

Designs of the Oppressed

**Week 3 (27/10/2022 – 02/11/2022): Critical consciousness**

Rodrigo Gonzatto

Hello, I'm Rodrigo Freese Gonzatto from Curitiba, Parana, Brazil! This is an audio-lecture about the concept of Critical Consciousness.

What's the meaning of critical consciousness and naive consciousness in Alvaro Vieira Pinto's and Paulo Freires's thinking?

When we talk about consciousness, we are talking about the human being. The human being is a consciousness. Consciousness is a term that, throughout the histories of ideas, has been shaped as a way of understanding, of conceiving -- many times, philosophically -- what is a human being and how we can explain the human being in the world.

Other terms had been used in the past, to explain what happens with this entity, this being... like the "spirit". Explain humans as beings that are a consciousness of things in the world, requires us to think that they have certain relation with what is in their surroundings. So, consciousness is a useful concept to help us understand that the human being's definition includes that which consciousness is conscious about, since consciousness is always the awareness of the things in the world. In this way, the definition of human being must include the world where these human beings have consciousness and developed their consciousness.

For example, to think of me, Rodrigo, requires thinking of a person whose action in the world takes place in an exploited, underdeveloped country, and that it is from these circumstances that I move, act, and produce my existence - who I am.

Consciousness is a concept that has a profound relation with the idea of reality. In the most important work of Vieira Pinto, *Consciousness and National Reality*, this appears right in the title. Consciousness, in this book, is not just any consciousness. It's mostly what he designates as a collective consciousness. In this case, it does not mean a single individual, but the collective of consciousnesses that forms, as an example, Brazil. The Brazilian nation could be considered as a collective consciousness.

The head thinks where the feet step. Or at least that is how the critical conscience proceeds. Let's discuss the modes of consciousness: the critical and the naive.

Naive consciousness and critical consciousness are two extremes of the relationship between consciousness and reality. It is possible to move between these two modalities. In certain matters it can be naive, and in others, critical. A society or a group (such as designers) may be moving towards a more critical consciousness, even though several are in the naive mode.

However, the fact that a person is an intellectual, or have many years of education... does not mean that they has a more critical consciousness. However, if a person is a worker, if they feels the oppressions in his skin, they has more chances to have a critical consciousness. Let's understand why.

I made a model with a schematization of these two antagonistic paradigms.

There are gradations between the extremes, but the most important thing is that there are characteristic marks of each mode of consciousness. And what differentiates critical from naive consciousness is the way in which consciousness relates to socially constructed reality.

In its critical extreme, the consciousness understands that reality is subject to modification. Because it was constructed by human beings. So it thinks in terms of transforming this reality into new forms, overcoming oppression

In contrast, naive consciousness is one marked by the belief that reality is immutable and given, and therefore also marked by passivity in the face of reality. It is the idea that capitalism will always exist, that there is only one form of "good design," that we will be saved (or dominated) by technology because it determines our lives.

But the main point that Vieira Pinto will distinguish critical consciousness, is not only about wanting to CHANGE the world, it is about understanding to be conditioned by that world (attention: conditioned, not determined!). In other words, the critical consciousness is the one that REALLY recognizes the factors that determine their own consciousness.

BUT SEE: it is not because consciousness is critical that it can recognize. It is because it recognizes the factors of reality, that we can call it critical. It comes from the objective world to consciousness, to then return in the form of action - transformation.

Vieira Pinto is an author who thinks by dialectics:

-to transform reality one must know it;

-to know reality is to be affected by it;

-to be affected by reality, and to know it, is to realize that it was previously transformed to be the way it is.

Therefore, critical consciousness is that which investigates itself, recognizing and questioning the factors that condition it.

And it is no accident that the oppressed, whether by class, underdevelopment, race, ethnicity, gender.... are closest to critical consciousness. They are the ones who can feel reality in its harshest form

Because they are the closest to feeling and experiencing the factors of reality that condition consciousness: such as the ideology, the material structure, the discourses of the oppressors.... of those who shape the world to their own interest...

For example, when thinking and making decisions, for naive consciousness it is indifferent to the fact that it is in Brazil, the United States, or China.

Naive consciousness believes to be detached from the world around it. A naive person lives and works in Brazil, and believes that Brazilian design will only develop when it is equal to that of the North-Global. and in this movement tries to justify why it does nothing to develop and change the reality on which it stands, and legitimizes the uncritical importation of models, theories and toolkits, without adaptation.

Another point: the critical consciousness is historical, it recognizes and wants to see the changes that reality has undergone, in order to participate in these changes.

It becomes more susceptible to dogma, has a fatalistic tendency (for example: there is nothing to do, there are no alternatives, or "it is very difficult") and tends to be reactionary, nostalgic, as if the past served for the present, not recognizing the changes in the world.

Finally, we can go to the concept of conscientization. Conscientization is a form of emancipatory empowerment. to, together with others, create a more critical consciousness.

However, naive conscience does not mean necessarily a bad person or unscrupulous people. This is what Freire shows us when he puts these 4 stages for the TRANSITION from naive consciousness (which, being immersed in reality, does not see the possibility of moving to another form) to critical transitive consciousness.

Observe that there in the middle we have the dominated consciousness, the perception of change impeded. coups, dependency, silencing, assassination, genocide... are all ways of controlling the formation of critical consciousness.

In conclusion...

In his books, Vieira Pinto showed us the ideologies that operate to mask reality, preventing the world from being transformed by those who need it most - the oppressed. He denounced ideological operations that try to make us ACCEPT OPRESSION as NATURAL, IMMUTABLE.

Paulo Freire, created a form of adult literacy known throughout the world for allowing that learning to read was learning to read reality, and learning to write allowed to VOTE, and participate in politics and in the written culture.

There is a Freire term for this: ANNOUNCEMENT/DENOUNCEMENT. Conscientization always needs both: the DENOUNCEMENT of the oppressed reality, and the ANNOUNCEMENT of liberation:

- announcement without denouncement leads to activism without responding to the true demands of reality.

- denouncement without announcement can fall into criticism without collective mobilization

ANNOUNCEMENT AND DENOUNCEMENT are the themes of the next parts of this class. So this first part we end here. Thank you!