

Mirah Sand

Ideas of hope and faith in the works of Paulo Freire

Social Action/Social Change, Theater

Hometown: Warwick, RI

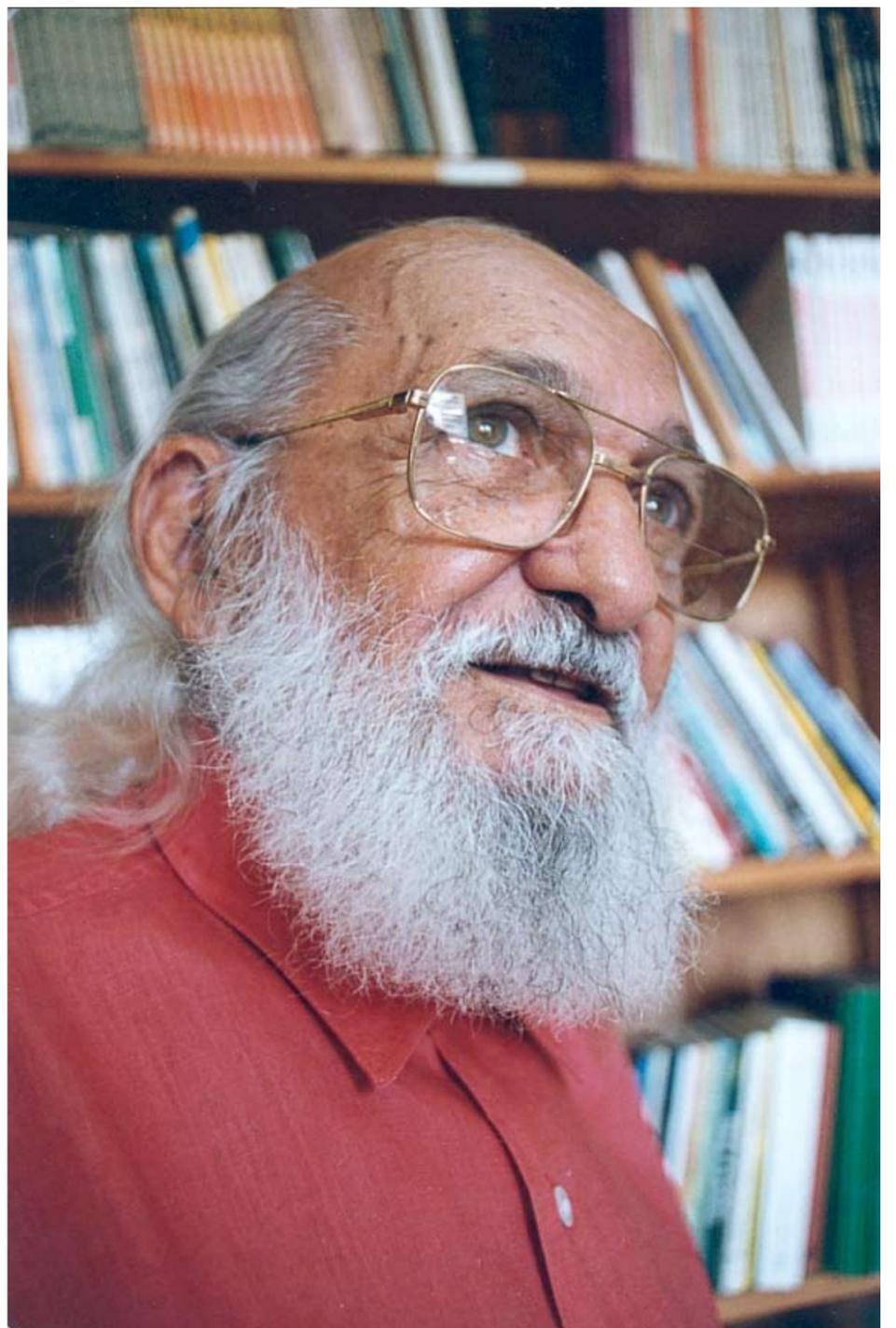
Thesis Advisor: Asma Abbas

I first encountered the name “Freire” when an intern at the program I attended in Thailand started a book club to discuss a book of his called “We Make the Road by Walking.” As I continued to read Paulo Freire, Brazilian popular educator and father of the critical pedagogy movement, I felt empowered by his philosophy because of his practical ideas about liberating ourselves from oppression.

As I continued in my program in Thailand, I realized that many Freirian ideas were incorporated into the program structure, specifically how the content of what was being discussed came from the students, and the projects we implemented in local villages came from ideas from the villagers themselves. The Freirian program structure helped to create a tightly bound community of students. We all left feeling empowered, inspired, and ready to work towards social justice.

After returning home for a few weeks, I began to feel this vague sense of distrust of Freirian philosophy; although he is quite radical and progressive in terms of his vision for a world of equal opportunity, I think his philosophy often feels too hopeful, and that this hope inspires others to interact with his ideas in a way that is no longer critical, as if he is a demi-god. I felt I had been seduced by the saccharine nature of idealism.

I encountered this discomfort again when I interned this summer at English for Action, an organization that teaches English to adult immigrants through Freirian techniques. In trainings on popular education techniques, I was given cartoons that terribly oversimplified Freirian ideas and principles in order to make them applicable to us as facilitators. Although I still mostly agreed with Freire’s philosophy, I saw it being appropriated in an ineffectual way, which caused me a lot of unease.



Paulo Freire

This thesis will address the discomfort I have with Freire’s ability to immediately inspire hope in his reader, and the effect that this might have on those using his philosophy in a practical sense. I am seeking answers to the many questions that have risen in the last nine months of encountering his ideas: Where do hope, belief, and faith intersect within Freirian works, and in what way is his hope completely irrational? In what ways does it not matter whether or not his hope is irrational? What is the place of Freirian hope in establishing community? In what ways is Freire’s emphasis on the possibility of human agency just another hegemonizing imposition? What are the dangers of appropriating his philosophy in a cookie-cutter fashion?

I predict that this thesis will act as a sort of dialogue between me and Freire in order to understand how he has inevitably shaped my worldview and my future. I predict that there will be many personal reflections on interactions and experiences that I have had over the last eight months that were definitively shaped by Freirian ideals.