

“The Practice of Freedom”

From Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 176-8. New York: Continuum Books, 1989.

Organization

In the theory of antialogical action, manipulation is indispensable to conquest and domination; in the dialogical theory of action the organization of the people presents the antagonistic opposite of manipulation. Organization is not only directly linked to unity, but is a natural development of that unity. Accordingly, the leaders' pursuit of unity is necessarily also an attempt to organize the people, requiring witness to the fact that the struggle for liberation is a common task. This constant, humble, and courageous witness emerging from cooperation in a shared effort—the liberation of [women and] men—avoids the danger of antialogical control. The form of witness may vary, depending on the historical conditions of any society; witness itself, however, is an indispensable element of revolutionary action.

In order to determine the *what* and *how* of that witness, it is therefore essential to have an increasingly critical knowledge of the current historical context, in view of the world held by the people, the principal contradiction of society, and the principal aspect of that contradiction. Since these dimensions of witness are historical, dialogical and therefore dialectical, witness cannot simply import them from other contexts without previously analyzing its own. To do otherwise is to absolutize and mythologize the relative; alienation then becomes unavoidable. Witness in the dialogical theory of action, is one of the principal expressions of the cultural and educational character of the revolution.

The essential elements of witness which do not vary historically include: *consistency* between words and actions; *boldness* which urges the witnesses to confront existence as a permanent risk; *radicalization* (not sectarianism) leading both the witnesses and the ones receiving that witness to increasing action; *courage to love* (which, far from being accommodation to an unjust world, is rather the transformation of that world in behalf of the increasing liberation of [women and] men); and *faith* in the people, since it is to them that witness is made—although witness to the people, because of their dialectical relations with the dominant elites, also affects the latter (who respond to that witness in their customary way). [i.e. with violence.]

All authentic (that is, critical) witness involves the daring to run risks, including the possibility that the leaders will not always win the immediate adherence of the people. Witness which has not born fruit at a certain moment and under certain conditions is not thereby rendered incapable of bearing fruit tomorrow. Since witness is not an abstract gesture, but an action—a confrontation with the world and with [women and] men—it is not static. It is a dynamic element which becomes part of the societal context in which it occurred; from that moment, it does not cease to affect that context.

In antialogical action, manipulation anesthetizes the people and facilitates their domination; in dialogical action manipulation is superceded by authentic organization. In antialogical action, manipulation serves the ends of conquest; in dialogical action, daring and loving witness serve the ends of organization.

For the dominant elites, organization means organizing themselves. For the revolutionary leaders, organization means organizing themselves *with* the people. In the first event, the dominant elite increasingly structures its power so that it can more efficiently dominate and depersonalize; in the second, organization only corresponds to its nature and objective if in itself it constitutes the practice of freedom....