development policy education. From the Latin American context the people is - with reference to Martin Jäggli - the "majority of persons on whose expenses one lives" (quoted in Sabary 2006). The people which means the ordinary people as opposite of the elite is central for the freirean education and research. As well and particularly because the people are not just victims but every now and then also offenders - as we know from the history of fascism. The people are not naturally good; the folk also deploys the bulk of blind followers. It also should not be the object of our paternalism. But Paulo Freire was convinced that all persons have the potential to become the subjects of their own life as well as subjects shaping the world. Based on this democratic confidence, it is good if the oppressed become subjects of history, but for itself this does not improve the world. *Animal Farm* from George Orwell demonstrates what happens if pigs rule. In the 19th and 20th century the people in Europe fought for participation in politics and consumer society by nationalist and socialist movements and against the resistance of the reactionary and liberal elites (Hobsbawm 2003: 101ff.). The opposite of nostalgic glorification is - in good dualistic manner - elitist degrading. The concern of an alliance between intellectuals and the people, which already spurred Brecht and Gramsci, had been left behind. Gramsci freed the concept of intellectuals from its scholastic and literate impoundment. For him organic intellectuals are the "ghostwriters of the spirit of the time" (Haug 2006a: 28f.). Freire was part of writing the spirit of the 1960s by thinking popular education and popular movement as unity. Today this alliance is broken and the world of the middle and under class is again clearly separated. There is a lack of organic intellectuals that are not talking on behalf of the people but with them (Bhaskar 2002: 58). This is because the European middle class lives in an increasingly hermetic world that does not much overlap with the underclass. Thus the presentation of the

11%K.Theater, an initiative of Augustin, a newspaper of homeless people, and the subsequent discussion with the audience were the highlight of the symposia. The play "Innocent" humorously showed the perfidies of a system of labour market administration and the oppressive mechanism that enforces alienated labour on the weakest part of society. At the same time sales promotion sings the hymn of an "out of work income" and promises via private retirement insurance a "life in a hammock". For one evening an exchange between the different worlds happened.

4. Research for liberation

Freire's essential idea is respect toward others and their way of thinking and living (Freire 1984: 28). Elitist arrogance and paternalism by well-meaning experts likewise hamper not only a relationship that wants to make a difference but also one that just aims for mutual understanding. It is about the dialogue between researchers just as about the dialogue with the objects of research, which are at the same time subjects of social transformation. This interactive research praxis is transdisciplinary (Novy 2004: 12). Neither this implies a rejection of disciplines and their methods and skills, nor a replacement for discipline and its strict way of thinking and acting, because "knowledge requires discipline" (Freire/Shor 2003: 101). One example is a research on how people suffer neoliberalism. Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch examines this for Austria (Katschnig-Fasch 2003) following Pierre Bourdieu's studies on France (Bourdieu 1993). Committed research starts with listening, emphasizing and learning to understand. Therefore, a good researcher must not see the world just through precast spectacles but has to search openly and curiously for something new and has to be eager to learn. This attitude enables a dialogue with the investigated persons. In the course of exchange the diverging sides of reality can be perceived, the effects of neoliberalism can jointly be detected as well as what can effectively be done against it. This shows that a reasonable dialogue can not be restricted to university and research institutes but needs the exchange with society and its multifaceted interests. In the philosophical of science it is critical realism developed by Roy Bhaskar that provides the best frame to not confound

the word liberation with the real liberation that is actually taking place, to confuse talking with reality. The primacy of being and becoming clearly positions thinking and researching as a part in a process which can not be dualistically separated from being and becoming. Freire animates to interfere in the world, but with a modified praxis of transformation that has learned from the failures of dualistic and mechanical projects (Bhaskar 2002: 221). He aims at a form of development as overcoming injustice and oppression in order to allow free development of each and all. In a conflictive world this integral perception of development results in a conception of liberation - liberation from a world where progress is accompanied by enrichment of a few. Paulo Freire invites us to consider development as liberation of the whole individual and of all people. This also always involves liberation from structures that empower those driving for an accumulation of wealth and development for just a few. This can only be approached in a holistic way, by both the centers and the peripheries, in thinking and acting.

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