Teachers: A Question of Class

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Teachers may be the original bureaucrats since they perpetuate the privilege of knowledge. It is because of teachers that bureaucracy can transcend generations. Without teachers there could be no heirs of technocratic know-how, but it is also true that without teachers there could be no liberatory culture, only conditioning. Without teachers, every generation, every individual revolutionary would have to start from scratch, from the very beginning of History. Thanks to teachers, the history of class struggle can be passed down and passed around. Thanks to teachers, we don't have to reinvent the wheel in order to collaborate or communicate. This means that it is possible, through the act of teaching, to indoctrinate or to liberate students. It is the method and the particular pedagogy which makes all the difference because learning necessarily occurs in no-man's land. So, though they obviously aren't themselves the ones oppressed by knowledge, neither are teachers the oppressors. They occupy a middle ground; every teacher works at the border, on the limit, at the edge.

Teaching is ethical work precisely because it walks the boundary between bureaucracy and revolution. A teacher who shares answers to important questions with students, intending to instill in them these answers, is part of the problem. They might be a good person with great intentions, but they are not revolutionary intentions. This kind of teaching is not liberating because this kind of teacher is a bureaucrat, an agent of the powerful, defending their role in the system. They reject the freedom to pose new questions and dehumanize themselves and their students by reducing learning to the mechanistic propagation of pre-established responses.

The feedback loop created by this kind of education is bureaucracy, plain and simple. It is an unnecessary and never-ending deviation that is justified by moralism. You are considered a good person if you share the generous gift of solution with the needy and not-yet-knowing. The solution is supposed to serve as the missing piece in the prefab puzzle that is human existence, a one size fits all recipe with the promise of universal application.

By contrast, someone who personally takes on the burden of knowing the solution, who, not unlike the other teacher, has full intention of sharing, explaining, and generally exhibiting solutions (and their correlating problems) but who has no expectation of convincing students of these solutions, this is a teacher practicing radical pedagogy. They expect that the students will come with their own, new questions, maybe about the original problem and its premise, maybe about its solution, but maybe about something different entirely. These possibilities, which are avoided by the bureaucratic teacher, are embraced by the radical teacher who accepts their role in the situation as the one with the cartoonishly rigid, read- made solution. This absurdity makes clear a class distinction between the teacher who stands on the precipice, with intimate knowledge of its contours, and the students whose minds are not yet formed by the prevailing problem-solution dichotomy.

Walking the edge causes angst, not because you could fall but because you could jump. The cliff makes clear that everything is contingent on freedom. This requires ethical rigor and determination from the teacher, but the entire learning process fundamentally depends on the recognition and defense of freedom by the students because the teacher can seem so wise, so knowledgeable and experienced, and the student can be so hungry to learn, so ambitious and competitive, that they walk (or run) willingly off the cliff, to a life of being a proud purveyor of solutions, *prêt-à-porter*.