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Celestin Freinet's Printing Press: Lessons of a 'Bourgeois' Educator

Abstract

This essay seeks to provide a new reading of the work of Celestin Freinet and his use of the printing press. Specifically, this essay aligns Freinet's approach to teaching and learning with a counter-reformation in pedagogical thought-an approach that places him both within and outside of the 'progressive' turn in education that began to emerge at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries. Freinet's pedagogical experiment in rural France during mid- 20th century demonstrated the way that student freedom, uninhibited by overarching ideological pre-emption, and unbound from the progressive imperatives typical of reform education in either its Marxist or liberal variants, can be utilized as a way to inspire pedagogical techniques founded on alternative social, political, and anthropological postulates. Specifically, the authors demonstrate how Freinet's use of the press helps us to think about the following: 1) a different relationship to technology and the role it could play in the conception of the common within the classroom; 2) the creation of an existential good as opposed to the private good discovered through the amassing of property and the advancement of the related notion of progress; 3) and a reaffirmation of the possibility of a genuine workers education.

Keywords: Celestin Freinet; Reform Education; Technology; Work

Introduction

“When one has bidden a last farewell to someone, as I had done, a farewell accepted in good faith, surely the mutual formalities that remain should be got over as quickly as possible, and one should not burden one's host purposelessly with one's silent presence. As I contemplated the stubborn little old fellow from behind, while he sat at the table, it seemed an impossible idea ever to show him the door.”

-Franz Kafka, "The Village Schoolmaster"

When the technological arc of progressive thought almost inevitably solders all education reform, radical or radically complacent, to a singularizing path of technocratic polity and the consumption of electronic media, one must search for untimely examples of pedagogical practice. What is customarily known as progressive education (and what will now be labelled as 'reform' education)ⁱ would appear to offer one such redoubt to the seemingly uninhibited advancement of technology and automation to school age children throughout the world. However, as a pedagogical movement bound up with all manner of ideas associated with advancement, progress, and productivity, reform education has been completely ineffectual in curtailing the mass of new, destructive technological reconfigurations of the biosphere that mark our contemporary world. Instead of serving as a barrier to the intensification of the Anthropocene and the defense of personae, reform education has been an active participant in celebrating what is now widely regarded as the inevitability of the post-human.

The first wave of reform pedagogy, in its different articulations, was designed to challenge and undermine the top-down, rigid, and rote learning approach to schooling that dominated the educational landscape in much of the Americas, Europe, and Asia in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Specifically, school reform in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries intended to move pedagogy away from the recitation model of learning by subverting its reliance on repetitive mental exercises. As a result, almost all of the new 'progressive' reforms were based on the creation and introduction of new educational materials and activities that were intended to foster experiential growth and hands-on learning.

In spite of some of these radical reforms, use of experiential methodologies, and development and use of new kinds of educational materials, much of the new pedagogical spaces created by these reforms ultimately leave in place the machinic, and technological imperative tied to common notions of progress. In other words, while reform doctrines do often innovate in the realm of pedagogical tools and student autonomy, their limitation is most evident in their futility to help change the basic teleology

of schooling and its function as a preparatory mechanism for a progressive future of technological wealth metaphysics.

One recent example of reform based pedagogy that exemplifies the complicity between new pedagogical strategies and technological advancement is Project-Based Learning (PBL). In PBL one finds a similar defense of experiential learning bound up with whatever kind of new technological innovations have recently made their way into the market place. In more specific terms, Project Based Learning prioritizes 'doing' through hands-on problem solving often involving digital technologies. With PBL projects, formal learning is organized around the application of ideas and concepts gained through traditional curriculum to real life issues and problems. While the focus of PBL often emerges out of problems identified through traditional means, this approach typically exists as a stand-in for traditional curriculum whereby the problems posed 'naturally' instigate an engagement with particular subjects that commonly serve as the core, foundational program in schools (e.g. math, grammar, etc.). Because much PBL is designed to give students practice in solving real-life, contemporary problems, the activities are typically connected to global trends found in emergent technologies and the kinds of vocations they engender.

With the continued pervasiveness of reform-oriented pedagogy in operation today, it is difficult to identify examples of teaching and learning indicative of what we might refer to as a technological counter-reformation. In other words, it is rare to find a pedagogical approach designed not so much to undermine the the entirety of the 'progressive' school reforms that have been in operation for more than a century, but rather to challenge some of the basic understandings of the metaphysical-not ethical-constraints to production and technological innovation that reflect the conception of humanity as *homo oeconomicus* and *animal laborans* (see Arendt, 1958).

However, one such example of counter-reformation exists in the work of 20th Century French teacher Celestin Freinet (1896-1966). As a teacher who followed in the footsteps of many of the reform oriented educators, practitioners, and philosophers of education of the 19th and 20th Centuries, Freinet

was interested in eliminating the stifling approach to schooling that marked his own educational experiences as a child growing up in rural France in the early 1900s. Unlike most educational reformers of his time, however, Freinet was not interested in creating a new terminological framework for schooling that would counter what had existed prior to his arrival in the school, nor to simply and more effectively prepare students for their future employment opportunities created in the wake of massive industrialization, technological innovation, and globalization/internationalization. Instead, what the pedagogical creation of Celestin Freinet offers us is a complete reconstitution of classroom organization and a corresponding re-conceptualization of the way work can be valorized and incorporated into the school in a way that doesn't simply acquiesce to progressive, market trends. Although Freinet, like many of his reform minded contemporaries, developed his own new methodological approach to teaching, his most profound modification of educational practice came in the form of the introduction of the printing press to the centre of the classroom.

Freinet's place and use of the press did not mark an innovation within the framework of the teacher-student social unit, but rather established the possibility, through the use of the press, to give students the chance to discover and fashion their own social world including the development of new relationship with adults that formed innovative social/psychological compositions. It was then within the context of being given the power to utilize the machine and eventually create their own written forms of expression, that the theme of work gains a new significance. No longer reducible either to achievement within a given social structure nor the learning of discrete technical skills for pure economic aims/teloi, work becomes oriented toward learning to elaborate the entire material infrastructure of life in a way that marks a dispensation from the rule of progressivism and productivity.

Freinet's classroom offered students the chance to engage in a very different kind of learning through the disentanglement of school/work from the impediment of the platform. Rather than functioning primarily as an ideological formation (radical or conventional), Freinet's approach was

grounded in technique-specifically the appropriation of a particular machine by the students themselves allowing them to participate more directly in their own pre-sociogenesis.

Freinet's adage 'to give children the word', that he used to describe student appropriation of the press is here relevant, as the phrase implied giving children authority over the way they engaged with the press and their creations that resulted from such an engagement. This approach stands in contrast to the common idea of supplying them with a ready-made lexicon of 'empowerment' for overcoming their own alienation. By not pre-defining the social field through an ideological pre-emption, a very different sort of learning space was created where an existential commitment could grow in the Freinet classroom.

The untimeliness of Freinet as a rural elementary teacher from an era that seemed bygone even in its own time, combined with his approach to teaching that stands in striking contrast to the progressivist/reform/productivist model, necessitates a new, discerning engagement with this work. Freinet should neither be conceived as merely an overlooked contributor to the monolith of neo-liberal and progressivist educational theory, nor as an interesting, but nonetheless ancillary footnote to the growth of post-war French thought particularly of the Deleuze/Guattarian variety (see Dosse, 2010). Instead, we argue that the work of Freinet as a teacher needs to be assessed on its own terms-especially as the 'bourgeois' educator he was accused of being in mid-20th Century, France. Subsequently, this essay focuses on the implications of Freinetian technique in order to help us envision the following: 1) a different relationship to technology and the role it could play in the conception of the common within the classroom; 2) the creation of an existential good as opposed to the private good discovered through the amassing of property and the advancement of the related notion of progress; and 3) a reaffirmation of the possibility of a genuine workers education in which we utilize the term *workers* as a reference to the dignity and nobility of doing work.

The Country Teacher

Because ample information concerning the life Celestin Freinet has already been sketched out in a variety of other English-language publications (see Acker, 2007; Legrand 1993; Beattie, 2002), we will leave to readers the task of seeking deeper familiarity with his biography, fascinating as it may be. However, a brief review of his life and the path leading to his vocation as a teacher will help to establish the personal and intellectual background to the untimeliness of Freinet's work referred to above, in particular his use of classroom printing methods as something more than mere technological 'innovation.'

Celestin Freinet was born in Gars, France in 1896, a rural farming community of some few hundred people nested at the base of the Gars mountain in the French Alps. As was the case with many *Garcinois* families, Freinet's family supported itself through the traditional local work of sheep farming when Freinet learned the timeless labor of the shepherd. According to his wife Elise Freinet (1977), it was Celestin's time spent as a shepherd that served as "the leitmotiv" of his own early educational experiences. It was against this idyllic background that Freinet struggled in school as a boy and young man (ibid.). The combination of authoritarian teaching methods employed in his local school that were typical of the contemporary French education system at that time, along with his family's financial difficulties made it impossible for Freinet to finish school. These struggles led him to leave the school system before ever finishing the secondary level, annulling any hope he ever had of entering the university (ibid).

Although Freinet's experiences as a young student in Gars were a disappointment, they nevertheless pushed him toward the teaching profession with the hope of developing a different approach to teaching and learning. Thanks largely to an education system that enabled access to teaching service in primary schools without having a university degree, as a young man Freinet was able to enrol in a teachers training program after having completed some continuing education classes in Nice. Almost immediately after gaining his teaching certificate, however, his professional ambitions were derailed by the outbreak of WWI when he was called to serve in the French army.

Despite having to put off his career as a teacher for the war, Freinet's eventual work as a teacher would undergo profound transformations thanks in large part to his war experiences. In fact, his experiences in the war have come to acquire a sort of mythological status in terms of its effect on the eventual development of what many consider to be his "ingenious" approach to teaching (Schleminger, 1999). According to Elise Freinet (1977), the "genius" of Freinet's teaching philosophy is directly attributable to his experiences in the war, arising specifically from a lung injury sustained during a poison gas attack. Following this legend, after returning from wartime, Freinet discovered, serendipitously, that this wound to his lungs forced him to reconsider the traditional pedagogical position of the teacher in classroom. Freinet (1990) explains the experience as follows;

"(W)hen I returned from the great war in 1920, I wasn't the same due to a *glorious wound* in my lung that weakened and exhausted me to the extent that I was incapable of speaking in my class for more than a few minutes at a time. ...If I had had, like all of my other colleagues, sufficiently strong breath to dominate the passivity of my students with my voice, I would have been convinced that my technique, in spite of everything, was acceptable. I would've continued to utilize saliva, the number one instrument of what we call traditional school, and as a result my experiences (as a teacher) would've come to an end" (p.11).ⁱⁱ

As a result of his "glorious wound," Freinet found himself incapable of working according to the conventional style of classroom instruction of his time. Long lectures with only occasional exchanges of questions from students proved to be physically harrowing for Freinet and would have ultimately posed an insurmountable challenge to his work as a classroom teacher after the war.

After almost four years of convalescence in various hospitals upon returning from the war,

Freinet was finally able to begin his teaching career in Le Bar-Sur-Loup, a small, rural town in southern France located amongst the valleys of the Alps near the Mediterranean Sea. Upon being hired at Le Bar-Sur-Loup, Celestin became a member of the anarcho-syndicalist teachers union associated with the French Communist Party, and began reading and discussing many of the anti-authoritarian and child-centered philosophies emerging out of the "New Education Movement," which included the work of Maria Montessori, Adolph Freierere, Ovide Decroly, John Dewey, and Rudolf Steiner among others. Certainly, contact with the thought of figures in the New Education movement appears to have played some role in the development of Freinet's practice, although the exact influence of particular figures or concepts can only yield to speculation as his largely novelistic approach to writing and thinking eschewed a citation-heavy style (see Freinet 1970; 1990; 1990b; 1993).

During Freinet's first six years in his post at Le Bar-Sur-Loup, this first layer of influence including the contingency of corporeal restraint and the fashions of social reform sweeping across Europe in response to the events of World War I, compelled him to extract his body from the centre of the schooling experience and replace it with something else-a printing press. The inclusion of this foreign object instigated a number of important changes: First, the focal point of student attention shifted from the authority figure at the front of the classroom to the machine that was to become the source of both their physical and cognitive engagement. Secondly, the physical position of students in the classroom was altered. The rows of chairs that were typically organized in horizontal lines, and that always faced the teacher's podium, were displaced to the sides of the classroom. While still serving as a possible place to rest and write, the chairs ceased to be the primary physical location of students. As the students were released from their confinement to their chairs and their orientation toward the lecturer, the press became the focal point of students' physical and cognitive engagement. Student and teacher physical positioning and interaction was changed thus heralding in an entirely new social organizational dynamic into the classroom. Finally, a new level of physical engagement/work - a

component of schooling typically limited to vocational training- was introduced to the classroom as a result of the manual labour required to operate and maintain the press.

Along with the physical and social alterations that followed the introduction of this machine into the classroom, there were also specific curricular objectives that the printing press allowed Freinet to pursue. Specifically, students collectively organized themselves around the press in order to produce a school newspaper that included student writings referred to as "free texts." These "free texts" allowed students the chance to write (or speak and/or draw if they were not yet reading and writing) about their home life, a particular outing in the community, an adventure with a friend, or anything else of interest to them. After writing these texts, students were asked to read their texts in class. This was a kind of reading that Freinet called "work oriented reading"ⁱⁱⁱ in that it was both a product of student investigation, and often a description of the kind of life and vocational pursuits found in their community. While such exercises were designed to help students improve their reading, writing, and speaking skills, the primary intention of these exercises was to instigate a form of collaborative work and engagement with the local.^{iv}

Why it might be tempting to understand the use of the press in the classroom in purely organizational terms, the value of the printing press is not identifiable as a mere product of its use. In other words, its primary value is not to be found in the connections that it makes. Rather, its use is only brought to light through the limit that is imposed upon it through the emphasis on local events being translated through student writings/presentations.^v

It was this introduction of the printing press into the classroom, and its subsequent placement at the centre of the class that began the "Freinetian Technique" and the eventual development of a national education movement in France. This 'movement' would influence a range of figures in the post-war cultural scene such as Fernand Oury and Fernand Deligny who emerged as disciples of Freinet, and eventually developed their own urban-centered practice of "Institutional Pedagogy."^{vi}

Freinet referred to his pedagogy as the method of the *ecole modern* (the modern school). However, the integration of the printing press into the classroom should not be conceived of as an object of modernity in the way that Benedict Anderson (2006) equated it with the emergence of nationalism and Walter Benjamin (1968) attributed it to the birth of the novel to the detriment of storytelling. Freinet (1990b) describes this process as follows,

"...modernization doesn't simply mean buying new equipment. And it's much the same with teaching methods; we've to do more than just try to increase pupil participation, or even organize cooperative work or print a school magazine and set up a school-to-school exchanges of letters or parcels. All these things bring only surface improvements unless we change the basic idea of a classroom as a place where teachers are like puppet-masters controlling everything ... As soon as I started using classroom printing, it was obvious that a much more fundamental change in every activity was also necessary. This example may help you see how organizational and philosophical improvements find their way into the classroom"(p. 39).

It was this anti-authoritarian spirit of Freinet - one that challenged the fundamental relationship between teacher and student - that compelled him to seek a way to incorporate more meaningful activities/work into the classroom.

From Party Platform to Press

Alongside the printing press, and the whole ensemble of educational "tools" developed by Freinet practitioners including information cards for self-study, and the use of a school newspaper

(among other things), another object of significance often popularly mythologized in accounts of the founding of the Freinet Method, though often cast as an antagonist, is the teacher's platform. This miniature stage, which functioned as the eye of the needle through which state representatives were given authority to open and close the world to students, represented the school as statecraft in purest form, adjudicating on "the timeless property of the common people" (1990, p.5). With the lectern angling downward, rolling toward the commanding figure standing behind it, student non-compliance, as well as any viable attempt at reforming the nature of learning in the classroom, only ever faced rebuke, repelled by the symbolic citadel of the teacher's place in the classroom. In a way, it was the podium, and less the teacher it predicated, that served as the salient feature in the classroom through which the circulation of all knowledge passed. Though the teacher was without doubt the living authority of the room, his control over students extended from a physical orientation of space that was both emblematic of and functionally demonstrative of a strict separation of teacher from student, as well as student from student. Understood in this way, the teacher's platform was no mere object atavism, a horse-and-buggy holdover of old-school educational authoritarianism, but a dynamic technological impediment to the conduct of emergent social forms in learning.

From the founding of the first European universities in the Middle Ages to the time of the Third Republic, the traditional situation of teaching and learning condensed into the practices enacted on the pedagogical platform existed without interruption. Even the efforts to establish "child-centered" learning models undertaken by Freinet's contemporaries were unable to adequately supervene this basic relationship of obedience and acquiescence. When platforms and the lecture format of education were abandoned, the role performed by the platform to enable the punctilious supervision of individual learners and their attainment of prescribed social goals, was conserved in the figure of the teacher. Even if their citadel at the front of the classroom gradually acquired mobile capacities with the modernization of schools in the 20th century, the fundamental pedagogical format remained in place.

The institution of this one single elusive thing, intransigent as if by conspiracy, became the most

prominent example of *State engineering*. However, with the election of the printing press by Freinet as a new engine of educational activity in his school in Le Bar sur Loup, another political and pedagogical form seemed to emerge in place of the platform.

One might perceive a political heroism portrayed in the struggle between these two items - the platform and printing press - pitted one against the other as if they represented the only two necessary moments in an enlightening progression of education. Indeed, within the object mythology of the Freinet movement, the interplay of these items is often interpreted along the lines of the passing of old-guard, authoritarian methods of instruction, spurred and supplanted by the egalitarian potential of modern instruments. As a result, there is an overwhelming urge, conditioned by the clean continuity of academic thinking, to interpret the relationship, if in fact one exists, between the printing press and the podium as two moments in a necessary chain of displacement – a dialectics of classroom technology. This logic of political change interprets surpassing through the lens of necessity, always already recouping the future to a principle of efficiency defined by a drive toward obsolescence. However, Freinet's installation of student-operated printing presses displaced not simply a symbol on the coat of arms of some Lycee, but the most basic teleology of the classroom – if not the tin god of progressive reform.

At the center of the classroom, both figuratively and literally, an educational character of open constitution emerged—one that seemed to "naturally" facilitate a new correspondence between teacher and student, and school to school on a local and regional level that led to an increasing engagement with a broader array of historical, geographical, environmental, mathematical, and folkloric topics.(ibid. p. 40). In short, the forms of separation endemic to the platform and lecture oriented traditional classroom began to dissolve. Each component - the platform and the press - induced speaking or expression in contrasting fashions appropriate both to the period in which they were instituted and to the operational forms of each. Instead of some vocalization above reproach descending from a pulpit, we find the mass produced word created from collective authorship and revision. It is

unsurprising then, that “to give children the Word” has become one of the most celebrated catchphrases of Freinet, if not his most potent maxim.

A Workers Education

The collective and open constitution that Freinet brought to the classroom was a product of the actual engagement of students with the press. In other words, the collectivity was formed by the work of students on and with the press. The creation and reproduction of student writing by the students themselves - which included the full operation of the press - placed work at the foreground of Freinet's thinking about pedagogy. Work in this sense was not an instrumental form of vocationalism aimed at prioritizing usefulness and utility at the expense of intellectual inquiry and creativity. Rather, the work associated with the printing press was conceived as something that must be fully integrated into the school so that learning becomes indistinguishable from the organization of social life - a process through which both pedagogy and institutions become equally unhinged from their traditional sources of support.

Emphasizing the work of students, not merely learning to give shape to new existential idioms but also to assume responsibility for the mechanical operation and materialization of them through the use of a printing press, provides a first and primary isolating of Freinet's work from that of contemporary advocates of the New Education. The link between the work of students and the fashioning of new social forms (even if founded on the traditions of village of life) was simply lacking in either reactionary (which took flight in ahistorical universalizing tendencies) or progressive (which aimed largely at preserving social order under the banner of democratic values) arms of the New Education movement. It is important, however, to recognize this relationship between student work and emergent social forms as no mere accident of Freinet's work but as the necessary outcropping of his faith in the students' ability to make the machine subservient to the socio-ecological necessities of everyday life in their locale.^{vii}

During the organized school walks, the work of the community was often on full display- consequently serving as the source around which traditional disciplinary subjects such as history, mathematics, geography, geology, etc. could be discussed. In other words, school walks; spontaneous forms of writing; the collective discussions about students writing; and the resultant formal production and sharing of this writing with other schools led not only to an expansion of the kinds of subject matter being discussed and investigated, but also the creation of new forms of interactions and relationships between students that radically altered the social life of the school.

Unlike the intended purposes of many pedagogical tools, the novel impact of the printing press on the Freinet classroom was not related to its capacities as a medium of instruction, expanding channels of information transmission between teacher and student, but in its ability to serve as an unexpected nexus for formulating and reformulating relations within and beyond the classroom. As a result, we must avoid the temptation to subvert the history of the printing press to a kind of technological critique that too easily aligns its invention with the shaping of the protestant world view, seen as the *fons et origo* of European Capitalism (Anderson, 2006).

Whereas conventional uses of particular materials in education tend to be motivated by socio-political prescriptions, the example of Freinet's printing press provides a salient example of the stakes that particular objects can have in unintentionally staging novel forms of learning. Furthermore, the printing press is also an example of how things can induce radical political activity in education without subjecting the use of these items to curricular or institutional agendas that inhibit their affective power in learning. The printing press thus serves as the central tool around which collaborative learning, work, and the organization of social life emerge. This is not to say that the printing press is what is primary in this process, only that it serves as a focal point for student work.

The link between such student work and learning is expressed not only in the operation and maintenance of the printing press and creation of the school journals that are shared with others, but also in the way that the affective engagement with this particular machine incites student desire to

know more about the community around them. In other words, the combination of working the printing press with the physical activity of walking in the community and then writing about those experiences, provide the impetus to describe and better understand how their community functions as well as how it's related to other communities. According to Freinet, "the dream of all modern educators ... is to make the life of a child and the life of the village the center of the life in the classroom" (Acker, 2007, p. 53). The absorption of the school by the press allowed such a dream to come to fruition.

Traditionally, learning is measured in terms of one's knowledge relative to another. That is, there is a standardized and accepted form of knowledge production where students' capabilities are measured in terms of how they compare to other students. This is the most common situation found in today's hyper-competitive schooling environment. With Freinet, the emphasis on relative knowledge is replaced by a shared form of learning that instead of being determined by the demands of the teacher and standardized curriculum is propelled forward by the kinds of interests and desires produced from the collective engagement with the new component that now sits in the spot formerly occupied by the expert and his platform. In Freinet's classroom the introduction of the printing press instigated the disappearance of State mandated education. The addition of a new tool (the printing press) precipitated the subtraction of another (the platform) and as a result, open constitution and student autonomy appeared while the teleology of State education withered into obsolescence. As members of a community that betray the labouring process as well as the traditional way that schools prepare students for a future life of production and consumption, these students are participating in their own micro-workers struggle and political socio-genesis of their own communities.

No Masters

It would be impossible to separate Freinet's own anti-authoritarian and collective pedagogical project from the kinds of political work and debates he was involved in at the time.^{viii} While Freinet

was focused on developing a popular, anti-authoritarian form of education, he was also very involved in local and national political movements. While teaching at Bar-sur-Loup, Freinet was not only a member of the local anarcho-syndicalist teachers union, but also involved in a workers cooperative in his hometown of Gars. Similarly, after marrying Elise in 1926, Celestin became a member of a communist trade union, the communist party in France, and part of a union delegation that travelled to the Soviet Union to meet Nadya Krupskaya-the wife of Vladimir Lenin and Minister of Education (Legrand, 1993). As his political activities grew in tandem with his thinking about education, by 1928 his teaching philosophy had become the centre piece of a national educational movement that was formalized as the Coopérative de l'enseignement laïque (Secular Education Co-operative) (ibid.).

It was also during 1928 that Celestin and Elise were transferred from the rural community of Bar-sur-Loup to the middle class community of Saint Paul-de-Vence. In this new location Freinet's use of the printing press and spontaneous writing of children was seen as a direct political threat. In the midst of Fascism's rise in Europe and after a number of years of complaints, the right wing town council of Saint Paul-de-Vence forced the Freinets to leave their community in 1933. As a result of being forced out, the Freinets were reassigned back to Bar-sur-Loup. However, for the next two years instead of deciding to work at Bar-sur-Loup again, both Celestin and Elise focused their attention on the development of their secular education cooperative which included the development of a variety of educational materials that would help expand Freinetian ideas all over France (E.Freinet, 1977).^{ix}

While it might be easy to suspect that middle class suspicions about collaborative forms of learning that challenged the traditional place of the teacher in the classroom would eventually emerge, political criticism of Freinet's pedagogy did not begin and end with right wing town councils. Rather, some of the harshest critics of the Freinetian method came from the French Communist Party of which Celestin had been a member for a number of years. Some of these rather predictable attacks came in the early 1950's and included the following about Celestin's approach to pedagogy: 1) that it placed too much faith in process over content; 2) that it placed too much faith in the spontaneity of children; 3) it

did not grant the teacher sufficient importance; and 4) that it showed a misguided trust in outmoded rural methods at the expense of innovations in urban centres. Consequently, in the early 1950's Freinet's work was categorized by the Stalinist oriented FCP (including the well known figures Georges Cogniot and Georges Snyders) as being "too bourgeois"(Acker, 2007, p.100). Of course, along with the irony of the urban intellectual avant garde accusing a rural teacher of being too bourgeois, such a disparaging accusation might seem all-too-predictable considering the state of French Communism and its alignment with Stalinism in the 1940's. However, what is particularly interesting for us is how this particular recrimination actually allows us to more clearly discern the pedagogical innovation of Freinet.

Freinet was neither part of the urban capitalist class, nor was he part of the burgeoning consumerist lifestyle endemic to city centres marked by increasing consolidation of wealth and expanding markets. On the contrary, Celestin had lived the life of a small farmer and rural teacher. The accusation of being 'bourgeois' could not possibly be derived from some structurally determined socio-economic position. He was neither a city dwelling owner/manager, nor a collector of land rent in the countryside.

Where one might find some validity to this supposed insult, however, is in the cultural realm where Freinet's promotion of a strong work ethic and inquisitiveness, his faith in individual initiative and creativity, his prioritization of work over labour, his focus on the local over the international, and his disregard for the vanguard's educational mythos of the 'one who knows' placed him at odds with the technologically progressivist, international political project of the communists. Likewise, Freinet's own belief in student could have also served as a point of contention. While Freinet promoted freedom for students to create, organize, and work as they saw fit, the communists desired nothing other than the establishment of an educational curriculum that would put into place a specific ideology that could advance pre-determined notions of substantive freedom.

Without a curricular orientation identifying students as future labourers, producers, and consumer directed toward overcoming the contradictions of capitalist society, it would be difficult to escape the disdain of mid-20th Century French communists. Furthermore, as a result of Freinet's printing press and curriculum being ascribed a local focus, learning and writing about the life of their community was the priority. Not only was the writing project and curricular orientation suggestive of a lack of interest in communist/liberal internationalization or globalization, but so too was the way students and teachers engaged with the primary technological feature of the classroom (ie the printing press) where the printing press was only ever utilized as a way to produce a small written text to be read by families and friends.

Within the prevailing (communist/liberal) myth of the boundlessness of economic and technological progress, the conception of freedom is always aligned with productivity where more freedom is code word for increasing productivity designed to unleash the newest forms of technorationality to more effectively mine and control our physical and psychic worlds.^x Within a classroom setting that prioritized the local over the global, and the use of machinery/technology disengaged from consumerist desire and the logic of accumulation, a teacher such as Freinet could only ever be bourgeois-a true badge of honour indeed.

Conclusion

The lesson of Celestin Freinet's classroom antique, gains intelligibility in a contemporary context when understood as representing a way of counter-reformation in educational theory. This is not to suggest that the content of Freinet's inventions echo that of the reactionary politics of the 16th century or consciously sought in any way to undo the advances of education in the modern world. Nor would such a reminiscence amount to anything more than inappropriate ideological longing. Rather, Freinet's humble experiment from the already unfamiliar space of rural France at mid-century (the last one) demonstrated the way that student freedom, uninhibited by overarching ideological pre-emption,

and unbound from the progressive imperatives typical of reform education in either its Marxist or liberal variants, can be utilized as a way to inspire pedagogical techniques founded on alternative social, political, and anthropological postulates, correcting or breaking with overweening progressive dicta and indulgences in the process. While the unaffected genius of Freinet's teaching remains unrecognized due, at least in part, to his non-academic and plain-spoken writing (which offers meager incentive for translators in a theory-congested publishing market), the disregard for his work, despite its staying power in schools around the world, stems from the difficulty in locating his innovations within leftist, neo-liberal, or neo-conservative approaches to education and schooling. This inability to participate in the conventional ideological spectrum, however, should summon the curiosity of readers. That the kernel of his work turns to the printing press, the very pedagogical object employed by the elder of modern education reform, Jan Comenius, and the technical concomitant to his *Didactica Magna*, only to confound its universalist application of 'literacy' in the service of internationalization or globalization, is a worthwhile lesson for those seeking guidance outside of the chancels of critical pedagogy or the 'post-factory' learning spaces informing the 'Internet of Things.' By breaking with the key universalist precepts of modern education, capital since Comenius, of identifying education primarily with overarching, international social and political projects and the engine that technological innovation plays in this process, Freinet's example may be unrecognizable and untimely to some. As a result, to advocate applying the ideas of Freinet, then, to a contemporary context would require what Jacques Ranciere (1994) refers to as the 'superimposition of time periods' (p.30)- where something seemingly anachronistic might be utilized to broaden our perspective on the (pedagogical) present.

Faith in the value of such a gesture, though, depends on the perception of the present as ideologically, perhaps cognitively, dissonant. To be sure, there are some connections that Freinet has with reform education, particularly how his faith in the volition of students, in their active participation in their own learning. But here the similarities trail off. In a Freinet classroom students not only act on their own discretion in the way that they organize themselves and their own work agendas (similar to

the Summerhill approach), but they also actively participate in a micro-workers struggle inside the classroom. Students' collaborative commitment is limited by the specific activity of work and the production of a document through an engagement with a machine. This process functions not in the name of hands-on utility or practicality, but rather as Ivan Illich (1978) might say, to 'disable the intensity of the market' by refusing to engage with the kind of entrepreneurial free play, and/or 'practical' acquisition and application of skills, that are coveted by labour and today's global market economy.

For many then, Freinet's teachings signal an impropriety within contemporary educational theory. However, when the pedagogical imagination has been so sorely diminished through its acquiescence and subservience to the demands of the market, new technological innovation, and the productivist metaphysics of wealth accumulation, an engagement with the improper, 'bourgeois'

ⁱ The progressive movement of education that began in the late 19th Century was developed in reaction to the problems and limitations that many teachers and philosophers identified in traditional forms of formal education in both the US and Europe at the time. We choose to utilize the term 'reform' because it allows us to both extract worthwhile elements of pedagogy found in the work of such figures as Johann Pestalozzi, Colonel Francis Parker, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner, among many others, from the inherent destructive characteristics found in the concept of 'progress.'

ⁱⁱ Translated by Matthew Carlin.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Reading" here should be understood in its broadest connotations as both the actual reading of a written text and also a reading of their town, experiences, and recent happenings in terms of the way that this activity allowed them to generate and give meaning to these things.

^{iv} The focus on work in Freinet's 'method' was not only reflected in what students did within the classroom, but was also in the way that teachers who utilized this approach in France in the 1920's and

30's conceived of this pedagogical approach as part of a genuine worker's education. In the early 1930's those who began to utilize the printing press and associated ideas of 'free writing' created both a public school co-operative and a journal by the name of the 'Proletarian Educator' that served as a resource for teachers around France. Among other things, this teachers cooperative published a range of booklets based on student research called the 'library of work' that was designed to assist other students and teachers in the development of their own research projects.

v From certain perspectives, the criticisms aimed at dislodging certain “myths” of the Freinet movement are well-founded, particularly the myth generated by many of Freinet’s followers that ascribe a sui generis status to Freinet’s innovations. For example, the use of the printing press to reproduce student texts had already been utilized by the Polish pedagogue Janusz Korczak who was using a school newspaper as a focal point of his teaching as early as 1921. What was novel about his use of the printing press was the way he placed it in such a prominent position within the classroom.

vi Institutional pedagogy was the name given to a primarily urban centred intellectual movement focused on developing new ways to live within the context of schools in which student autonomy and student/teacher collaboration were encouraged. This approach to schooling challenged static understanding of the concept of the institution while emphasizing both the impact of the unconscious and the role of institutions in responding to the psycho-social factors that both students and teachers bring into the school.

vii It is such subservience that also makes it impossible to mistake the conception of work operative in Freinet's classroom with any of the contemporary work based pedagogical forms that so willingly yield to market and technological trends.

viii Freinet's work-by it's very insistence on challenging both the legacy of the master and his platform (specifically his questioning of the foundation of the traditional exegetical relationship between teacher and student including the platform on which it stands) can be situated alongside other

currents of anti-authoritarian contributions to education and political theory such as Ivan Illich, *De-schooling Society*, (New York, NY: Harrow Books 1972), and Jacques Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1972).

^{ix} Elise Freinet, *L'itinéraire de Célestin Freinet*. (Paris: Payot 1977). It is worth mentioning that Freinet was eventually arrested and put into a prison camp after the Soviet-Nazi pact where he laboured for 4 years. However, his imprisonment only served to increase his desire to teach and work with youth after his release.

^x The equation of 'freedom' and 'productivity' has become even more pronounced under new forms of global capitalism and the spread of computer and digital technologies. See Franco Berardi, *After the Future*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press 2011).

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