

Making Philosophy Together

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1.

For me, to speak about Dick is not easy. Our last conversation on future projects remains interrupted by his death. Many things were left to be said, and many others to be done. That's death: the conversation stays unfinished. Unsaid words will always linger, as will unshaped thoughts. One can only aspire to keep alive the rhythm that Dick imprinted in the conversation, a driven thought that, like a pulse, holds in the air even after the musical phrase is over.

2.

For years I met with Dick in varied places. In New York, of course, but also in many other cities across the United States where conferences took place; also in Mexico, where we (peers from Mexico, Spain, and the U.S), organized one of the most impressive conferences on John Dewey's two visits to Mexico, at which Dick spoke about Trotsky.¹ Dick also visited Spain many times; we shared very good moments in Toledo, Madrid, and in Alcalá de Henares accompanied by colleagues from many countries.² During those years I published works on Dick's thought. I edited and wrote the Spanish prologue for his first book on Dewey; and I was also in charge of an edited volume on Dick's thought.³ In one of the most technical essays I have ever written about Dick's ideas, "Thinking Without Banisters: Bernstein and Habermas on Democratic Ethos,"⁴ I compared Dick's notion of *ethos* to Habermas's and Honneth's

¹ In 2012 Dick published "John Dewey's Encounter with Leon Trotsky," later reprinted in Bernstein, *Pragmatic Encounters* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016) 50-62.

² In addition to the two big conferences celebrated in Toledo and in Alcalá de Henares on pragmatism and political debates, two meetings in Madrid were also organized: a workshop with Simon Critchley and other colleagues on political theology (Dick published later "Is Politics 'Practicable' without Religion") as well as a conference on irony, just when Dick was already working on his book *Ironic Life* (2016). I also want to remember that some activities that I organized in New York (as an intense workshop on the many faces of violence) were possible thanks to the collaboration and support of Bjørn Ramberg and Oslo University with the Spanish research groups.

³ "Derivas pragmatistas", introduction and edition, to Bernstein, R., *Filosofía y democracia: John Dewey*, Barcelona, Herder, 2010.

⁴ In *Confines of Democracy. Essays on the Philosophy of Richard Bernstein*, eds. Ramón Del Castillo, Faerna A. and Hickman L. (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2015). In 2012 Dick also published a paper related with Habermas, Arendt and Dewey "The Normative Core of the Public Sphere," included in *Pragmatic Encounters* (2016).

understanding of the same concept. This essay has been by far the most laborious essay I have written on Dick. I based it on Dick's extraordinary, though rarely cited, "The Retrieval of Democratic Ethos,"⁵ which certainly deserves more attention than it usually gets. Dick praised my text; it made me very happy. As always, rather than similitudes, I underscored the differences between different thinkers, but Dick knew my intention was far from creating division or steering disagreement.

In "A Pragmatic Party," I focused on Dick's peculiar view of the philosophical dialogue, certainly inspired by Gadamer. And yet, with very distinctive traits, in my view, related to a quintessential American tradition: the strident unscripted debate, the discussion among simultaneous, though compatible, voices. In appearance, voices overlap with one another, but interestingly enough, the trained philosophical ear can learn to listen to all the voices at once.⁶ In the discussions that Dick initiated, voices overlapped and drifted apart, and yet, somehow, all managed to move along together. Dick did not demand ideal agreements, but he expected a willingness to discuss, and he prioritized the obligation to keep playing music together with others. Of course, Dick's conception of dialogue finds its roots in the European philosophical tradition—in Gadamer, Habermas, and Arendt, for sure—but it also contains two quintessential American traits: openness and frankness. Both can be found in the private and the

⁵ "The Retrieval of Democratic Ethos," *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 1. no. /4-5 (March 1996): 1127-46. Reprinted in *Habermas on Law and Democracy: Critical Exchanges*, eds. Michel Rosenfeld and Andrew Arato (California: University of California Press, 1998). See also Habermas's reply to Bernstein in this volume and also "The Moral and the Ethical: A Reconsideration of the Issue of the Priority of the Right over the Good," in *Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment. Essays for Richard Bernstein*, eds. Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004) 29-44.

⁶ In his *The Pragmatic Turn*, Dick described this type of dialogue as an "open-ended conversation with many loose ends and tangents. I don't mean an 'idealized' conversation or dialogue, so frequently described and praised by philosophers. Rather, it is a conversation more like the type that occurs at New York dinner parties where there are misunderstandings, speaking at cross-purposes, conflicts, and contradictions, with personalized voices stressing different points of view (and sometimes talking at the same time). It can seem chaotic, yet somehow the entire conversation is more vital and illuminating than any of the individual voices demanding to be heard" Quoted in "A Pragmatic Party," Symposium on Richard Bernstein's *The Pragmatic Turn. European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. III, no. 2, (2011): 223-228 (including a response from Bernstein). Dick also pointed out that, "if James was right (as I think he was), it is unrealistic and undesirable to think that we will ever escape from some form of the clash of intuitions and temperaments. This pluralistic clash energizes philosophical speculation and enlivens philosophical debate. Sometimes it is just the slings and arrows that we feel from those who oppose us that drive us to a more subtle articulation of a philosophical orientation." Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (New York: Polity Press, 2010) 124.

public sphere, in the small assembly and in the national forum.⁷ Dick's *exhortatory* tone could evoke the prosody of old pragmatists, but Dick was less solemn. Probably what was very distinctive was his Jewish-American frankness, what in Yiddish is called *chutzpah*, a sort of audacity or even insolence frequently tinged with irony.

Dick's communicative style and the traditions he belonged to are as much philosophical or literary as they are musical. I see Dick's sense of dialogue related to avant-garde music from the United States, such as Charles Ives's and Elliot Carter's music. In the music of these American pioneers, reunion and disparity, union and separation, encounter and diversion, the communal and the individual, never find any final or dialectical solution. As many know, Charles Ives was inspired by Emerson, and, if my memory does not deceive me, Dick and I were listening to Ives's *Concord Sonata*, probably the same winter New York was covered by a lot of snow and he gave me as a gift a volume of Emerson's essays. I also remember a conversation in which I showed Dick examples of the beautiful cacophonies that Ives composed, and we talked about his unique way of recreating the American "melting pot" (a phrase Dick resisted) and the *E pluribus unum*.⁸ On Elliot Carter, I wrote a radio program that consisted of 17 episodes lasting one hour each. I think Dick listened to the program, probably when all of the episodes were compiled in the National Spanish radio television web. I also had conversations with Dick about Carter's idea of human communication in his string quartets and his interest in preserving the irreducible character of each individual voice. During a trip, in a car, I told Dick that I had written a text on Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* for the Spanish National Opera Theatre. Suddenly he started to sing the aria "I got plenty of nothing, and nothing's plenty for me," and I accompanied him.

⁷ See also "Ironías de la filosofía", a conversation with Richard Bernstein on *Ironic Life*, in collaboration with Jaime Infante, in *Minerva*, (Círculo de Bellas Artes), Madrid, October 2015, no. 25. <https://cbamadrid.es/revistaminerva/articulo.php?id=652>. In a work on Richard Rorty, Bernstein's close friend, I also presented some ideas on Bernstein as a "philosophical fox." Ramón Del Castillo, "The Hedgehog that Therefore He Was. On Rorty's Style," *Journal of Philosophical Research, The American Style in Philosophy*, Vol. 39 (2014) 421-437.

⁸ See Bernstein, "Engaged Fallibilistic Pluralism," in *Thinking the Plural: Richard J. Bernstein and the Expansion of American Philosophy*, eds. Marcia Morgan and Megan Craig (New York: Lexington Books, 2017) 215 - 228.

3.

Dick loved music. His daughter Robin reminded us of it during the moving tribute that Dick's family and friends organized in New York in the Fall of 2022, which concluded with his granddaughter singing Billie Holiday's "I'll Be Seeing You." It always made me happy to discover new sounds for him, in the same way that he discovered for me books and texts that I did not know. During a trip to the Basque Country, I had with me Uri Caine's version of Mahler; Dick fell in love with that wonderful mix of post romanticism – Mahler's collage, klezmer, and experimental jazz. During this trip, in Donosti (a city located in the Basque Country), he gifted me with a curious token that he carried in his wallet. As we were walking, he suddenly stopped at a crossroad, turned to me and said, "I want to give you something." He gave me a business card from his youth, from the time when he desired to become a jazz string bassist. "I have only two. Keep this one," he said. Afterwards, we went to have some ice-cream and out of nowhere we heard an a capella song—it came from a Txoko, a private space where, traditionally in the Basque Country, groups of friends meet to cook, eat, and celebrate. During Dick's tribute in New York, I showed the card to Dick's children and grandchildren, and we all had a good laugh. A family friend said that Dick used to give away these business cards, and we all continued to laugh. Dick, the string bass.

Dick was a bit of a seer. He always knew what book someone would need. I gave him music and he gave me literary surprises. Among the many projects that I have abandoned, there is a little book in which I compared Dewey's social psychology with Freud's psychoanalysis. I wanted to understand why so many American intellectuals found in Freud something that Dewey could not give them. I understood Dewey, but also Freud's defendants. Dick was aware of it and recommended me to read *Freud the Mind of the Moralizer*, by Philip Rieff.⁹ The funniest part is how I found the book. During a snowy winter, and to the surprise of the bookstore staff, I found a copy of the book in the basement of the *Strand* bookstore on Columbus Avenue in New York. Everybody thought the copy had been lost among the thousands of

⁹ Dick was also aware that I was analyzing *Dewey and Freud on the Nature of Man*, by Morton Levitt. I intended to deeply discuss with Dick Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*. In my work, I would also discuss Walter Lippman's reception of Freud, which Dick found very interesting. Perhaps, someday I should undertake this project, which began in the basement of the Strand, and with Dick's happiness because I had found Riff's book.

volumes that populate the shelves of the legendary New York bookstore.

4.

The last few months, communication with Dick was beautiful. In 2019, I published a controversial book on the illusions and traps of naturalism in urbanism and architecture. Since then, I have been invited to give many talks on the idea of nature in Marxist philosophy and geography (Marx, Adorno, Schmidt, Harvey, Smith). In 2020, I published another book on the philosopher's relationship with nature (with a focus on Nietzsche, Hegel, Adorno, Heidegger, and Sartre). Dick was very happy about it and, together, we planned all sorts of activities to host an endless discussion on the idea of nature in philosophy. During the pandemic, Dick wrote *The Vicissitudes of Nature: From Spinoza to Freud*. I was anxious to discuss with him his chronicle, as both our books addressed similar matters in distinct historical moments: his book starts with Spinoza and concludes with Marx and Freud. By contrast, I begin with Hegel and Nietzsche, but I dedicate the core of it to Heidegger's, Adorno's, and Sartre's relationship with nature and history, the city and the countryside, the mountains and the gardens.

5.

When Dick announced his retirement, he rapidly informed me of the conference tribute the New School for Social Research (NSSR) was organizing. Generously, he also invited me to give a talk on any topic of my choice before the event. For very long we considered several issues related to nature but, in the end, we thought it would be best to wait for his book to come out. Finally, I offered him a talk about Charles Chaplin and the exiles. In the talk, I said I would recover Adorno's and Krakauer's ideas on the figure of the homeless, as well, and most importantly, Hannah Arendt's notion on the same topic. Though some health restrictions on public events forced a postponement of the conference until the Fall of 2022, the plan had not changed. Dick loved the idea and started all the paperwork to organize my talk. His health changed everything. Someday, I will publish the text that I thought of as a present for Dick's retirement. Now, I cannot do it. Perhaps the Spring will infuse me with the necessary strength to do it.

6.

If Dick were alive, we would be talking about philosophers and nature, about the exiled and humor, and we would have had time to continue a pending conversation. When I told Dick about my collaboration in the educative project founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, I also told him about the resemblances I saw between groups of musicians playing together and groups of philosophers thinking together. With a cheeky smile, he said: “Ok, I have what you need.” It was “Making Music Together” by Alfred Shütz, a very odd text on which I am still meditating. Shütz thought that execution could shed some light on the non conceptual aspect involved in *any* kind of communication.¹⁰ What is the relationship between two or more individuals making music together? Each performer—Shütz said—must share in vivid present the other’s stream of consciousness. This is possible, Shütz added, because making music together occurs in a face-to-face relationship and, even if performed without communicative intent, non-conceptual gestures or actions are operating “as suggestions or even *commands* for the participants.”¹¹ I think that making philosophy with Dick required justifying every affirmation, taking responsibility for the things said, and demonstrating sensibility towards the things not said, which have their own normative value. Even though we all identify Dick’s character and his voice with his ways in keeping the rhythm of a discussion, I believe the most interesting part of it all was his hearing. On my view, he taught us to listen, and overall, to listen while we talk, while our interlocutor appears to be silent. When I prefaced and edited in Spanish Dewey’s *The Public Opinion and Its Problems*, I remember having discussed with Dick that striking phrase according to which full dialogue “can be fulfilled only in the relations of personal intercourse. The connections of the ear with vital and out-going thought and emotion are immensely closer and more varied than those of the eye. Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participant.”¹²

¹⁰ “Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship,” *Social Research*, vol.18, no. 1, section V (March 1951): 76-97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹² John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) (Chicago: Gateway Books: 1946) 218-219. In the same conversation, I confessed to Dick how much I liked Christopher Lash’s ideas about dialogue in “The Last Art of Political Argument” and “Conversation and the Civic Arts” (both in *The Revolt of Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: Norton & Comp.: 1996). I also remember another conversation which, however, was interrupted, one about some of Iris Marion Young’s arguments, such as that theories of deliberative democracy presume too narrow an understanding of

I have to confess that, tired of certain kinds of music, my hearing isn't as generous as Dick's. He never ceased to believe (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never lost his *will to believe*) in the encounter between traditions. Unlike his friend Habermas, Dick empirically, and leaving big principles aside, fomented consensus every step of the way, in every case. But some of us who enjoyed his company did not share his expectations. The interesting part of making philosophy with Dick, is that one did not have to hide one's disagreement with him or others. As I said, Dick always believed in the dialogue among different philosophical traditions. Dick knew my reservations about it, but he always respected it. Every time that I reminded him of some terrible things that Arendt had said about Dewey, he replied: "I know, I know, no need to remind me again, I know what I am doing."¹³ On several occasions, I made manifest my disappointment with the development of contemporary pragmatism. I told him that, in my view, pragmatism had accommodated to the academic industry, instead of questioning it. His reply: "Do you think I do not know?"

Dick never criticized me for having Marxist friends critical of Hannah Arendt. He celebrated my good relationship with anarchists and he himself organized encounters with historic American anarchist figures. I had never had to conceal my disagreements with him.

communication and that several forms of interaction additional to argument are important for debate. See her *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2000). In a previous book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Young also mentioned a curious idea from Jean François Lyotard: "Language is first and foremost talking. But there are language games in which the important thing is to listen, in which the rule deals with audition." In these games, "one speaks only inasmuch as one listens, that is, one speaks as a listener, and not as an author." Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 70-71.

¹³ See Hannah Arendt, "The Ivory Tower of Common Sense," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994) 194-197. Arendt's text is a review of Dewey's *Problems of Men*, published in *The Nation*, October 1946. It should be kept in mind that Adorno did understand Dewey much better than Arendt, and it is reasonable that he praised him in *Aesthetic Theory*, in *Three Studies on Hegel*, or in the *Lectures on Negative Dialectic*. This does not mean that Arendt's text is not interesting.

7.

Another of Dick's virtues, or perhaps a gift, was his capacity to create connections among people, so they could do their own philosophy together. Thanks to Dick, I met very close friends and peers with whom, sometimes, we manage to make good philosophy (formations might vary—duos, trios, or quartets). I must confess that over time, I have come to prefer small formations rather than big bands or orchestras. I owe it to Dick's generosity to have been able to keep up the *pulse* of thought in the company of others. This is also his legacy: he not only contributed with ideas that made a difference in the philosophy of the 20th century, but he also inspired ways of cooperation and mutual learning, *forms* of doing philosophy together.

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