

## LEARNING UNIT

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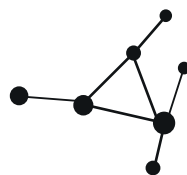
# REENGAGING FREIRE: DECODING AND RE-CODING FREIRE'S "GENERATIVE IMAGES" AND CRITICAL ARTS EDUCATION

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Working Group: Geneva / Zurich  
Authors: Nora Landkammer

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- # PATERNALISM
- # CONSCIENTIZATION
- # CRITICAL LITERACY
- # CRITICAL PEDAGOGY
- # PAULO FREIRE
- # POPULAR EDUCATION
- # REALISM
- # TRAVELLING CONCEPTS
- # DECOLONIZE



**intertwining hi/stories**



Thinking with Scissors: Recoding of an image from the literacy campaign in Guinea Bissau by the ministry of Education in collaboration with the IDAC in the 1970ies by participant of the workshop held in Zurich on June 3, 2018.

## AUTHORS

This Learning Unit builds on insights gained collectively with Andrea Thal, Lennyn Santacruz, Camilla Franz and others in a workshop in Vienna in October 2017, particularly the session focused on images in literacy resources based on Freire. A second workshop was on the visual material used by Freire in literacy campaigns and was held in Zurich in June 2018 with students of Arts Education and Independent guests. It was compiled by Nora Landkammer, Geneva/Zurich Working Group.

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## ABSTRACT

How do we engage students or participants of a learning programme in a gallery in discussing an artwork in a critical and potentially emancipatory manner? This Learning Unit proposes to reflect on methods for the critical reading of images by engaging with pictures for learning situations that were created following Paulo Freire's approach of "generative images".

## ADDRESSEES

This Learning Unit is for art teachers, gallery educators and cultural mediators and students in these fields who are interested in Critical Pedagogies. It is written within the context of art teaching and gallery education in Switzerland. Feel free to skip passages you feel don't suit your context, or if you work with this resource in a group, supplement it with further materials.

The texts and action/reflection proposals in this Learning Unit require some basic introductory knowledge on Critical Pedagogies and the work and thought of Paulo Freire (recommended: → Learning Unit - Zurich / Geneva - Reengaging Freire. *Paulo & Elza Freire in Geneva*; Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2005 [1970], see further resources online, p. 44)

## GENERATIVE IMAGES AND ARTS EDUCATION

How do we engage students or participants of a learning programme in a gallery in discussing an artwork in a critical and potentially emancipatory manner? This Learning Unit proposes to reflect on methods for the critical reading of images by engaging with pictures for learning situations that were created following Paulo Freire's approach of "generative images".

Paulo Freire's writings are a key reference for practitioners and theorists of Critical Arts Education, Gallery Education and Cultural Work. To mention a few examples from German, English and Spanish publications, Freire is quoted for the goal of having participants recognize the power structures they are embedded in so they are able to take transformative action<sup>1</sup>. His approach is drawn on when referring to learners as objects or subjects of discourse<sup>2</sup> or to practices of collaborative research involving communities and working in solidarity with them.<sup>3</sup> Art educators refer to Freire to state that education is a political act; to underpin the principle of interchangeability of the roles of teacher and learner<sup>4</sup> or for working with "generative themes".<sup>5</sup> In the first International Meeting of Another Roadmap for Arts Education in October 2015, after the series of presentations, we recognized that Freire's radical pedagogy was one of the references that many within the network shared – albeit with different meanings according to their specific contexts. Paulo Freire is an inspiration for many Critical Art Educators who aim to demonstrate a politicised understanding of education and the epistemological foundations of a critical approach to teaching/learning in their work.

What has held less prominence in art educators' reception of Freire's work is the fact that working with *images* is a key element of his concrete methodological proposals. Freire's connection to art has not received much attention, states Ana Mae Barbosa, the Brazilian art educator and theoretician:

"Few people know that Paulo Freire was connected to Art Education from the beginning of his educational activities. He was President of the Escolinha de Arte do Recife in the 50ies and his wife Elza Freira can be considered a pioneer of integrating the arts in public schools, with an emphasis on the productive implications of artistic endeavours for literacy. [...] During their exile, Paulo Freire and Dona Elza maintained close contact with the Escolinha de Arte de São Paulo, where from 1968 to 1971, Paulo Freire guided research remotely and through the books he sent from Geneva."<sup>6</sup>

Working with visual elements that relate to the problems and contradictions in the learners' situation/ reality – what Freire calls "generative images" – and decoding them collectively as a group is the basis of the "culture circles" that he proposed for literacy and the development of critical consciousness (conscientization) in the 60ies in Brazil. His approach, outlined in detail in the early *Educação Como Prática da Liberdade* (Education, the practice of Freedom)<sup>7</sup> and in the third chapter of "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"<sup>8</sup> involves several stages of "decoding" and "coding". It begins with an investigation carried out in collaboration with people from the area where the educational activity is to take place. The collaborative investigation is dedicated to identifying "generative themes" that characterize the social reality of the group. Through several stages of analysis and discussion with the local co-investigators these images are "codified" into representations – visual, auditive, or mixed media (although in the projects described by Freire he used images principally). These codifications of social reality are discussed in the culture circle – the format Freire devised for learning in groups – and "decoded" by the group. By naming and

1 Zobl, Elke and Laila Huber: "Kritische Kunst- und Kulturvermittlung", *making art, taking part*. accessed August 16, 2018, <https://www.takingpart.at/kontext-1/kritische-kunst-und-kulturvermittlung/>.

2 Golding, Vivien. *Learning at the Museum Frontiers: Identity, Race and Power*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009: 56.

3 Graham, Janna, Eva Forsman, Nina Suni et al. "Para-Sites: Following in the Footsteps of Freire." *Cumma Papers*, no. 12 (2015), accessed August 16, 2018, <https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/cumma-papers-121.pdf>.

4 Bennett, Bonita. "Education at the Centre of District Six Museum." In *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education*, edited by Carmen Mörsch, Angeli Sachs, and Thomas Sieber, 141–54. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017.

5 Rodrigo Montero, Javier, and Antonio Collados, eds. *Transductores: Pedagogias En Red y Practicas Instituyentes*. Granada: Centro Jose Guerrero, 2012: 158.

6 Barbosa, Ana Mae: "Paulo Freire e a Arte-Educação". In: *Paulo Freire: uma biobibliografia*, edited by Moacir Gadotti, São Paulo: Cortez: Instituto Paulo Freire; Brasília, DF: UNESCO, 1996: 637.

7 Freire, Paulo. *Educação Como Prática Da Liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967.

8 Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th ed. New York: Continuum, 2005.

describing elements within the image, and working with the words split up into syllables for literacy training, participants also analyse their socio-political situation and the structures of oppression that they living. It is this part of Freire's work, that comes closest to a "method", that has been most intensively adopted in the fields of literacy training and foreign language learning.

Indeed, critiques of "Pseudo-Freirean approaches"<sup>9</sup> where Freire's literacy training "method" is deprived of its political and politicising character have been voiced since the 1980ies. Kidd and Kumar criticize in 1981 the "development and promotion of a theory that operates under the cover of Freirean terminology, and serves material interests which are directly antithetical to Freire's aim of transforming the structures of oppression in the world".<sup>10</sup> Speaking in the German/Swiss/Austrian context, where I reviewed the available literature, one could say: While in literacy training and language learning the "method" has been taken up widely, even sometimes neglecting the political implications, in the field of arts education it is the philosophy of education and the critique of educational institutions that has had the most impact. At the same time, there has been little attention to Freire's writings on learning with images in the field of arts education.<sup>11</sup>

What does Freire's proposal of the "generative image" and its de-codification have to do with methods in Critical Arts Education? Can we draw something from the field of literacy training, where Freire developed his pedagogy, for current Critical Arts Education? And can the background in working with representation from the arts contribute to a critical analysis of Freire's approach and its adaptations?

When discussing these questions in the workshops we had as part of intertwining hi/stories, we found that the connection between Freire's literacy method and critical arts education was not only lacking attention, but paradox. My take on this paradox would be: While Freire's thoughts about decoding images as a way to understand social relations and situate oneself critically in the world express much of what I attempt to do with groups in arts education, the images he used seem to point rather to the contradictions of such an endeavor than to its successes.



How much does the "critical consciousness" that the educator wants the participants to achieve consist

<sup>9</sup> Kidd, Ross, and Krishna Kumar. "Co-Opting Freire. A Critical Analysis of Pseudo-Freirean Adult Education." *Economic and Political Weekly*, no. January 3-10 (1981): 27-36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 28.

<sup>11</sup> The proposals based on Freire's generative images in the cultural field known to me (in the german speaking countries) don't come from art educators specifically, but from general secondary school teachers (see Schroeder, Joachim. "Bilder Bilden. Oder: Wie Aus Einem Kupferstich Eine Codierung Wird." In *Befreiung Und Menschlichkeit. Texte Zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, 181-92. München: AG SPAK, 1991) or from social scientists (see Brandner, Vera. "Die Bilder Der Anderen Erforschen. Generative Bildarbeit: Das Transformative Potential Fotografischer Praxis in Situationen Kultureller Differenz." Doctoral Thesis, Universität Lüneburg, 2017, accessed August 16, 2018, [http://opus.uni-lueneburg.de/opus3/frontdoor.php?source\\_opus=14491&la=en](http://opus.uni-lueneburg.de/opus3/frontdoor.php?source_opus=14491&la=en)).

of ideas the educator already knows beforehand and only wants the participants to take on? What does the selection of images, their style and pictorial language say about the educator and her/his assumptions about the participants?

The image above is from the initial series of paintings for the Brazilian literacy campaigns by Francisco Brennand. Freire cites examples of emancipation in the culture circles: "I make shoes", he reports a participant to have said, "but now I discover that I have the same value as a doctor who makes books". Another participant is quoted saying "Through working I transform the world".<sup>12</sup> The image shows potters at work. The text on the image series<sup>13</sup> in "Education, practice of freedom" details that to understand the difference between "nature" and "culture", how humans transform their natural environment, is the purpose of working with the pictures, as an important step towards the consciousness of one's own agency. Now this is exactly the reading that the participants whom Freire quotes develop – but what about other possible readings of the images? As early as 1973, a group of workers, Italian migrants and their German peers in Frankfurt am Main, having experimented with Freire's approach criticize that the generative images do the decoding of reality *for* the participants, the action in the culture circle being only a repetition of an analysis that has already reached its conclusions beforehand. "The student only reflects mediated by the teacher", they write, "he observes himself in the mirror; he assists to the reflection. And again, he is only public and not actor, as Freire claims".<sup>14</sup> They claim that Freire's approach leads once again to a passive position of the learner.

Yet, it would be wrong to dismiss the image above as mere illustration of a given message. A theme (and the image for it) for Freire is *generative* because it is developed in interaction with the (future) participants of the educational action and allows participants to recognize themselves in a situation and speak about their perception of the world. Freire clearly says: "I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me,"<sup>15</sup> and describes the process of decoding in the culture circles as a "flux and reflux" between concrete situations and the abstract, an iterative process of describing and critically analyzing reality. In fact, his writings make the images appear only as one instance of a process, which is centrally about the group discovering their own generative themes: "In all the stages of decoding, people exteriorize their view of the world. And in the way they think about and face the world – fatalistically, dynamically, or statically – their generative themes may be found."<sup>16</sup> That participants find themselves as agents in the world through these images, then, would not be a "message" defined by a teacher, but lead back to the fact that the topics and images come out of a meaningful co-investigation with people who are living in the area and circumstances that give the context to the educational action. Still, there is a clear tension between a desired reading of the images that implies critical consciousness as Freire imagines it for the learners, and the image being based on the learners' expressions of their world views. Is the fact that the images are overtly simple due to the fact that it is only possible to integrate both aims if the generative images are really "reductions" (a term Freire uses often in describing the images) of more complex reality? If yes, is reduction of complexity really helpful to bring about critical understandings of – necessarily complex – reality?

The style of painting by Francisco Brennand adds another layer of contradictions. Does not the style, the reduction and integration of folk elements, rather speak to traditions of artistic imaginaries of peasant life, than to how peasants would chose to represent their lived reality? The relation to "reality", both in the sense of day-to-day situations as well as in the sense of an understanding of economical, political and

Painting by the Brazilian painter Francisco Brennand for Literacy Training, 1963, online on <http://www.acervo.paulofreire.org:8080/jspui/handle/7891/656>, accessed January 5, 2018.

societal mechanisms that are at work in these, is key to Freire's understanding of the coding and decoding of images. The fact that the pictorial language is a "code" in itself, does not receive attention in his writings.

12 Freire, Paulo: Education, practice of freedom. La educación como práctica de la libertad, Buenos Aires: siglo veintiuno, 2004 [first portuguese edition: 1967], 103f.

13 In its second version by Vicente Abreu.

14 Autorenkollektiv Autonomie der Arbeiterklasse und Sprachverwirrung. "Autonomie Der Arbeiterklasse Und Sprachverwirrung. Deine Sprache, Meine Sprache, Unsere Sprache?" *Ästhetik & Kommunikation*, no. 11 (1973), 53.

15 Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th ed. New York: Continuum, 2005, Chapter 3.

16 Ibid.

Yet it creates an ambiguous relation to his theory. What Freire wants the participants to acquire is a critical, and this means for him *rational* understanding of their reality – understanding the causes of one's oppression and the mechanisms behind would lead to the capacity to act in one's own interest. This means overcoming what he terms "magical" conceptions of the world, which he sees to cement the status quo because they locate the reason of things beyond human influence. The fact that this idea of emancipation is very much connected to European Enlightenment rationality, and might be, in effect, rather colonial than liberating, is discussed in the Learning Unit by the Quito and Cuernavaca working groups [LINK] on the basis of experiences in the Andean region. But turning back to the image by Brennand: while the topic Freire wants the learners to discuss is the division between "nature" and "culture", and the critical consciousness he envisions is based on the rational analysis of the learners' reality, the image does not seem to lend itself in its entirety to such a "rational" analysis. In fact, the nature depicted, the tree around the image, counters rationality by growing from two roots (in two pots, so they are rather culture than nature). Does the "magical" worldview Freire wants to overcome re-enter the educational situation via Brennand's folk ornaments?

The tensions described of a critical decoding of images, both the question whose critical decoding it is – the participant's or the facilitator's – and the point that images resist one-dimensional "readings", extend beyond the historical case of Freire's literacy courses. They point to questions I ask myself in my practice as an art educator: which are my projections on the participants' "reality" that make me chose an artwork to discuss? What do I envision as "critical" in decoding artworks, and what do I recognize as such when working with a group? The images of the historical literacy campaigns can be a starting point for reflection on emancipatory ideals in arts education and their contradictions.

The action/reflection proposed on the following pages is to work on these questions by engaging with images in learning resources based on Freire's approach. The assumption is that to work out the connections and tensions between Critical Arts Education and an emancipatory use of image-reading as Freire proposed, it makes sense to work from the visual; to analyse and think about the images. The images themselves might reveal more about the method for which they were created than reading descriptive texts about the methodology. These pages invite you to take an excursion into the field of literacy and work with images from historical teaching resources, both the ones employed by Freire and the people he worked with directly, and by others who adapted his approach. I hope working with these images and accompanying short texts on generative images, coding and decoding, applications and critiques of the methodological approach, can generate a productive investigation for art educators on how to re-engage Freire's concept of the "generative image" critically.

The collection of images to work with includes the illustrations from the original literacy campaigns in Brazil (Brennand, Abreu); images from the literacy material by the IDAC in Guinea Bissau; and images from material in the German speaking context. I hope for a future extension of the material and am grateful for suggestions of teaching resources to include.

## ACTION/REFLECTION: THINKING WITH SCISSORS

### Material needed

- Prints of the images and texts (Resource 1: Generative images; Resource 2: Readings)
- Scissors and Cutter
- Blank paper in different colours
- Tape
- Pens and markers in different colours
- Tipp-Ex to "delete" parts of a picture
- Glue
- Add anything else you have available for handicrafts and tinkering, like strings, plastic film, cloth, stickers, ...

### Action/reflection

Thinking with scissors is possible for working solo or in a group (it is more interesting and fun in a group though). The minimum time frame is 2 hours. It should be done after reading the intro text (or providing the information given there) and if necessary, get some introductory knowledge about Freire's work (see → Learning Unit - Zurich / Geneva - *Reengaging Freire. Paulo & Elza Freire in Geneva*). The "readings" compiled in Resource 2 provide different perspectives on the approach of working with "generative images", both to lead to a more concrete understanding, as to critically reflect its shortcomings.

Lay out the prints and the materials in the space. Begin by choosing an image to think about. Don't take too much time choosing. Think about what you see the image by applying your scissors and other tools to it. You can take the image apart, re-compose it, add parts and layers to it, write on it or delete elements using tipp-ex. Turn to the "Readings" and pick one or several of them if you feel you need some input to continue (if you get completely drawn in it makes sense at some point to take a break and read). The basic question is:

### HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUR DECODING AND RE-CODING VISIBLE IN THE IMAGE ITSELF?

The following questions can guide you:

- ▶ How do you decode the image? As an unintended viewer (most of the "generative images" have most likely been made for a time and a context that is not yours), how do you see it as a codification or a "generative image" for discussion on social relations and readings of the "world"?
- ▶ Which "codes" does the image contain apart from the ones that might be intended and purposeful? How do the form and the style influence the meaning?
- ▶ Where do you stumble? Do you see ambivalences, contradictions, frictions? Can you think of alternative, unlikely readings of the image?

When working in a group, close the activity with a first reflection round consisting of looking at each others work, explaining not so much the final result that's visible in the image, but what you found out while doing it.

For the second reflection round, as soon as you are finished looking at all the images, put the intervened images away. Think and talk about the question: What does Freire's approach of decoding "generative images" have to do with what you do as an art educator? Did you have experiences of learners understanding something about themselves and the world they live in through analysing an image together? If yes, how did you proceed as a facilitator? Do you have critiques of Freire's approach? Do you see similarities to Freire's approach? Do you have critiques of his approach?



**RESOURCE 1: GENERATIVE IMAGES****A**

These images (examples from a larger series) were made by the Brazilian painter Francisco Brennand for Literacy Training in 1963. Based on initial experiences with Freire's approach and the codifications worked out in the Literacy Campaign in Angicos (State of Rio Grande do Norte) in 1963, Brennand designed the images for the National Literacy Programme, which was to be implemented throughout the country, but was interrupted in 1964 when a military coup took place and the Literacy Programme was denounced as subversive. Brennand's images were confiscated. The central axis of the image series is the "anthropological concept of culture", culture meaning that people transform the world that surrounds them through their work and actions.

**B**

These images are re-interpretations of the series by Brennan (A) by the Brazilian artist Vicente Abreu. They were commissioned to substitute Brennan's series, and published in "Educação como prática da Liberdade" (1967).

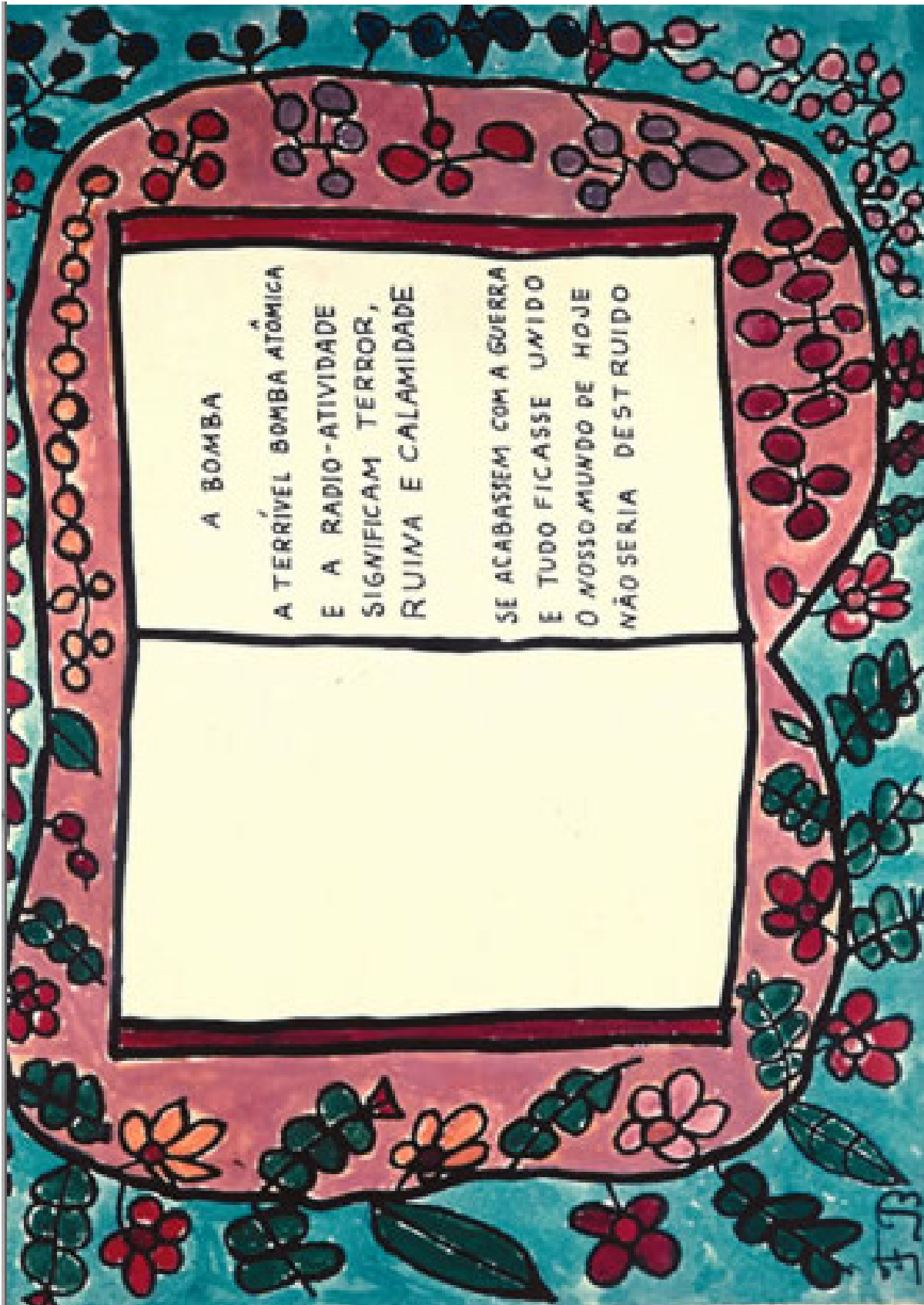
→ Freire, Paulo. *Educação Como Prática Da Liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967. Includes the images and accompanying texts in the appendix. In Portuguese (see further resources online, p. 44)

→ Freire, Paulo. "Appendix". In *L'éducation : pratique de la liberté*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971. Appendix with the images and accompanying texts from the French edition (see further resources online, p. 44)

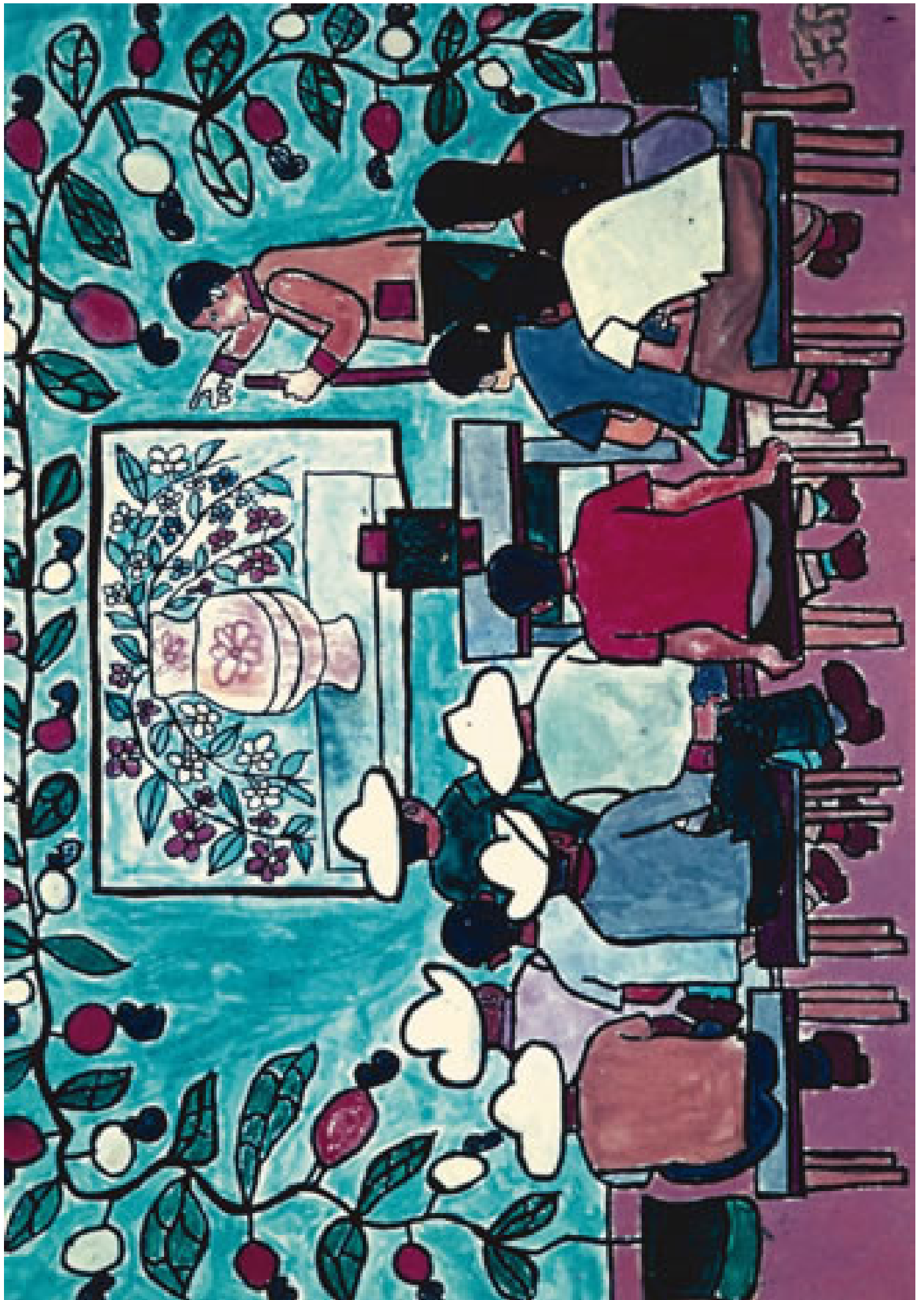








Guache do artista plástico pernambucano Francisco Brennand, traz mensagem sobre o imperativo da paz no planeta para impedir a sua destruição, representando o pensamento freireano.



**C**

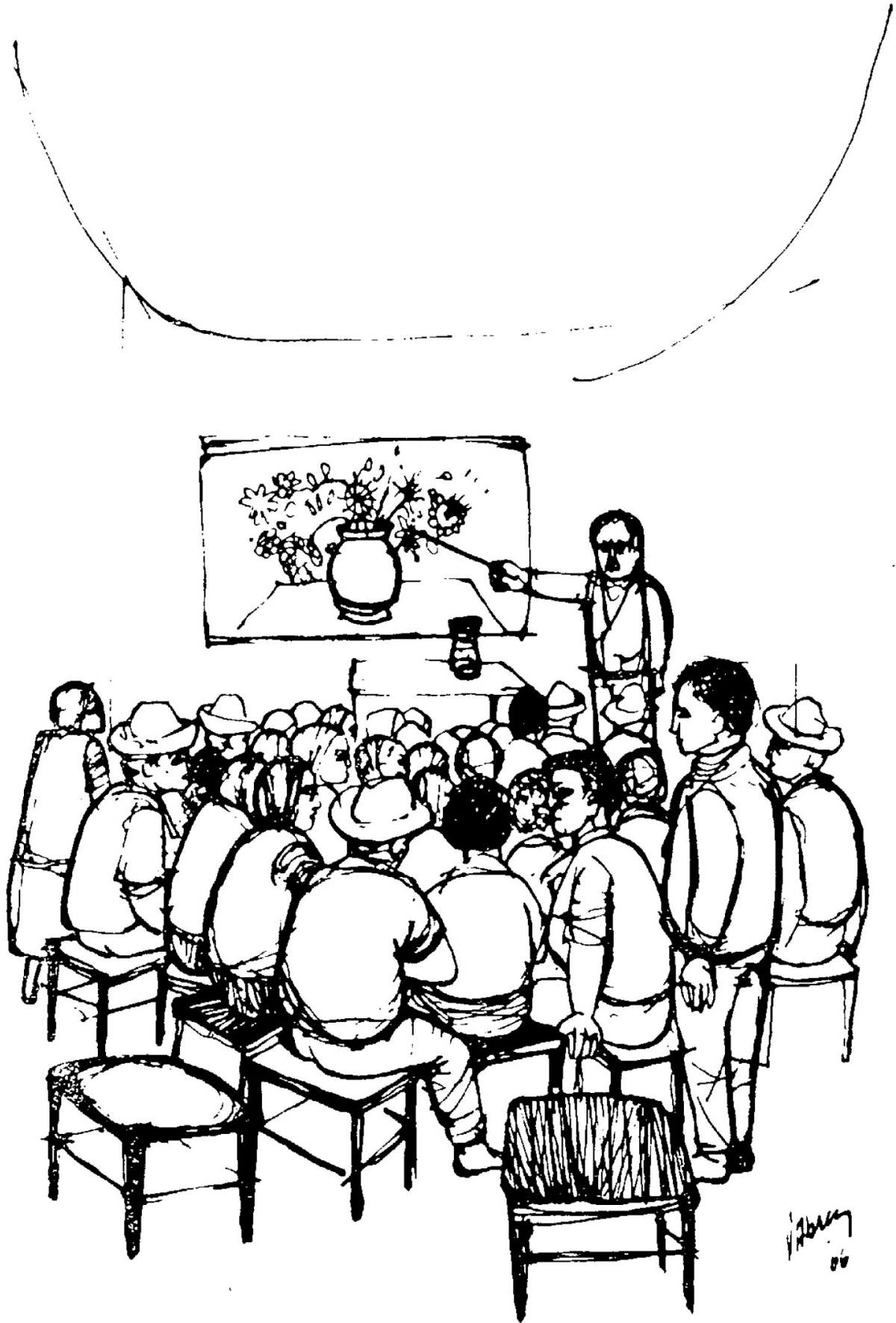
These images were created by the IDAC (Institute for Cultural Action) based in Geneva and of which Freire was a member, in the course of their collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Guinea Bissau from 1976 on. On invitation by Mario Cabral, the minister of Education, the IDAC collaborated with educators and politicians in the newly independent Guinea Bissau on the foundations of a new educational system and in developing learning resources. The images (extracts from a larger series) were created as "codifications" for discussing the history and future of education in the country with educators and community members. They were published in the IDAC-Document 18, "Guinée Bissau 1979: Apprendre pour vivre mieux".

→ Institut d'action culturelle IDAC. Guinée Bissau 1979: Apprendre Pour Vivre Mieux. IDAC Document 18. Geneva, 1979. In French (see further resources online, p. 44)













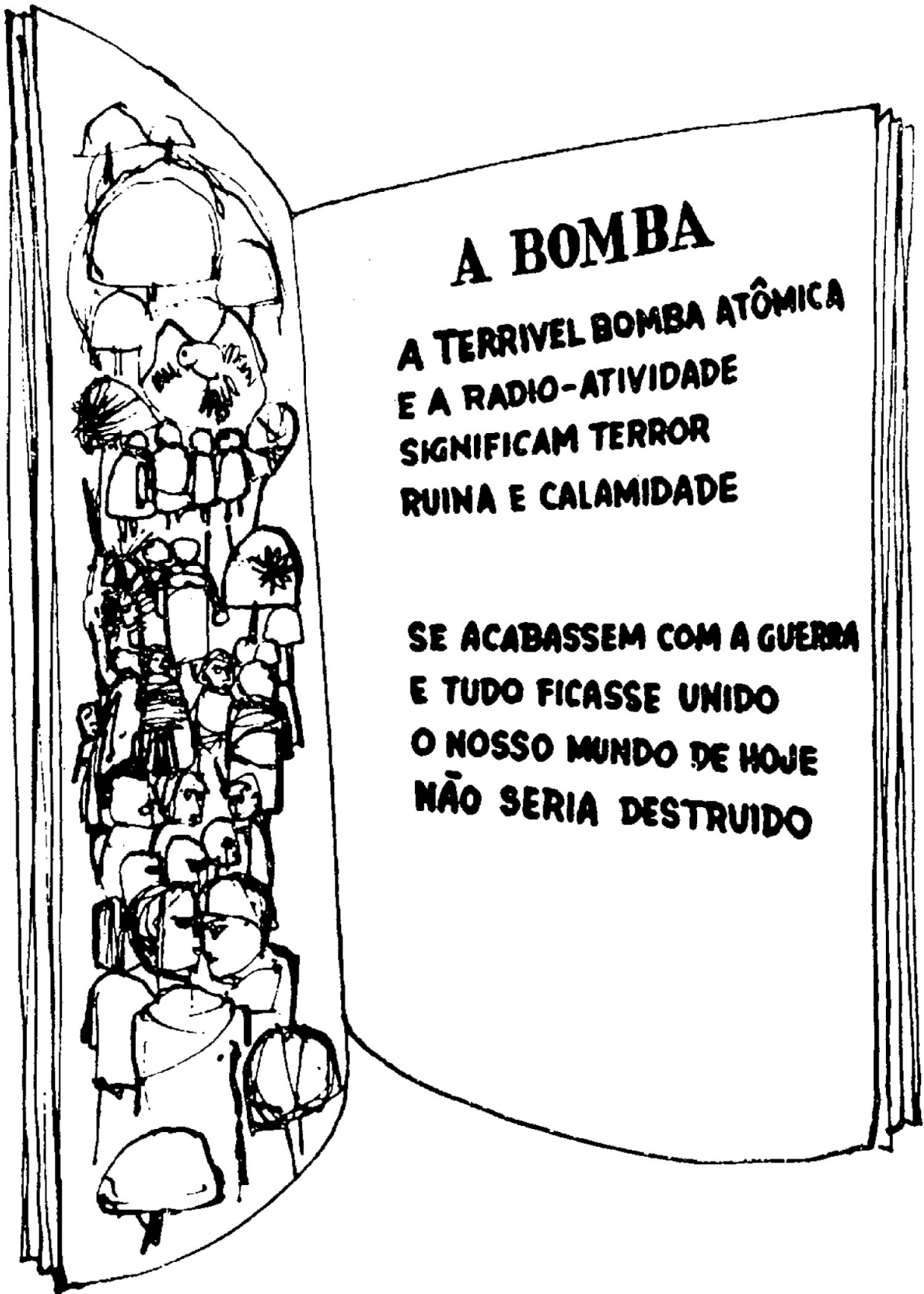








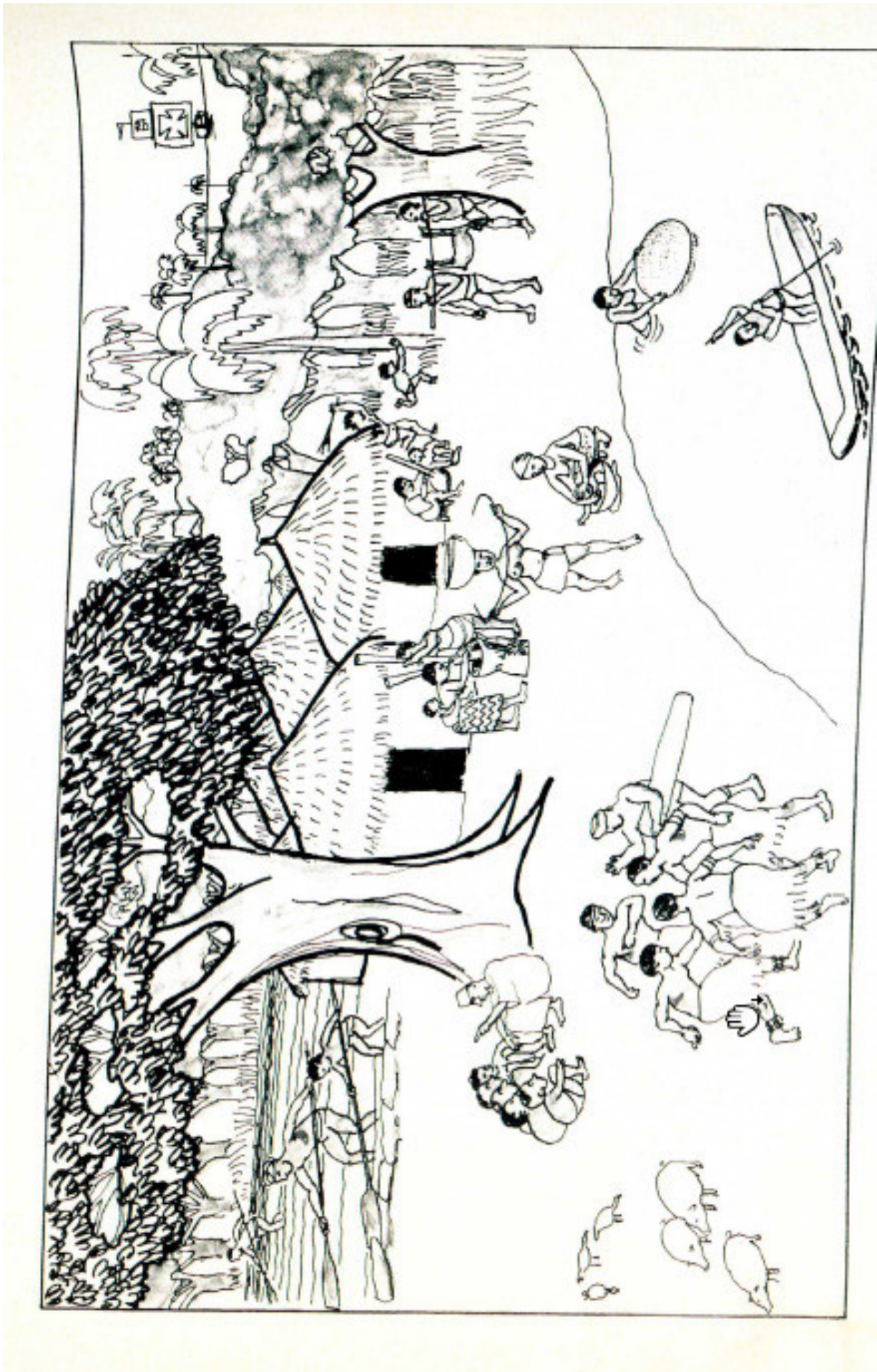


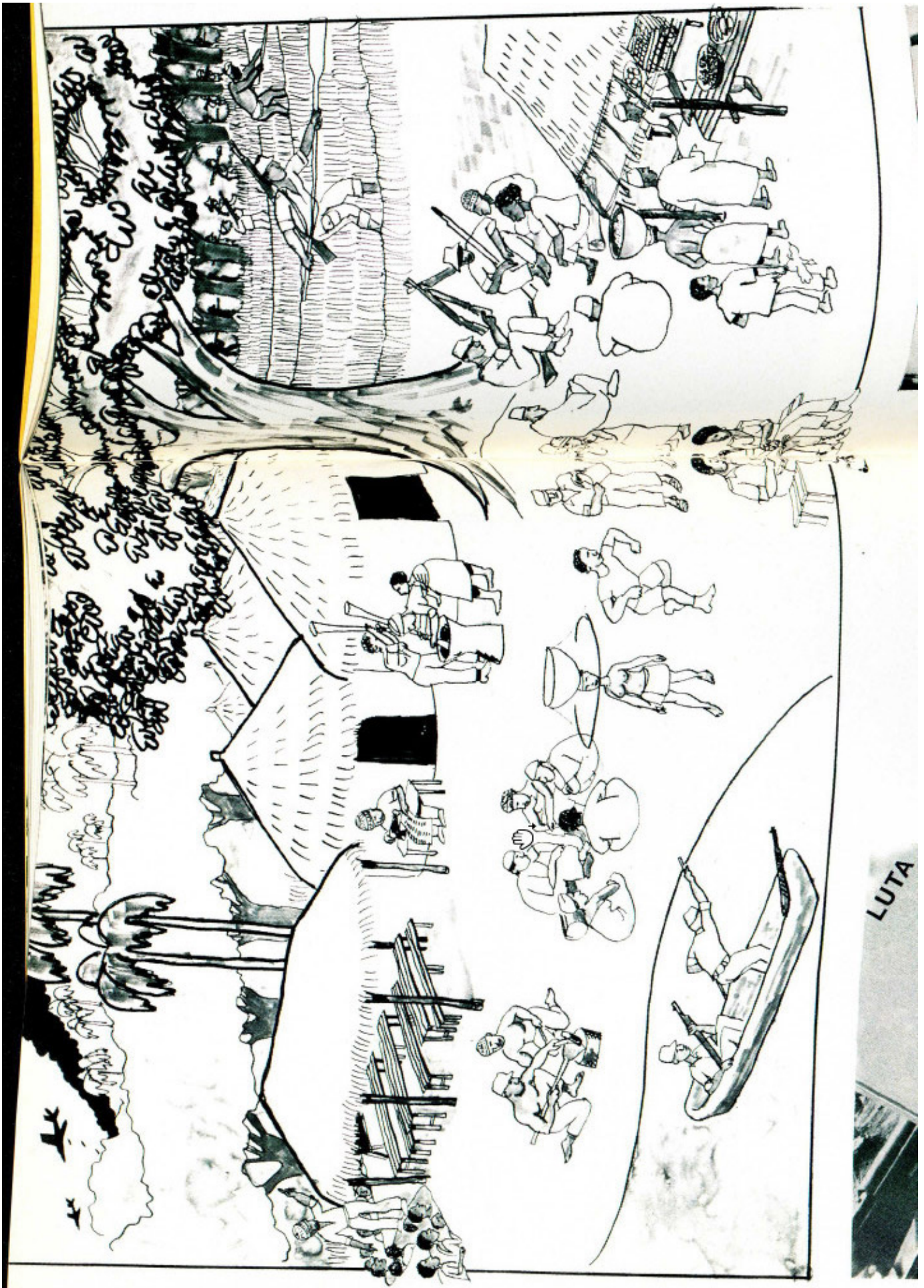


**D**

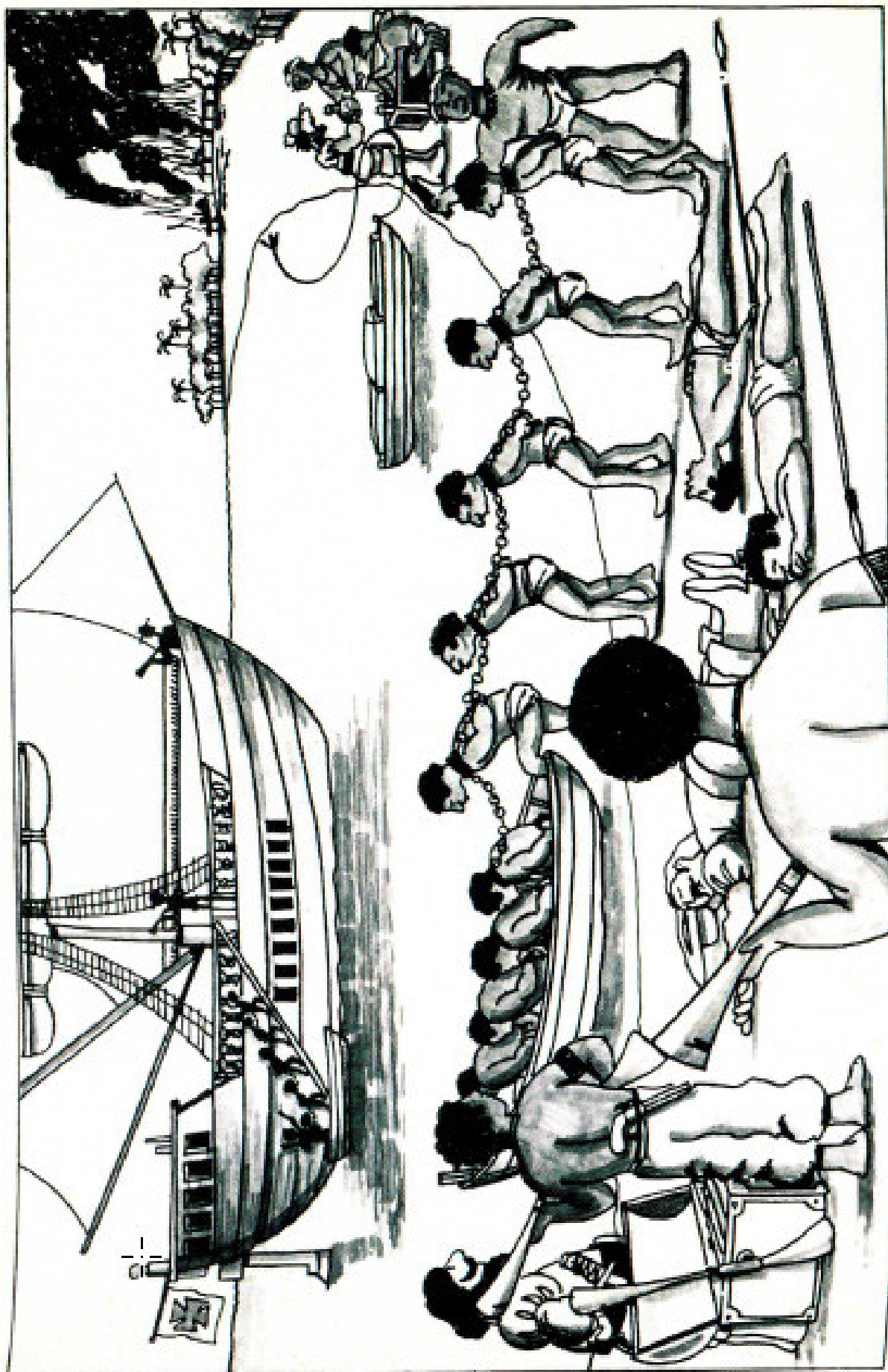
Extract from a comic drawn by Claudius Ceccon, a Brazilian cartoonist who, same as Freire, was in exile in Geneva in the 1970ies and also a member of the IDAC (Institute for Cultural Action) team. The comic was developed as part of the education project in collaboration with the government of Guinea Bissau (see C). Also available in a film format (presented as a comic for publication), the resource was meant for the preparation of moderators for a literacy programme (the addressees were future moderators/facilitators for the programme). It was published in the IDAC-document 11: "Guinée Bissau: Reinventer l'éducation", 1976.

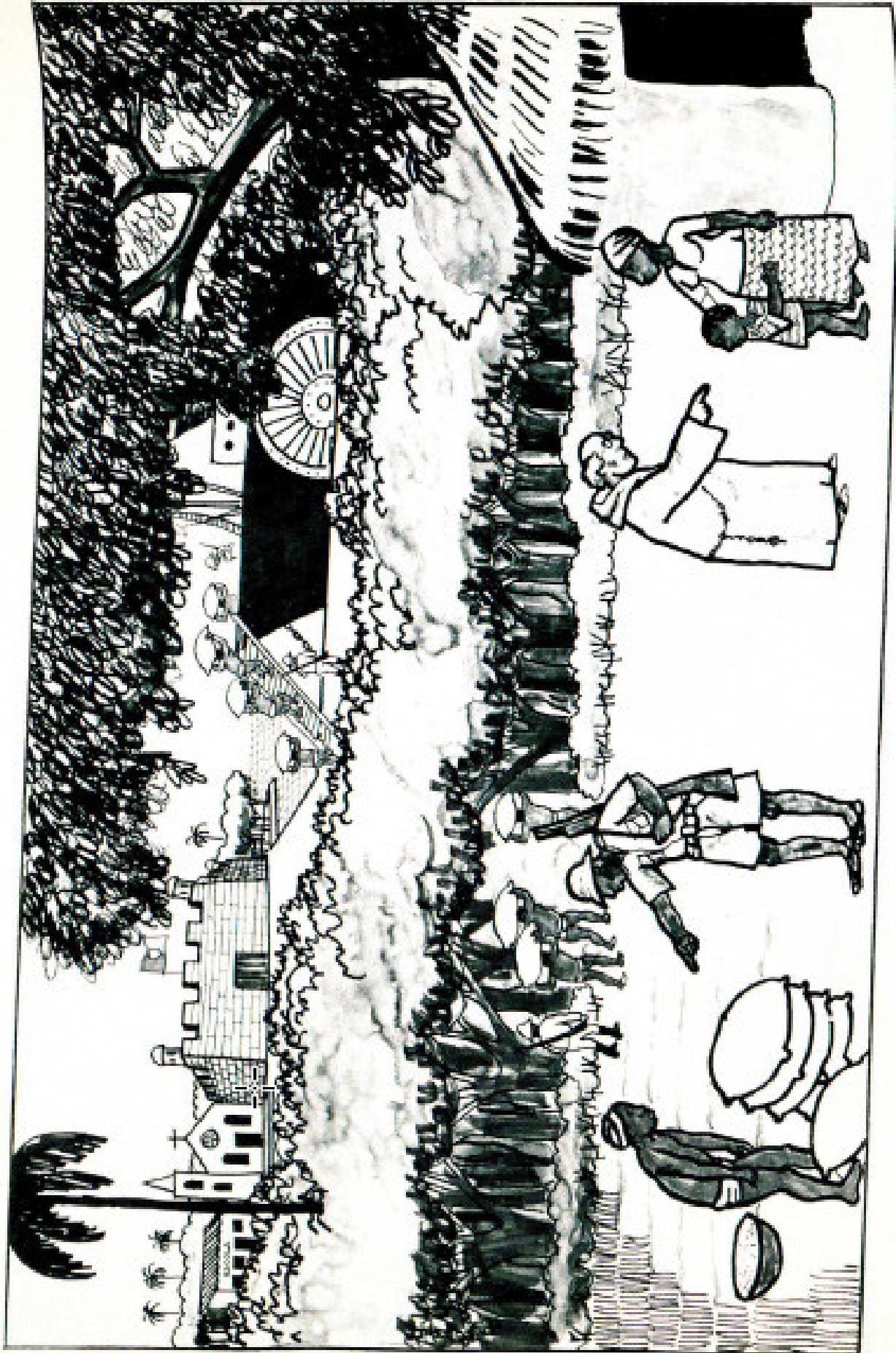
→ Institut d'action culturelle IDAC. Guinée Bissau: Reinventer L'éducation. IDAC Document 11. Geneva, 1976. In French, with the full comic (see further resources online, p. 44)

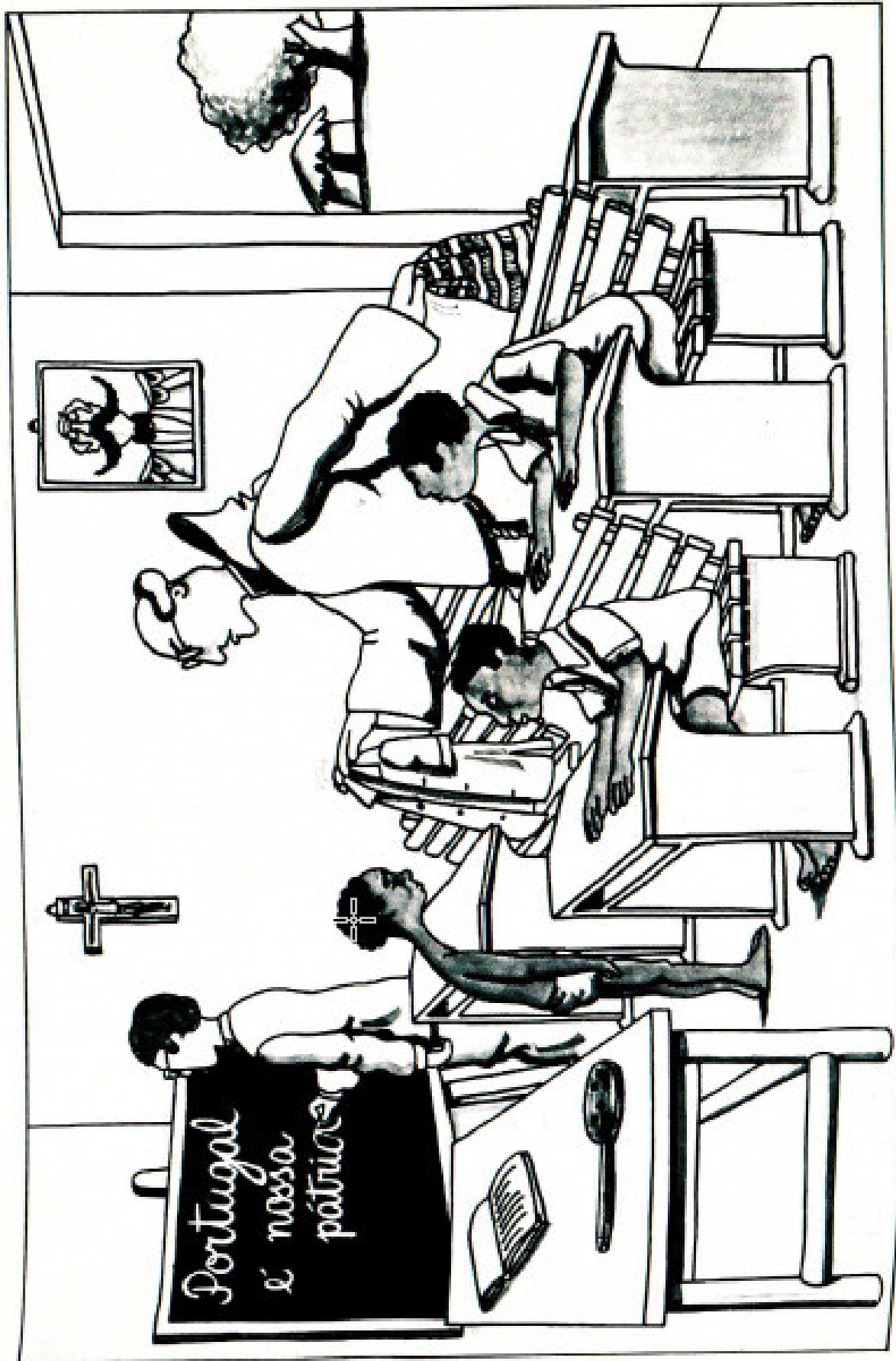




LUTA





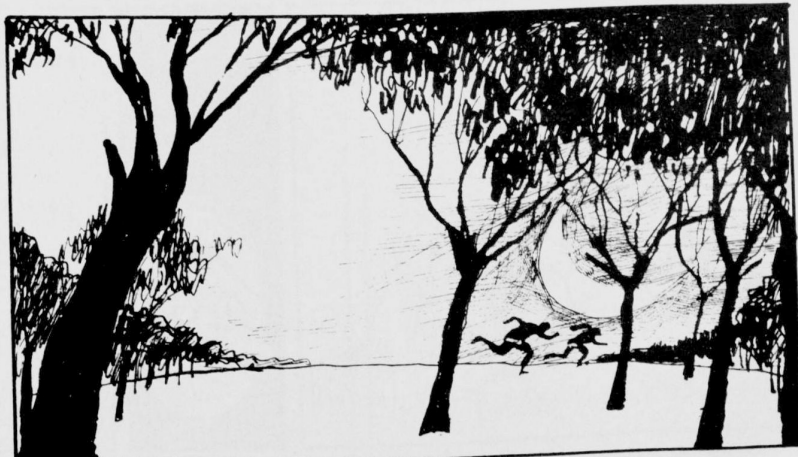
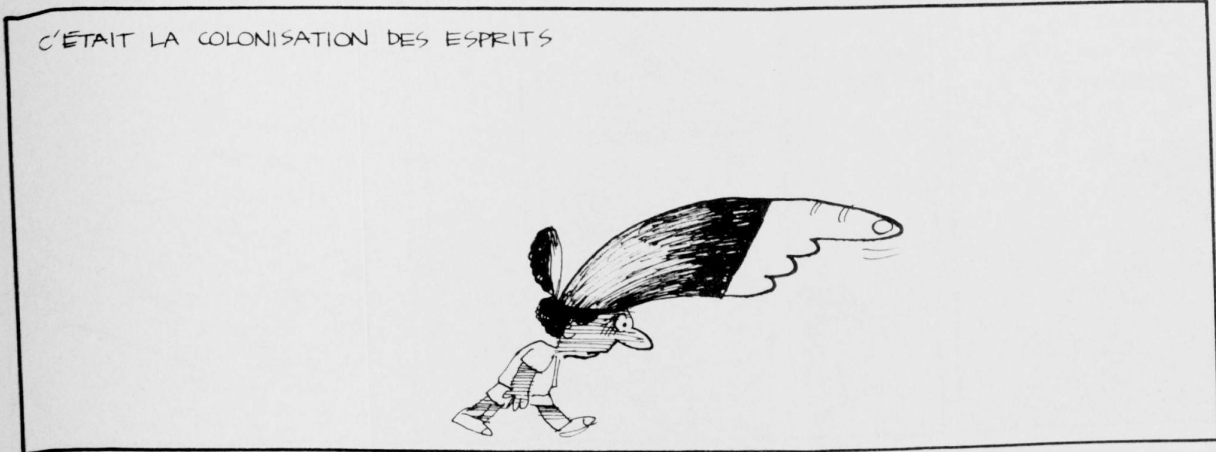
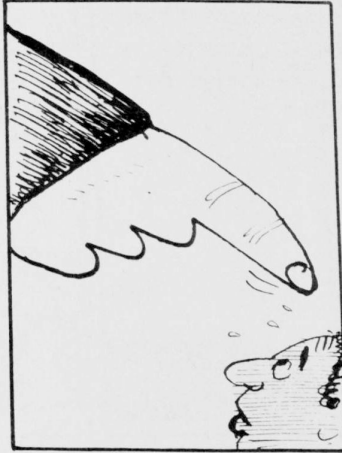
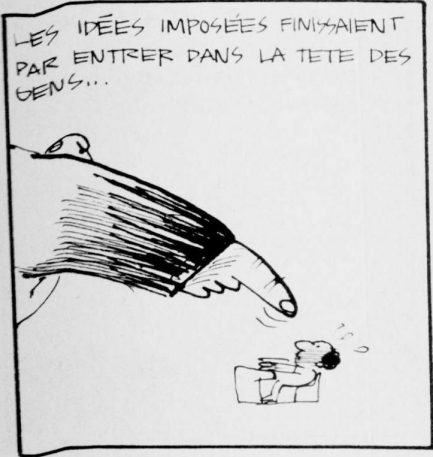




## E

Joachim Schroeder, a teacher in Germany, in a text from 1991 presents his practice based on Freire's approach (see Readings). For working with high school students, he chooses historical art works as "codifications" for generative themes he sees relevant for the student group. The works here are two examples.

→ Schroeder, Joachim. "Bilder Bilden. Oder: Wie Aus Einem Kupferstich Eine Codierung Wird." In *Befreiung Und Menschlichkeit. Texte Zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, 181–92. München: AG SPAK, 1991. In German, and translated extract from the text (see further resources online, p. 44)



F

Image from the IDAC-Document 21, on "Feminin pluriel (I). L'éducation des femmes". It is not directly described as a « generative image » for a particular campaign, but accompanies an article on women's education.



"An demselbigen Ort wurde Kolumbus von dem Kaziken ganz freundlich und herzlich aufgenommen; und als sie beide einander mit Geschenken und Gaben verehrten, haben sie Bündnis der zukünftigen Freundschaft miteinander gemacht und bestätigt: Es verehrte und begabte Kolumbus den König mit Hemden, Hüten, Messern, Spiegeln und dergleichen; hingegen verehrte und schenkte der Kazike dem Kolumbus einen großen und schweren Klumpen Goldes"

**Abb. 1:** Theodor de Bry: Das Vierdte Buch Von der neuwen Welt, Tafel IX, Frankfurt 1594 (Quelle: Landung von Columbus. In: T. de Bry, Grands Voyages, Frankfurt/M., 1594 [British Museum])

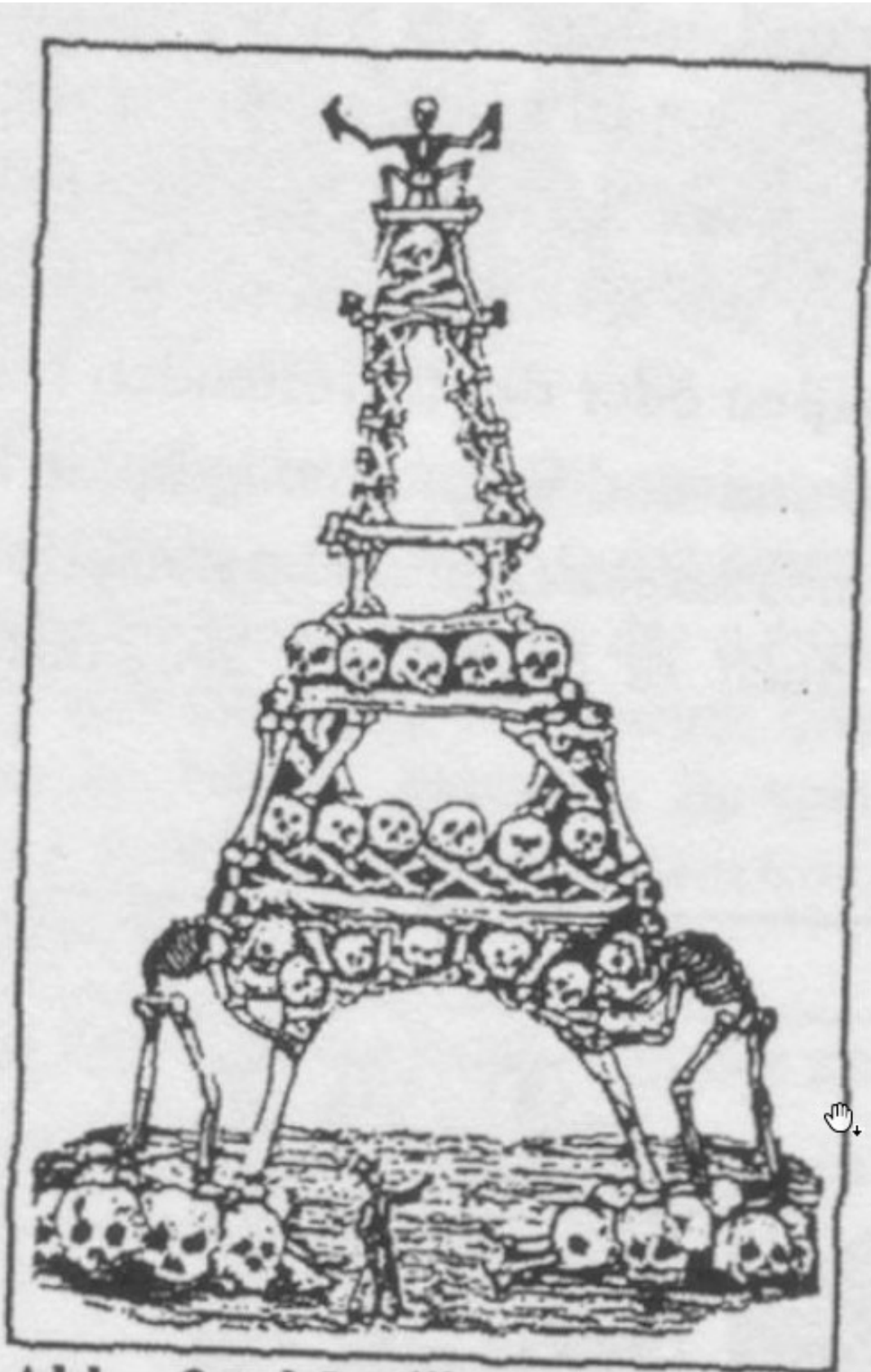


Abb. 2c Manilla, Eiffelturm-  
Calavera; um 1900

**RESOURCE 2: READINGS**

Freire, Paulo: Education, practice of freedom

La educación como práctica de la libertad, Buenos Aires: siglo veintiuno, 2004 [first portuguese edition: 1967], S. 103f.

[translated from the Spanish edition by N.L.]

*In "Education, practice of freedom" Freire describes his approach of developing and carrying out courses for literacy and conscientization (development of critical consciousness) in the form of "Culture Circles" on a methodological level. Working with codifications on "generative themes" plays a key role in the method. For preparing the action, a multidisciplinary team carries out research to identify the generative themes, in collaboration with co-researchers from the area where the courses are to take place. Generative themes are topics that condense the problems of the social and political reality of the learners. The team and the co-researchers, from the results of their investigation, produce "codifications", which can be images, audiovisual material, etc., which are then used for discussion in the Culture Circles with the learners. The aim of the approach is that in decoding these situations, which connect the concrete and the abstract, the learners gain critical understanding of their reality, with view to organize and fight for change. In the passage below, Freire describes the use of codifications around the concept of culture (See images A and B).*

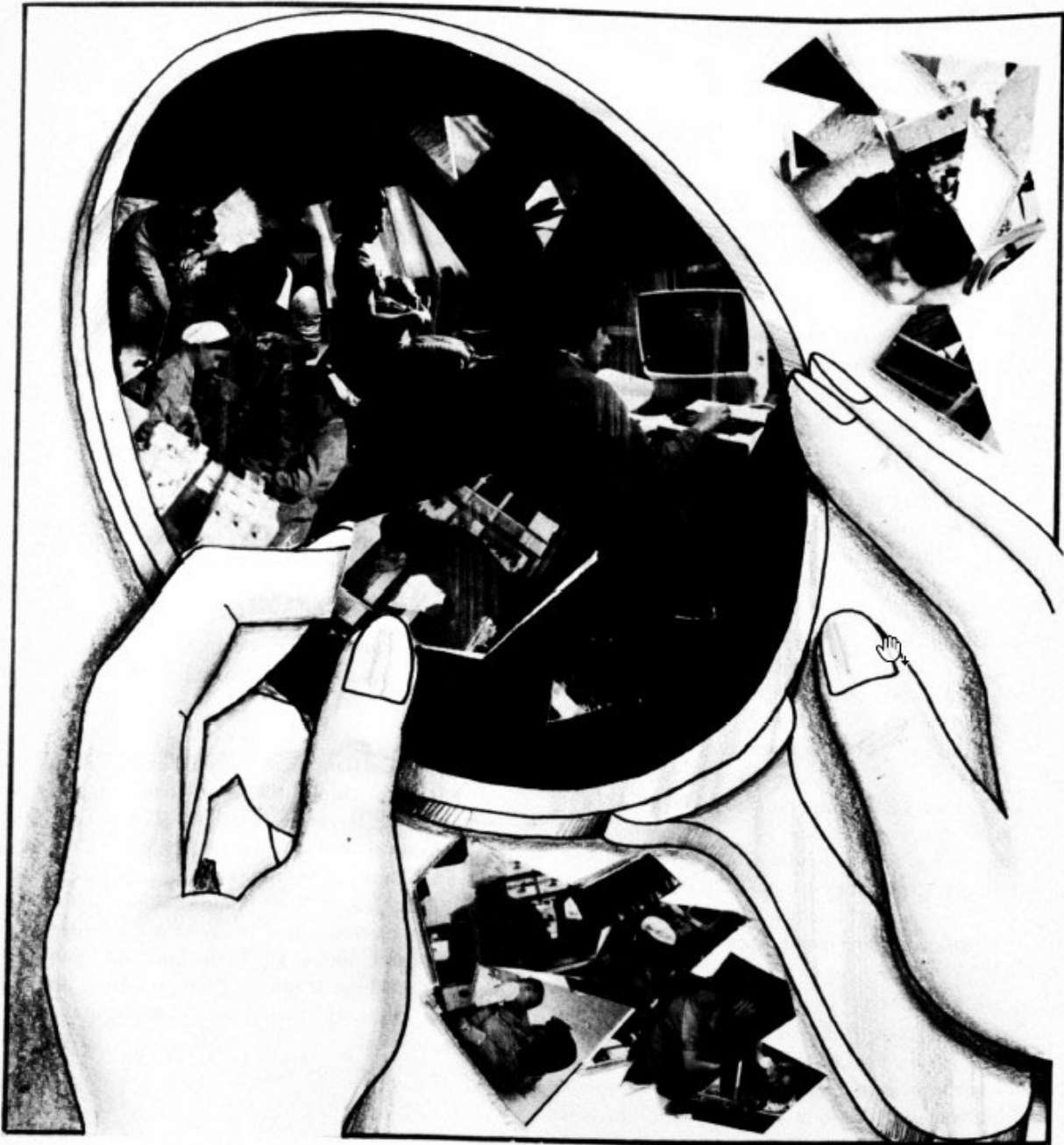
To introduce the concept of culture, gnoseologically and anthropologically, we "reduced" this concept to its fundamental traces, in eleven existential "codified" situations that challenge the groups and enable their understanding through "decoding". Francisco Brennand, a key figure of current Brazilian painting, painted these situations, thereby creating a perfect integration of education and art.

The first situation provokes the illiterate's curiosity, who – to use an expression by a writer who is a friend of the author [Freire]– "untiming himself initiates his entry into time" (Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho). It is surprising to see the debates begin and unfold and observe the curiosity of the participants responding to the problems presented in the situation. Each picture contains a certain number of elements for the learners to decode with the help of the coordinator of the discussion.

As soon as the debates around the codified situations – with "x" elements – become more intense and the participants respond in their various ways to the situations that challenge them, the students start creating a "circle" that becomes more dynamic the more the information shared and observed responds to the groups' existential reality.

Many of them in the discussions, when they understand the anthropological concept of culture, happily and with faith, affirm that they haven't been shown "anything new, but only refreshed their memory". "I make shoes", one said, "but now I discover that I have the same value as a doctor who makes books". [...] "Now I know that I am culto [knowledgeable, educated, wise]", an old farmer strongly affirmed. Asking him why he knew that he responded with the same strength: "Because I work, and through working I transform the world".

→ Freire, Paulo. Educação Como Prática Da Liberdade. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967. In Portuguese. (see further resources online, p. 44)



**Schroeder, Joachim: Images educate. Or: How a copper engraving becomes a codification.**

In *Befreiung und Menschlichkeit. Texte zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze. München: AG SPAK, 1991: 181f. [translated from German by N.L.]

*Joachim Schröder, a teacher in Germany, in a text from 1991 presents his practice based on Freire's approach. For working with high school students, he chooses historical art works as "codifications" for generative themes he sees relevant for the student group.*

Existential themes, that comprehend both the individual and subjective experiences of the students and the social relations and problems behind them, are always worth being taken up in class; to make them visible and reflect on them. Obviously, there are many forms into which such themes can be reconstructed and represented in class. Lastly, this is a question of finding or developing a proper "codification" by which the students can find their access to the theme. The concept of "codification", as developed by Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, now does not refer to finding a smart introduction to the topic, giving an impulse or motivating students through proper material. A codification is more than that: it contains the current, concrete experiences of the students and makes them an object of learning; it takes up social problems subjectively experienced and tries to lay open their contradictions and interrelations; it "names" problems and encodes them at the same time, because it is the process of de-codification, of analysis and reflection of the codification, where learning properly takes place; it tries to represent tangible reality in a way that its connection with personal experience as well as with societal problems becomes visible (cf. Freire 1973, S. 79ff.)

Codifications can be newly produced, or one uses existing material. Codifications can be texts, roleplays, music pieces or images. In Latin America, mostly images or comic-like booklets are used. [...] This contribution wants to show, how even works of "high culture"- in this case a copper engraving from the late renaissance - can be used as codifications. Yet, for use in class the artwork still has to become a codification, meaning that it has to be prepared for use in class and it has to be used outside of common methodology. If used as codification, the work of art cannot be treated on the level of art or art history, but it has to be mediated in the concrete societal context and proximity to students' biographies. This is not to negate the necessity of consulting academic literature and studying the history and contexts of production of the image. But in class, the problem represented in the picture and the process of decoding with the students has to take center stage; the discussion of what students see, associate, name and decode.

Since Peter Weiss, at the latest, an active and "discursive approach of appropriation" can also be found within discussions in art theory. The point for him is neither appreciative contemplation of an artwork nor interpretation on art history, but the incessant analysis and appropriation of the contradictions in the artwork; it is not about understanding the image, but understanding one's own situation and position through the image.

→ Schroeder, Joachim. "Bilder Bilden. Oder: Wie Aus Einem Kupferstich Eine Codierung Wird." In *Befreiung Und Menschlichkeit. Texte Zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, 181-92. München: AG SPAK, 1991. In German; and longer translated extract from the text (see further resources online, p. 44)



Schroeder, Joachim (1991). „Bilder bilden. Oder: Wie aus einem Kupferstich eine Codierung wird“ In: *Befreiung und Menschlichkeit. Texte zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, München: AG SPAK, 181–192

„Existentielle Themen, die sowohl die individuellen und subjektiven Erfahrungen der Schüler wie auch die dahinterstehenden gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhänge und Probleme umfassen, sind es immer wert, im Unterricht aufgegriffen, sichtbar gemacht und reflektiert zu werden. Natürlich gibt es viele Möglichkeiten, wie solche Themen im Unterricht rekonstruiert und repräsentiert werden können. Letztendlich handelt es sich darum, eine geeignete «Codierung» zu finden oder zu entwickeln, durch die Schüler ihren Zugang zum Thema finden können. Der von dem brasilianischen Pädagogen Paulo Freire geprägte Begriff der Codierung meint nun allerdings nicht, einen pfiffigen Einstieg ins Thema zu finden, einen Impuls zu setzen oder durch geeignetes Material die Schüler zu motivieren. Eine Codierung umfasst mehr: Sie enthält die gegenwärtigen, konkreten Erfahrungen der Schüler und macht sie zum Gegenstand des Lernens; sie greift subjektiv-erfahrbar aktuelle gesellschaftliche Probleme auf und versucht denen Widersprüche und Zusammenhänge sichtbar zu machen; sie «benennt» Probleme und verschlüsselt sie gleichzeitig, denn im Prozeß der Entschlüsselung, dem «Decodierungsprozeß», der Analyse und Reflexion der Codierung, erfolgt der eigentliche Lernprozess; sie versucht die konkrete Wirklichkeit so zu repräsentieren, daß ihre Verknüpfung mit der eigenen Erfahrung wie auch die Verknüpfung mit gesellschaftlichen Problemen sichtbar wird (vgl. Freire, 1973, S. 79ff).

Codierungen können selbst hergestellt werden, oder man verwendet vorgefertigtes Material. Codierungen können Texte sein, Rollenspiele, Musikstücke oder Bilder. In Lateinamerika werden meist Bilder verwendet oder comic-artige Heftchen; dies liegt vor allem daran, daß die oft analphabetische Bevölkerung mit Bildmaterial am besten arbeiten kann. Auch Schüler können über Bilder oft leichter Zugang zu Themen und Fragestellungen gewinnen: Bilder umgehen Leseprobleme, Bilder machen sichtbar, die Bildsprache ist internationaler. In diesem Beitrag soll nun vorgeführt werden, daß selbst «hohe Kulturgüter – in diesem Fall ein Kupferstich der Spätrenaissance – als Codierungen eingesetzt werden können. Allerdings muß für den Schulgebrauch ein solches Kunstwerk erst zu einer Codierung werden, d.h. es muß für den Unterricht vorbereitet werden und es muß jenseits der üblichen Methodik verwendet werden. Als Codierung verwendet, kann das Kunstwerk nicht auf der kunstwissenschaftlichen oder kunsthistorischen Ebene abgehandelt werden, sondern es muß in konkreter gesellschaftlicher und schüler-biographischer Nähe vermittelt werden. Daß zur Vorbereitung der Codierung auch die Auseinandersetzung mit der Fachliteratur gehört und die Entstehungsgeschichte und –zusammenhänge des Bildes erarbeitet werden müssen, wird nicht bestritten; im Unterricht muß aber das im Bild repräsentierte Problem und der Decodierungsprozeß mit den Schülern im Vordergrund stehen, die Auseinandersetzung mit dem, was die Schüler sehen, assoziieren, benennen und entschlüsseln.“

→ Schroeder, Joachim. „Bilder Bilden. Oder: Wie Aus Einem Kupferstich Eine Codierung Wird.“ In *Befreiung Und Menschlichkeit. Texte Zu Paulo Freire*, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, 181–92. München: AG SPAK, 1991. In German (see further resources online, p. 44)

**Hall, Stuart: "Encoding, decoding"**

In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During, 1993 [1973]: 95.

*Stuart Hall in his seminal essay "Encoding, decoding" from 1973 conceptualizes how meaning is encoded and decoded with the example of television broadcasting. Although not directly related with Freire's purposes of working with images in literacy courses, for me to read Stuart Hall's text, roughly written in the same period as "Education, practice of Freedom" and using the same metaphor of the "code", is useful to reflect on Freire's method and the images it produced. While in Freire's writing the relation between "codification" (the image) and social reality is highlighted – the learners, decoding the image, decode reality – Stuart Hall calls attention to what different "codes" do to the meaning transmitted. Knowledge of the "code" – the language – is required to decode what was the intended representation of reality. In the passage below, Hall highlights that there is no representation of reality without it being encoded in a particular, and not universal, "code", and that some of these codes are naturalized, meaning they seem "natural" (not anymore recognisable as a specific language).*

Since the visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, it cannot, of course, be the referent or concept it signifies. The dog in the film can bark but it cannot bite! Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive "knowledge" is the product not of the transparent representation of the "real" in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus, there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Iconic signs are therefore coded signs too – even if the codes here work differently from those of other signs. There is no degree zero in language. Naturalism and "realism" – the apparent fidelity of the representation to the thing or concept represented – is the result, the effect, of a certain specific articulation of language on the "real". It is the result of a discursive practice.

Certain codes may, of course, be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed – the effect of an articulation between sign and referent – but to be "naturally" given. Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a "near-universality" in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently "natural" visual codes are culture-specific. However, this does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather, that the codes have been profoundly naturalized. The operation of naturalized codes reveals not the transparency and "naturalness" of language but the depth, the habituation and the near-universality of the codes in use. They produce apparently "natural" recognitions. This has the (ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present.

→ Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, decoding". In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During, 1993 [1973]. [In English] (see further resources online, p. 44)

Author collective: "Autonomy of the Working Class and Language Confusion. Your language, my language, our language?"  
In *Ästhetik & Kommunikation*, (11), 1973: 38–58, 85.

[translated from German by N.L.]

*This text was published in 1973 by a group that describes itself as a collective of (Italian) migrant workers and their German peers in Frankfurt am Main who organized a German language course together. It appeared in the journal "Ästhetik und Kommunikation" (Aesthetics and communication), the journal of the Institut für Experimentelle Kunst und Ästhetik (IKAe) in Frankfurt am Main. The journal understood (and still understands) itself as a left medium for political education in the visual realm. The group, rejecting "integration" into German society as a form of oppression, searched for methods applicable to language learning that would suit their goals of autonomy and emancipation. Through a French collective they came across Freire's writing and decided to work with his approach. In the text, they relate their experiences, concluding that Freire's method is not as empowering as it claims to be. In the passage below, they criticize the "generative images" and the idea of the learners decoding the "codifications" that the moderator has prepared.*

*They end up proposing that the learners produce their own visual media. They founded the "Internationales Solidaritätszentrum" (International Solidarity Center) in Frankfurt am Main, which later became the Gallus-Zentrum, still existing today.*

"The teacher-learner presents the material for reflection to the learner-teachers..." [quote from Freire] What is used here, is the motif of the mirror, as old as metaphysics. Like a mirror the teacher presents to the student his own image: this allows for re-flexion. The mirror reflects the image. The teacher reflects the student's image. What is not said, is that if it is the mirror which reflects, transferring the metaphor it is the teacher who reflects, and not the student. In effect it is the teacher who takes on the role of the mirror. The student only reflects mediated by the teacher: he observes himself in the mirror; he assists to the reflection. And again, he is only public and not actor, as Freire claims. [...]

Freire forgets that the mirror, distorted or not, can only reflect what is in the place where the mirror faces. Once again, the real question is who holds the mirror, and who "reflects".

In Freire, this is all easy and very modern: a team of specialists works out everything in interdisciplinary collaboration: contents, vocabulary, material, structure of the classes, form of relationship to the students, etc. Of course, it is indispensable that "representatives" of the future students "take part": voilà, the students become voyeurs, but don't worry, not all of them, only the representatives. Through the analysis meetings one brings about "dialogically" the totality that is presented to the students (123-141, see above). A strange kind of dialogue, that does not take place between teacher and students anymore, but between specialists. Freire and his specialists decide that the codifications and the problems posed are their private issue.

In fact, the milieu in which the students live is seen as a whole and living code that needs to be deciphered (S. 123-141). It is deciphered to produce a new code which the students have the task to decipher. The specialists decide that the students are capable of decoding this second code produced by the specialists, but that they are not able to decipher the first code they are confronted with all the time. It does not occur to them that the narrations of the workers are already a kind of deciphering and recoding of reality. It does not occur to them to look at what the workers say and to question whether or not every narration contains a problematization of reality. We can hardly believe that Freire did not notice this. We rather believe that also he recognized that the fundamental thing is the first decodification, and that the second one is only a post festum rumination of something others have done before. It is exactly for this reason that the "conscientiseur" (the "conscious-maker") in himself could not leave this task to the initiative of the workers: the pedagogue must lead.

→ Autorenkollektiv *Autonomie der Arbeiterklasse und Sprachverwirrung*. "Autonomie Der Arbeiterklasse Und Sprachverwirrung. Deine Sprache, Meine Sprache, Unsere Sprache?" *Ästhetik & Kommunikation*, no. 11 (1973): 38–58. In German, and longer translated extract from the text (see further resources online, p. 44)

**IMAGE CREDITS:**

Cover image: Thinking with Scissors: Recoding of an image from the literacy campaign in Guinea Bissau by the ministry of Education in collaboration with the IDAC in the 1970ies by participant of the workshop held in Zurich on June 3, 2018.

**Images A:**

Paintings by Francisco Brennand, 1963. A1: online on [http://www.projetomemoria.art.br/PauloFreire/paulo\\_freire\\_hoje/popup/reinventando2.html](http://www.projetomemoria.art.br/PauloFreire/paulo_freire_hoje/popup/reinventando2.html), accessed November 23, 2018. A2-A3: photo Celso Pereira Jr., online on <http://forumeja.org.br/node/2499>, accessed November 23, 2018. A4-A5: online on <http://vifalahomenageiapaulofreire.blogspot.com/p/dilalogos-com-brennand.html>, accessed November 23, 2018.

**Images B:**

Drawings by Vicente Abreu, in: Freire, Paulo. *Educação Como Prática Da Liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967.

**Images C:**

Images by IDAC, in: Institut d'action culturelle IDAC. *Guinée Bissau 1979: Apprendre Pour Vivre Mieux*. IDAC Document 18. Geneva, 1979.

**Images D:**

Extract from a comic drawn by Claudius Ceccon, in: Institut d'action culturelle IDAC. *Guinée Bissau: Reinventer L'éducation*. IDAC Document 11. Geneva, 1976.

**Images E:**

Theodor de Bry: *Das Vierdte Buch Von der neuwen Welt, Tafel IX*, Frankfurt 1594 (Source: Columbus' Landing, in: T. de Bry, *Grands Voyages*, Frankfurt a. M., 1594 [British Museum]).

Manuel Manilla: *La torre Eiffel*, around 1900.

In: Schroeder, Joachim. "Bilder Bilden. Oder: Wie Aus Einem Kupferstich Eine Codierung Wird." In *Befreiung Und Menschlichkeit*. Texte Zu Paulo Freire, edited by Joachim Dabisch and Heinz Schulze, 181-92. München: AG SPAK, 1991.

**Image F**

Image by IDAC, in: Institut d'action culturelle IDAC. *Féminin Pluriel. De L'éducation Des Femmes*. IDAC Document 21. Geneva, 1980.

**FURTHER READING: RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE**

available for registered users on [another-roadmap.net](http://another-roadmap.net)

→ Learning Unit - Quito / Cuernavaca - [Discrepancies between Paulo Freire's Method of Critical Literacy and Andean World-Views.](#)

→ Learning Unit - Zurich / Geneva - [Reengaging Freire. Paulo & Elza Freire in Geneva](#)

Autorenkollektiv Autonomie der Arbeiterklasse und Sprachverwirrung. "[Autonomie Der Arbeiterklasse Und Sprachverwirrung. Deine Sprache, Meine Sprache, Unsere Sprache?](#)" *Ästhetik & Kommunikation*, no. 11 (1973): 38–58. [in German]

[Translated extract from the text](#) [in English]

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[Translated extract from the text](#) [in English]

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