Man owes something to man. If he ignores the debt it poisons him, and if he tries to make payments the debt only increases, and the quality of the gift is the measure of the man.

I am tempted to tell him about my own "consciousness," about how the world merely reflects the revolution that occurs within one's own soul, about how his is truly a "revolution of the left." Another part of me wants to encourage him to act on his feelings, to take up arms and dare to begin a just crusade. Instead, I quietly remember Paulo Freire, and wonder if this is the meaning of teaching, at minimum, to lead others to a battlefield where defeat is certain but heroism is found in the act of choosing to fight for one's integrity and vision rather than to "apologize" for one's actions. I curb my desire to moralize and encourage Paul to go before the city council and try again.

Geoffrey Scheurman

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I am sad to learn of Paulo's death and fortunate to have such loving memories of my work with him at U. Mass. He taught me how to think about taking notes—a small act but one so central to my own capacity to think well.

Deborah Britzman

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Encountering The Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In the midst of one hell of a year Pedagogy of the Oppressed arrived in my campus bookstore. The Vietnam War raged on. More than 400 universities in the U.S. went on strike in 1970, the U.S. invaded Cambodia and four student protesters were gunned down at Kent State. A
Marxist, Salvador Allende, was elected president of Chile. Alongside our assigned doses of Mills, Merton, and Talcott Parsons, sociology students were reading *The Making of the Counter-Culture*, *Armies of the Night*, Emma Goldman's autobiography *Living My Life*, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. We read Marx, Marcuse, Fanon, and Sartre. We showed *Titticut Follies and the Battle of Algiers*, assigned *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Fanshen, Who Rules America?* and *The Rich and the Super Rich*; we lectured on social change. Despite Woodstock and Altamont we believed in Rock and Roll, and we believed in revolution and we believed the people would win a new world.

I was hired as a graduate research assistant to study paradigms in the sociology of education; with the job came a copy of the book. My thumb worn copy of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was underlined through so many readings that every word was emphasized and all the margins filled with scribble. Freire sent me backwards and forwards: back again to Marx and Sartre and further back to Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, and two long semesters of Hegel; and forward to Althusser, Erich Fromm, to George Sorel and the Wobblies. I mucked around in epistemology, dialectics and the paradigms of human understanding and action. I even read some education literature.

Freire had written a dense philosophical treatise on the problem and prospects of human liberation. In it he extended few empirical examples beyond his work on literacy among Brazilian peasants. The central question Freire posed to graduate students in the privileged universities of the first world, was this: How could one develop such a pedagogy from our subject position in the belly of the beast? (Sorry, we talked like that) Freire forced certain uncomfortable issues: the student movement felt oppressed by the "banking" education of the university, by the draft and by the military industrial complex, yet in relation to Vietnam and the third world we were just as clearly oppressors. Was it necessary, as some argued, to go into the hinterland and inner cities and teach literacy? Was a pedagogy of the "oppressor" possible/necessary? In any case, what should we do to further "becoming more fully human?"

Out of this intellectual ferment I developed methods using film, videotape and ethnography to facilitate the kind of dialogic education and "conscientizacao" that Freire advocated. I stumbled into the application sort of accidentally, and spent the next decade studying
coal miners. Coal had been mined in the West for a century and legacies of that earlier coal age included poverty stricken towns, environmental damage, and thousands of retired workers with black lung disease. Some of these ex coal towns were within 20 miles of my university office in Boulder. By the mid 1970s there were oil boycotts and gas lines; the western states were in the midst of an energy boom that included huge new strip and underground coal mines. Boomtowns and the environmental and social impacts of large scale energy development were critical public policy issues. The social impacts of both the old and the new coal industry constituted the kind of "generative theme" Freire suggested.

I began interviewing working miners and photographing in both surface and underground mines. I interviewed many retired miners and their wives who had immigrated around the turn of the century. I asked the old timers to recount the events of their lives beginning with stories they had heard from their parents and continuing through the experience of growing old. I probed for events like strikes and disasters, and for the mundane reality of everyday life. I sought the communities' articulation of generative themes, recognizing that this included contrary positions and community conflicts. Questions were conversational and open-ended. The interview technique assumed agency on the part of the respondents and provided space for them to determine their own agenda. The interviews were photographed and tape recorded.

There were two reasons to begin with interviews rather than the usual review of the literature. First, I was forced to ask naive questions which led to important explanations. The second reason came from Freire. Social scientists tend to begin with theory and frequently ignore the messy empirical features of the lived reality. Ethnic relations, the generation gap, labor union locals, particular local towns, the comprehensions of individuals, etc., have all too often been relegated to the realm of accident or tagged with pejorative labels like superstructure or false consciousness, or simply reduced to the mean categories of subculture, role, class, etc. I wanted to avoid scientific slogans, abstractions and the exegesis of sacred tests.

By the end of the interviewing phase dozens of interviews had been recorded on audiotape. Color slides of the interview subjects had been made. Libraries and museums yielded a rich visual history of black-and-white photographs, subjects volunteered family albums, and
thousands of photographs were copied from company files. A slide show was produced that portrayed the history and present conditions of the coal community. The goal was not to make a "documentary" of objective truth, but to arrange an order that reflected relations between objective and subjective conditions. I wanted to capture themes and conflicts, and people's analyses in their own words, in a program that would be used to initiate dialogue. The program had three scenes: history, modern mining, and black lung disease; it was presented extensively in the coal communities. The use of non-print media made possible the presentation of perceptions held by members of a community, and the reflection of the understandings of one community to another community. The video documents became the focus for a community discussion.

After the program was presented the question was asked: Does this represent the history and current situation of coal workers? I called the ensuing discussions "Public Editing" and they were recorded for future programs. The goal of these dialogues was to reduce contradictions between researchers and community, and to encourage critical reflection on issues like black lung benefits, environmental damage, the social costs of rapid growth, and the boom/bust nature of the energy industry. I can't say it led to the kind of action I had hoped, ten days to shake the world, but in the long run I received a grant, moved from slide shows to video, made a program that was shown nationwide on PBS. In the fullness of time the old timers died, the energy boom wilted, and coal production continued beneath the mountains and the prairies. I moved on and now do similar video work with inner city kids dialoguing around issues of drugs and violence. Though Freire has died the issues are as alive as ever: How will we become more fully human? How can we educate ourselves without reproducing the old hierarchies? What shall be our praxis to get rid of the oppressor?

Eric Margolis

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