

# *The Poet and the Educator:*

## Notes for a Comparative Study on the Early Works of Octavio Paz and Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

While thinking about my presentation for this conference I reread Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I found in his revolutionary ideas on education various themes and concepts reminiscent of the work of another prominent Latin American intellectual: Octavio Paz. I have been working for the past year or so on the connection between Paz's first masterpiece, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, and the sociological method of the German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel. So I decided to present today a brief sketch of their basic ideas and a few notes at the end that can help us in the attempt of a comparative study of their early work.

### 2. THE POET AND THE EDUCATOR

While there are some coincidences and similarities in their intellectual trajectories, few would argue that the ideas of Octavio Paz and Paulo Freire share much in common. The principal connection between them is, of course, that they are two towering examples of Latin American intellectual life in the second part of the twentieth century. And even though in Mexico and Brazil—the two largest Latin American countries in terms of population—people speak two different languages, these two countries do share a similar cultural heritage with origins in the Iberian peninsula (Portugal and Spain.) Finally, both thinkers are also roughly of the same age, Freire being a few years younger than Paz.

But their respective work—and their fame—is located in very different fields. Paz is basically known as one of the finest poets and essayist that the Spanish language has produced, while Freire received worldwide recognition as a theorist and as an educator. But, perhaps more importantly, their ideologies and careers diverged in significant ways. While Paz was briefly attracted to Marxism during his early years, he gradually changed his views towards what can be called a “traditional liberal” view. He worked as a diplomat up until 1968, when he renounced his post as Mexican

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1. ©Copyright 2004, by Jorge Capetillo-Ponce. Presented to the 1st Annual Conference-Workshop of the Social Theory Forum, UMass Boston, April 7, 2004 (Panel: “Transformations of the Self: Pedagogies from the Margin”). Contact information: [jorge.capetillo@umb.edu](mailto:jorge.capetillo@umb.edu)

Ambassador to India due to the Mexican government's repression of the student movement. Since that time, and until his death in 1998, Paz devoted his energies to writing and to publishing prestigious art and culture magazines. He was acknowledged both by Mexicans and foreigners as Mexico's foremost intellectual, and for many Mexicans as the embodiment of the national conscience.

For his part, Paulo Freire's career was marked by his militant stance against the totalitarian regimes in the Brazil of the 1950s and 1960s. He maintained himself close to Marxism as he developed a critical social pedagogy, and his personal involvement in literacy campaigns, educational movements, and many other social and political projects, led to his arrest, imprisonment and exile. Here we can clearly appreciate the difference between a liberal bourgeois and Francophile artist such as Octavio Paz, and a militant and revolutionary educator and theorist such as Paulo Freire, who showed throughout his life and work a keen interest in the liberation of the oppressed. After his return to Brazil in 1980, Freire worked in educational projects for the Workers Party, especially in the city of Sao Paulo. From that time and until his death, he wrote extensively on a wide range of topics related to education, forming a large body of followers worldwide.

In this presentation I will focus on both thinkers' early work for three reasons. First, because *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are not only Paz's and Freire's most-widely-read works, but also because we find in these works a common theme: the analysis of alienation—even though from very different ideological perspectives. Second, in each text the reader can get acquainted with many of the central themes that each thinker would develop further in later years. And third, because during the early stages of their careers, when the *Labyrinth* and the *Pedagogy* were written, both Paz and Freire were interested in revolutionary causes. Freire kept this interest throughout his life, but for Paz the time he spent in Paris writing the *Labyrinth* coincided with an enthusiasm for the work of Marx and other classical writers of communism and socialism—as well as works from the anarchist and libertarian traditions-- that waned in his later years.

### **3. THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE AND SIMMEL'S FORMAL SOCIOLOGY**

Ever since its initial publication in Mexico in 1950, Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* has been hailed as a masterpiece of both Latin American and modern literature, and proclaimed as one of the key texts unlocking the Mexican national identity. It is a work that is located at the intersection of nationalism and modernity, and that crosses many disciplinary borders. In this brief sketch of the *Labyrinth*, however, I will focus on its sociological content, one that has not been properly analyzed, and has at times been completely ignored. I will do so by contrasting the main themes in the *Labyrinth* with the formal sociological method developed by the German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel. This sketch will aid us in the subsequent comparison with Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

There are various aspects of Georg Simmel's work that must have attracted the young Octavio Paz, writing in Paris his first major work a few years after the end of World War II. Surely one was Simmel's use of the essay as his favorite—and indeed only—vehicle of analysis. In fact, Simmel was recognized as one of the finest essayists of his time, not only in Germany but elsewhere in Europe. Paz himself has long been acknowledged to be one of the most refined essayists writing in the Spanish language. According to Fernando de Toro, the chief characteristic of the Paz essay is its open structure, expressive of an intense and ongoing search for a clue to human destiny. What the Pazian essay offers is “questions, points of departure, attempts at definitive solutions, but never final answers. Its questions encompass life directly, and life is not closed but open, multiple, dialectical as reality.”<sup>1</sup> Thus it can be said that the essays (or chapters) that constitute the *Labyrinth*, share with Simmel's sociological essays the following characteristics:

1. They comprise structurally open and discreet analyses that cannot easily be integrated into a whole;
2. They use dialectic or dualism as their principal analytical tool;
3. Their analyses reveal the interwoven nature of the assembled parts of the diversity of the social world;
4. They focus on the disclosure of social forms and types, in order to draw the spirit or destiny of a particular age.

This fourth point of resemblance is in fact the most crucial, for it is not so much the preference of both thinkers for the essay form that is relevant, as it is their shared interest in abstracting forms out of the historical dimension, with

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1. My translation. In Paz, O. *El Laberinto de la Soledad, Volume II*. Edición Conmemorativa - 50 Aniversario. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000, p. 39.

Paz doing this in the *Labyrinth* as a key aspect of his quest for Mexican identity.

One point where these two thinkers most strikingly intersect is in their similar takes on alienation. Paz's conception of solitude hews closely to Simmel's alienation of culture, as opposed to Marx's alienation, based on economic factors, or Hegel's romantic/idealist variety. Paz is speaking in the *Labyrinth* of the deepest sort of cultural alienation, one that leads to solitude. In both Simmel's essays and Paz's *Labyrinth*, we find an ongoing battle between objective and subjective culture, and the appearance of a certain unhealthy objectification, with this leading to the oppression of the cultural forms that individuals have created. For Simmel the only way out of objectification/alienation, as for Paz from alienation/solitude, is through the creative act --which is to say, through a belief in the primacy of subjective culture (the individual) over objective culture (the network of countless individual creations).

For Simmel, the world consists of innumerable contents which are given a determinate identity, a particular structure and meaning, through the imposition of those forms that humans have created in the course of their collective experience. Thus, instead of a bewildering array of specific events, the actor is confronted with a limited number of forms. By "contents" we essentially mean those needs, drives, and purposes that lead individuals to enter into continuing associations with one another. Forms are the synthesizing processes by which individuals combine into supra-individual unities, stable or transient, solidary or antagonistic, as the case may be.

Octavio Paz took to heart Simmel's call for the sociologist to study the forms of human sociability, and the modes of human interaction, analyzing the conditions under which they emerge, develop, flourish, and dissolve. We must begin with the link between the Pachuco, the protagonist of the *Labyrinth's* first chapter, and Simmel's famous essay "The Stranger," a piece that triggered numerous sociological studies of social isolation and marginalization in different parts of the world. There are, indeed, many parallels between the Stranger and the Pachuco. First, the initial chapter of the *Labyrinth* is, like "The Stranger," a discussion of social distance. As we have noted, for both of these thinkers the properties of social types and the meanings of things are intrinsically tied to the relative distances between individuals and other individuals or things.

So too, Paz defines the Pachuco—an individual of Mexican origin who has lived in the United States for many years or even for generations—as someone who is definitely not an "authentic" North American, and yet also feels ashamed of his origin:

What distinguishes them [the Pachucos], I think, is their furtive and restless air: they act like persons who are wearing disguises, who are afraid of a stranger's look because it could strip them naked. When you talk with them, you observe that their sensibilities are like a pendulum, but a pendulum that has lost its reason and swings violently and erratically back and forth. This spiritual condition or lack of spirit, has given birth to a type known as the *pachuco* . . . They can be identified by their language and behavior as well as by the clothing they affect. They are instinctive rebels, and North American racism has centered its wrath on them more than once . . . The pachuco does not want to become Mexican again, at the same time he does not want to blend into the life of North America. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma.<sup>1</sup>

Similar as the Pachuco and the Stranger clearly are in some respects, though, the distance/nearness paradigm can't help but assert itself by making them different as well. The form or type of the Stranger is constructed from the gazes of others, and hence chiefly sociological, moving as it does from outer "reality" to interior psychic world. We sense from Paz's descriptions of the Pachuco, on the other hand, an interior world, where a group consciousness is revealed by returning the harshly appraising North American gaze, with the overall feeling thus being even more psychological than sociological.

Still, what are we to make of the fact that although in this book Paz does look at such diverse social types as the Cacique, the Indian, the Criollo, the Mestizo, the Macho, and the suffering Mexican woman, all of these are subsumed within broader social or cultural forms in the seven chapters and appendix that follow the first chapter on the Pachuco? I would suggest that the structure of the *Labyrinth* itself gives us a transition from social types—what one might deem the micro Simmelian forms of sociation—to larger forms. Among the cultural (historical-mythical) forms dealt with are the mask, the fiesta and the Malinche or Malinchismo (chapters II, III, and IV). These forms, which have solidified over time to become traditions and/or myths, are themselves then used by Paz to transition yet again, this time to an

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1. Paz, O. *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. 1986. Translated by Kemp, I., Milos, Y., and Belash, R.P. New York: Grove Press, pp. 13, 14.

analysis of those more perishable forms that emerge, develop, flourish, and dissolve in specific historical epochs. Thus, Chapter V analyzes the Prehispanic world, the Conquest, and Colonial Mexico, while Chapter VI looks at Independence, Reform, and the 1910 Revolution. Chapter VII, “The Mexican Intelligentsia,” gazes through a glass darkly at the key actors and ideologies that have striven in vain to unite the subjective and objective elements of the Mexican character and thereby forge a true national identity. Chapter VIII, “The Present Day,” is of special interest because it was written almost a decade after the first edition appeared in 1950. Most notably germane to our present purpose is the fact that, even as in this chapter Paz discards many of the concepts he used in 1950, the concept of form remains central to his analysis. All of this transitioning leads the reader right up to the Appendix (written in 1950 along with the original work). Here Paz not only condenses and reprises the forms discovered in the prior eight chapters, but also adds a treatment of eroticism, marriage, and prostitution that is recognizably simmelian—all of this being done to depict the crossing of Mexico and Mexicans and the desolate modern Western world, with the depiction reminding us of Simmel’s “tragedy of culture.”

In chapters II, III, and IV of the *Labyrinth*, which are devoted to an exploration of the conditions through which key mythical forms constituting Mexican identity have emerged, Paz seems to mix on his palette Simmel’s formal sociology and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, as a way of more broadly depicting the complexity of the Mexican spirit that he had drawn, almost as a caricature, in the first chapter on the Pachuco. The form of the mask, for instance, is filled with such contents as hypocrisy, dissimulation, “noneness” (*ninguneo*), and repression of the affective life—with all of those being found par excellence in the social type of the Mexican macho. These are also the elements that tend to construct a cultural form characterized by formulaic behavior, decorum, and outright hypocrisy. This oppressive mask came into being largely as an after-shock of the Conquest, i.e., of the confrontation between two wildly disparate cultural forms: Indian and Spanish. The end-product of this clash of civilizations is, according to Paz, a lack of authenticity. That’s the content that fills the mask: lack and inauthenticity. And yet however inauthentic the mask may be, as cultural form it pervades Mexican life, undermining Mexican subjectivity and creativity, and hence true communion among individuals.

Pessimistic as that may sound, in the chapter of the *Labyrinth* entitled “The Day of the Dead,” Paz offers us, in marked contrast to the inauthentic character of the mask form, a dialectically opposed and liberating cultural form: the fiesta. Not only have Mexicans been able to keep the fiesta historically alive through the centuries, but both Paz and Simmel would deem it an art form, since it is characterized by “unity of spirit”: it has the power to transport Mexicans out of their solitudes, causing them to throw away their masks and participate creatively and authentically in the collective life.

When Paz refers to a form as being “open,” he means that there is enough content within or beneath the form to sustain it. Gradually forms close, however, leaving the content, the participation of individuals outside of them, and producing a sense of passivity rather than activity. Social structures were largely open, for example in Mexico’s prehispanic days and during the first part of the colonial era, but an event such as the tragic life of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz signaled the closing of the colonial form. Whenever a form becomes completely empty or petrified, there ensues a rupture, an explosion. That generally engenders new open forms, which again enter into a process of growth and decay. Two such eruptions for Paz are the movement for Mexican Independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Mexican Revolution of the second decade of the twentieth century.

A close reader of the *Labyrinth* can’t help but wonder whether Paz didn’t consciously assimilate there Simmel’s idea that the human mind is capable of erecting solid structures even while their foundations are still insecure—an idea that makes one think of postmodernism’s belief in a lack of origin. In Chapter VI, for example, Paz looks at the Reforma, it having been a late-nineteenth-century liberal critique of the old regime and a secular vision of a bold new social contract. What he sees there is a Mexico negating its past and thus erecting a structure without foundations. Thus, for Paz the Reforma form is one that strives to affirm man and yet almost fatally undermines itself by ignoring the Mexico of the past, the Mexico of the myths, the fiesta, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. While conceding that the Reforma marks the start of modernity for Mexico by being universalistic, secular, and profane, Paz sees in this new form not the explosion and authenticity of the Independence or the Revolution movements (both falling under the form of the fiesta) but rather the onset of a period of historic inauthenticity (characteristic of the form of the mask) marked by widespread simulation, born in response to the imposition of an alien positivism on the Mexican soul: “not a religion but an ideology.” The felt need for a rupture out of this oppressive form produced the 1910 Revolution, a form full of aggression but also a “real revelation of ourselves” and a harbinger of a more genuine universality, one that would simultaneously insert Mexicans into world history and reintegrate them with their own past.

#### 4. THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

Paulo Freire, like Octavio Paz, showed a continuing interest in the struggles in Latin America for freedom and active participation in the formation of their own societies. His basic assumption in his first—and most famous—major work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is that human ontological vocation is to become subjects who act upon and transform their world, and in doing so to move to new possibilities of attaining a fuller and richer life individually and collectively.

Transformation is a key word here, because Freire stresses that the world is not a static place, where men and women have to adapt to circumstances to survive, but a dynamic situation open to change. Collectivity is another key word, since Freire believed that, as Samuel Zalanga points out,

we cannot attain real humanity by pursuing an ideology that sees the redemption of human oppression in the isolated and individualistic pursuit of rights. That is, we cannot become more human by increasing individualism and egoism, but by working in cooperation and communion with each other. By using “having” or ownership as a measure of becoming human, we only create conditions for some (those who are able to have) to become human and others (those unable to have) to remain less than human. Freire in saying this is not denying the importance of “having” for being human, but rather to stress the fact that it is for this reason that we need to create conditions where all will be able to have in order for all to be all human.<sup>1</sup>

Another key element in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is Freire’s idea of cultural action. He maintains that cultural action is always a systematic and deliberative form of action, operating “upon the social structure, either with the objective of preserving that structure or transforming it. As a form of deliberate and systematic action, all cultural action has its theory, which determines its ends and thereby defines its methods. Cultural action either serves domination (consciously or unconsciously) or it even serves the liberation of men and women—they create dialectical relations of permanence and change.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, Freire is interested in the liberating effect of cultural action. This can be achieved only through a continuous dialogue—eminently educational in character—that grants all individuals an effective participation in power. As Freire puts it “men educate each other through their mediation of the world.”

Since Paz’s *Labyrinth* is characterized by the analysis of dominating or oppressing forms, I will focus here on Freire’s ideas of particular cultural actions that block the liberation of people, what he calls “antidialogical action.” Within this type of cultural action, Freire inserts conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and—especially important for our purposes here—cultural invasion, a variety of antidialogical action that serves the end of conquest. According to Freire:

In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. Whether urbane or harsh, cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, originality is for Freire, as for Paz, a prerequisite for liberation. For Freire, any situation or circumstance that denies another person or people the ability to pursue their legitimate aspiration as self-affirming beings is oppression. The action itself is violence. Here we clearly see the influence of Marx, because for Freire violent action on the part of some people gives birth to oppression. That is, violence and oppression do not come into existence by chance or accident: they are a product of historical realities. Violence is the distortion of human relationships throughout history, creating a situation where some deny others their humanity and undermine their originality, their self-expression.

The effect of oppression, according to Freire, is that the oppressed become fatalistic and immersed in a “culture of silence.” The oppressed take the existing reality for granted, thus developing certain socio-psychological attitudes designed to cope with this adverse reality. But the development of these “coping” attitudes also serves to affirm and maintain the status-quo. Of course, for Freire fatalism is not an essential element of the character of individuals and/

1. See Samuel Zalanga’s essay in this volume titled “Teaching and Learning Social Theory to Advance Social Transformation: Some Insights, Implications, and Practical Suggestions from Paulo Freire.”

2. Freire, Paulo. 1970. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Seabury Press, p. 78-79

3. Freire, P., op.cit. p. 150.

or social groups. That is, it is not a natural order of things, but the result of a lack of consciousness to perceive, understand, or decipher existing, everyday reality.

Every human being, according to Freire, no matter how “ignorant” or submerged in the “culture of silence,” is capable of looking critically at the world when engaging in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, s/he can gradually perceive his/her personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of her/his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. Until this liberating encounter occurs, however, the oppressed will continue to identify with the oppressor, simply because they have internalized the oppressor’s view of reality as the only possible reality.

The process of liberation is inevitably linked to an educational project based on a pedagogy that is both humanist and libertarian. This is what Freire calls “the pedagogy of the oppressed.” It has two distinct stages:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression, and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation.<sup>1</sup>

This revolutionary type of education leads us out of alienation and silence and into liberation and dialogue. As this happens, the word takes on a new power. It is no longer an abstraction or magic but a means by which individuals discover themselves and their potential as they give names to things around them. As Freire puts it, “each man wins back his right to say his own word, to name the world.”

It is important to underline, however, that for this liberating process to be successful, the oppressed must engage in a type of reflection that leads to action, and thus inevitably to social conflict. It is also important to note that any attempt to aid the oppressed in their struggle for liberation must be based, according to Freire, on trust, otherwise it becomes an antidialogical and manipulative action.

Thus, for Freire education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it (what he calls “the banking concept of education”), or it becomes a “practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (what he calls “problem solving” or “liberatory” education.) The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and a new world. We must remember that today’s advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us, subtly influencing our attitudes toward conformity to the logic of the market system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in Freire’s “culture of silence.”

## 5. CONCLUSION: NOTES TOWARD A COMPARATIVE STUDY

I would like to enumerate five areas that can be of interest to those who want to analyze the *Labyrinth* and the *Pedagogy* from a comparative perspective.

**1. Ideological Traditions:** A first area of comparison will have to cover, of course, the different ideological traditions on which Paz and Freire base their respective work. In the case of Paz, besides Simmel, we should note the important influence of Freud and Nietzsche in particular, as well as Borges, Caillois, Gaos, Levi-Strauss, Marx, Ortega y Gasset, Ramos, Reyes, Rousseau, and Vasconcelos. As for Freire, we find a strong Marxist influence emanating not only from the work of Marx himself but also from other authors and revolutionaries within the Marxist camp such as Mao, Fanon, Althusser, Che Guevara, Marcuse, Fromm, and Sartre, as well as authors from different ideological viewpoints such as Ortega y Gasset, Mounier, Martin Luther King, and Unamuno.

By analyzing the external influences on the seminal work of both authors, we will arrive at a better understanding

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1. Freire, p. op. cit. p. 40.

of the different ways in which each sees the problems affecting Latin American societies, as well as their different solutions to these problems. Such a study will also help us in understanding the eclecticism in Latin American intellectual movements since the end of the Second World War. For even though it is true that the *Labyrinth* has a psychoanalytic and postmodernist flavor, and the *Pedagogy* a clearly Marxist one—in particular the kind of Marxism advocated by critical theorists from the Frankfurt School tradition—both works incorporate the ideas of Third World intellectuals (especially from Latin America) in order to arrive at an original interpretation of the challenges posed by modernity to Latin American societies and identities.

**2. Alienation and Dialectics:** The comparison of the intellectual traditions behind the *Labyrinth* and the *Pedagogy* is a necessary first step to understand two central elements that Paz and Freire share: the analysis of alienation, and the use of dialectics as a methodological tool. Paz's alienation, which leads to his concept of *solitude*, is arrived at by using a dialectical approach of the Simmelian type, that is, it explores reality through the conflict between objective and subjective culture, the result being the appearance of an unhealthy or pathological objectification that leads to the oppression of the cultural forms that individuals have created. In contrast, Freire's alienation, which leads the oppressed to a *culture of silence*, is constructed by using dialectics of the Marxist type, based on the centrality of economic factors and a historical materialistic interpretation of reality.

**3. Colonialism and Lack of Originality:** While Paz's solitude and Freire's culture of silence are clearly different concepts, both are types of alienation that find their cause in one factor that has preoccupied Latin American intellectuals since the Independence movements of the nineteenth century: *colonialism*. Both Freire and Paz consider that the military and especially the cultural invasion of Latin America by European (and more recently North American) powers had a negative effect on Latin American societies, breeding conformity and, thus, lack of originality. But again, their solutions to this colonialism-as-lack-of-originality syndrome are very different. Paz considers, as good Nietzschean, that the solution can be found in the creative act of individuals. Freire, for his part, proposes the establishment of a dialogical type of education in order to regain the lost originality in Latin American societies, as well as to attain self-expression for all.

**4. Oppression and Liberation:** Probably the most interesting comparison of all, because it brings to light the core arguments in each text, is the way each thinker develops specific analytical concepts that are then confronted through the use of a dialectical method to explain their respective understandings of Latin American reality. In the case of Paz, he confronts his oppressive forms (the mask being the most powerful and representative of the psycho-sociological situation of Mexicans) against his only liberating form (the fiesta, which comes to life during revolutionary periods, such as the Independence and the Revolution) that represents the exit from solitude and a harbinger of a genuine universality that would simultaneously insert Mexicans into world history and reintegrate them with their own past. As for Freire, his belief that education either functions as an instrument of oppression or liberation leads him to present two basic concepts in conflict: the banking concept of education against a problem-solving or liberating pedagogy. One breeds conformity and inauthenticity: the sign of the colonized individual; the other generates self-expression and liberation, a "practice of freedom" that enables individuals and societies to transform the culture of silence into a culture of participation and self-expression.

This study would have to include the different takes each thinker has on the degree of oppression their respective analytical structures exert on individuals and societies, as well as the amount of conflict involved in countering oppression. This idea is derived from the fact that when one reads the *Labyrinth*, the oppressive cultural forms Paz develops to substantiate his analysis seem so pervasive that the only way out are bloody fiestas: an explosion of authenticity that can finally obliterate, if only for a limited time, the oppression found in inauthentic and oppressive forms. In contrast, Freire, in the *Pedagogy*, seems more optimistic and practical than Paz, in that he proposes that a problem-solving or liberating approach to education has the power, also through conflict, to gradually turn things around and for good. For Freire, the final product of his analytical enterprise is that individuals can enjoy a situation where they can transform their world through critical and creative thinking.

In short, in Paz's *Labyrinth*, oppression has the power to reconstitute itself, and oppressive cultural forms are only successfully countered by explosive revelations of "real" Mexican culture, that subsequently fall into a process of decay. In the *Pedagogy*, however, Freire proposes that we can get rid of oppression altogether. He actually thinks that we can arrive, through initial conflict, at a completely new situation characterized by liberated individuals and societies.

**5. A Latin American Understanding of Modernity:** Finally, both the *Labyrinth* and the *Pedagogy* are works characterized by their authors' preoccupation with a modern world that is rapidly making objects of most of us, stressing conformity to the logic of a Western-controlled market system. Thus, they are not only works that present a Latin American response to European or North American colonialism, but they also portray an understanding of what the

concept of modernity, as understood by the colonizing powers, means for Latin American individuals and societies.