

The Essential Nature of Cigarette Stubs

Shirley R. Steinberg

Indeed it was Paulo Freire's death which caused me to interrogate myths around the dissolution of the illustrious friendship between Freire and Ivan Illich. While compiling a homage to Freire through vignettes, poetry, and short notes, I considered inviting Illich to contribute.

The celebrious alliance emanating from kindred ideologies had been the subject of a rumored rift which occurred sometime between the early 60s (when Illich attempted to have Freire released from jail, and also hosted the ex-prisoner at the Cuernavaca Center for Intercultural Documentation), and the mid 70s, (after publication of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Illich's *Deschooling Society*).

A novice to the intricacies of social theoretical personal entanglements (friendships? enmeshments? associations?), I was loathe to step into a potential quagmire. On the one hand, Illich and Freire's friendship had been celebrated, and on the other, the reputed feud was legendary.

Death can cause outlandish and exaggerated thought processes. My respect for Illich (and the fact that I lived in his former home in State College, PA) captivated my desire to *do the right thing*, but there wasn't a reference or template covering my query. Freire's *compañeras*, *compañeros* and family were not particularly impressed with my dilemma.

In this case, my geographical placement at Illich's quasi academic home, Penn State, proved fortuitous, so I contacted an acquaintance who had worked closely with Illich. The feud hadn't been fabled enough to have reached him, and he was able to get a message to Illich about Paulo's death.

After having had time to reflect in jail, Paulo Freire came to Cuernavaca, to be for a while our guest at CIDOC. That's when he finished and Valentina Borremans published his first book outside Brasil. That's where an acquaintance made in 1961 grew into a friendship.

A few years later when Paulo had found a niche at the World Council of Churches, I went to Geneva for a few days. Paulo was waiting for me at the airport, behind a customs barrier. I still see his hair that had bleached, his open plaid shirt and the disheveled bundle of papers under his arm. We embraced with that northeastern light caress of the fingertips on the other's back, and then holding each other by the shoulders locked gaze.

"Como vay, Paulo?" He waited with his reply until we had stepped from the sidewalk outside the terminal. There he stopped. He looked intensely at the gutter, then into my eyes, and then pointed to the gutter and said: "Look. When I came in, there were cigarette stubs, one butt here, one over there. They have already been found and removed. Tell me Ivan, how can you be at home in a place as clean as that?"

--Ivan Illich (1997)

We have no time for personal feuds...the plethora of public hostilities and tragedies can occupy us. Like Illich, we continue on to interrogate the existence of clean gutters.

Illich, I. (1997). Personal communication with S. Steinberg.

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