

## APRENDICES | T1: E4 Javier Mazza

### Desgrabación corregida - Inglés

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#### INTRO

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I tell this to many of my students: "Look, you're in fourth year of university. If you're still concerned about your grades, you're on the wrong track. The true concern is very different. Embrace it and figure out what to do with it. I already know what Nietzsche said, you don't have to tell it to me again, I'm not interested. Tell me how it affects you and what you want to do with it".

#### PREVIA

"C'mon.

Let's enjoy ourselves a while.

Sure.

This takes times though, so...

Sure.

We have to look nice."

Apprentices, Javier, take 1.

#### CHARLA

I am a philosopher.

It's my profession, it remains my profession to this day, and I say this because everything I do, I do from this place.

Philosophy in some way allows you to have a sort of inquiring approach to the world and to life.

I always make the joke that us philosophers always have a problem for each solution, and I think that's the way I see things in everything I do.

Looking for spaces, whether as a teacher, a director and playwright, and also in my job as communicator, to get rid of the stupor of one's comfort zone, and use that uncomfortable quality of philosophy, that compels you and forces you to go out and look elsewhere, however difficult.

## **I want to ask you about the moment when you, or Javier, started to flirt with philosophy.**

I find it hard to identify just one moment. I mean, it often happens to me that I look back and I see that, yes, it was always there.

Even as a kid, I was a pretty annoying kid who asked questions all the time, and you know that kids often get past that period of making questions, often at 8 or 9, and then they stop.

Well, that never happened to me. Asking questions all the time stuck with me.

And I always remember that was pretty uncomfortable and unbearable for my teachers, my parents, even my friends.

So I think there's something there. And, formally, there's a moment in high school that... philosophy appears in fourth year, it's a novelty, you don't really understand what it's about, and they tell you that it's about asking questions which have no answers and you go: What's the point of this? It comes late.

So around that time I had almost decided to be a historian, which is baffling to me now. What was I going to do as a historian? And I remember a Philosophy teacher told me: "You're out of your mind. With the kind of questions you ask, you must study philosophy".

This was the fourth year of high school and I thought: "Really?"

And at the same time I had started reading some existentialist philosophy. I'd read some Sartre and a lot of Nietzsche.

I started to get more and more and more inside of it, and since then it never let go of me. It was a one-way street and to this day I keep reading philosophy daily.

When you get to a certain point you stop to think: "Well, and now there's the career, something productive, something where... What are you going to do? You'll make money, you'll have an edifying, professional career..."

And of course, I had decided to study philosophy and had begun studying theatre, in my fifth year of high school. So people would ask me: "What are you studying?" and I'd say: "Philosophy". And people would stare at me as if thinking: "My, what a dreadful life is in store for this kid".

## **And the theatre.**

Of course, then I'd add: "Don't worry; I also study theatre". That's the other thing that's also part of me.

I liked that about the theatre. It interested me that the theatre allowed you to show the other face of something. It was like: "Look what happened to this character when he had to go through this. Look at everything that happened to him. Look at all the problems he faced".

And I think that's a very philosophical outlook on theatre, too. It's like making the human experience go through a string and you come out wondering.

## **I kept thinking about the need we have in school, in high school, to live authentic situations; how important that is.**

Yes, totally.

In fact, as a teacher I keep thinking my classes that way.

I still think that each one of my classes are a bit about that, about immersing yourself in something.

We could use plenty of metaphors, like the one of Alice and the bunny, the rabbit hole.

To me, each class and each thing I study is, in a sense, a bit like that: "Let's see, go down this rabbit hole and see how the world looks from there".

Seeing how this little piece of the world looks like from there, but always with the promise you won't stay there. That this is not a place where I or anyone wants to take you, or a place where you'd like to stay.

This is a way of looking at the world. A way suggested by an author, or a character, or a movie. I mean, look at what can happen if you look at the world from their eyes.

Great. Now get out of there and look at the world from some other place.

Because, when it comes down to it, the whole point of contemporary philosophy, and I think contemporary culture, is to try and find a way out of the corset of objectivity that the modern world gave us as its heirs.

Thinking we have the chance to look at the world from a privileged place, free of prejudices, free of thoughts, free of preconceived notions, as if there was an aseptic place for thought and a way of looking at the world.

Which turns out to be a dehumanized, grim, empty, cold place.

And I think that those of us who got to live in the 20th and 21st centuries have to rebel and say: no. There is no such place. That place is a unicorn, impossible, and what we have to realize is that we are all human beings, with our own points of view, our own thoughts, our own histories, our own baggage and emotional loads, and that is how we look at the world, that is what we base ourselves on when we say and think what we do, and there cannot be another way, period.

The only thing to do is to have a great dialogue with all mankind, to start agreeing on certain matters.

But to think that at a certain moment we'll be able to say: "Look, this is the hard, objective verdict we have reached on this matter..." No.

The history of science, philosophy, history, art, what have you, the only thing that it shows you is that those truths have been destroyed, bang, bang, bang, over and over again.

So, OK. Careful, this isn't a... I'm not about to give T-shirts to teenagers with the slogan "Long live skepticism", no, not even close.

But you need a healthy dose of skepticism.

The funny thing is that you also need to believe in things a while. Even though you know you will have to discard it tomorrow.

And this can look very strange sometimes: "But how? I have to go all in with Nietzsche or with anarchism or socialism, or any way of looking at the world, any scientific theory, and then I have to discard it?"

Yes, I don't know, or maybe not, or maybe you have to find a way for these things to coexist with each other. Because that's what it's all about. Otherwise you have to ignore the fact that you and I look at the world from different places. If we can't talk and exchange ideas, it's going to be terribly difficult.

**I'm thinking about the subject of crisis, which is a recurrent theme in these conversations, because dropping our previous beliefs, our old ways of looking at the world, can lead to a personal crisis.**

**How many crisis have you undergone? Do you keep track? Can you count them with one hand, two, or aren't two enough?**

I think we all have crisis of different kinds, of a different nature. As you say, we could count them and one hand wouldn't be enough.

My parents were both in business, and the 2002 crisis hit us very hard, and in fact, certain family matters made me drop my studies and get to work.

To me it was interesting to say: "Well, sometimes you may have a very clear calling, very clear ideas, you know where you want to go, but life throws a punch at you and you have to go somewhere else, and you have to be ready when that happens".

It was hard for me to understand that I had to do it, but eventually I made my peace with it and said: "OK, this is what I have to do".

But I also struggled going back to that other place.

I had betrayed my career, I had left it, I had abandoned it for something else, and it was a struggle to go back.

It was hard to return and find my vocation again, and that sometimes isn't easy,

It's what we said earlier about leaving our comfort zones taking a toll emotionally. It's like you have to invest a lot of yourself and give a lot of yourself to go back to that place.

The hard thing, and I think it applies to a lot of aspects in life, is that you can't see the end of the movie while it's beginning. You can't even see the end when the movie is already playing.

And I think it's an important challenge to learn to trust your convictions.

Because when all is said and done, at the end of the day you look back and see that 20-something kid who had to go back to study, and you wonder: What saved him?

Having someone who supported him, who at that moment was his wife, but also the conviction that even though he couldn't see the road ahead (I didn't see myself professionally involved in philosophy), the conviction was that this was it, that this was the place to be.

Why? Because it was the place to be. There was something irrational, intuitive, pulsating that guided you... That's it.

I think trusting that, sometimes, if it's strong and it's present, is fundamental.

**I relate to this too being a teacher, of how to value and inspire rather than just teach, that inner drive for students.**

**Do you get that with your students?**

A lot.

One thing I loathe about the educational system are grades.

Grades appeared formally in the educational system less than 300 years ago. But they are taken to be the holy grail of the learning process.

And to me they are one of the biggest obstacles and crutches the educational system imposes on students. Especially when they are numerical.

Because this ignites in the student the notion of a learning pipe-dream tied to their quantitative performance.

I study to get a given number in the paper, in the midterm, in the oral presentation, etc.

And I get to be present in the final years of formal learning, in the final years of high school and the first and last years of university.

The key moment in a person's learning curve is when the student, regardless of the level he's at, understands what he is studying, and studies it for himself or herself, not to get a grade, or to get the teacher to like him, or the professor to compliment him. No, no, no.

The moment in which the student figures it out and goes: "Wait, wait, wait. This is mine, this is my patrimony, it's the patrimony of my life". And like that, they've figured it out.

And I have a lot of experience to confirm this, especially with my university students and when they start working.

The student starts working, the person starts working, then he begins to juggle both, because once you start working, studying becomes a matter of willpower, and you start thinking: "Wait, why am I going to university if I already work? I could just keep working. No, no. I keep coming to university because I want to continue my education, this will give value to my work, what I do with this knowledge. Not if I get good grades or not".

I tell this to many of my students: "Look, you're in fourth year of university. If you're still concerned about your grades, you're on the wrong track".

"The true concern is very different. Embrace it and figure out what to do with it".

"I already know what Nietzsche said, you don't have to tell it to me again, I'm not interested. Tell me how it affects you and what you want to do with it".

To teach that is incredibly difficult. To explain that to young people especially is very difficult. And I truly think us teachers can't take that road alone, we can't singlehandedly take charge of it all, but we can definitely be part of the process of learning that.

As an adult, I understood the passion of the educational system for quietness and concentration, and I realized the educational system is a prisoner of its own medium.

The educational system today is a system that, to keep existing, depends on reading and writing, on the written word and the printed word. Even today. And that is why it highlights quietness and concentration.

Only an educational system based on the written word favors concentration and silence as virtues.

Because that is what a book demands. That is why there are quiet rooms in libraries. Because to focus on a book you need to stay quiet. And to give all your attention to the book. Everything else is a nuisance. A noise is a nuisance, someone touching you is a terrible nuisance...

I think that today, in the 21st century, we get to participate in the biggest revolution of Western cultural history of the last 300, 400 years. Maybe even the last 3000 years.

Today, knowledge is changing radically. It's taking a 180 degrees turn. And that turn is changing the professional environment. And you realize that the professionals increasingly valued today are those who know how to make connections, how to link subjects, how to juggle knowledge coming at them from different sides. And the professional who stays put is increasingly the professional that... well... lacks skills. You'll notice that those abilities to connect things come precisely from the dominant medium of our culture, which is no longer the book, but the internet, hyperlanguage, hyperconnectivity and the connected world.

There's a great paradox here that educational systems have a hard time learning. And educational systems are always entirely conservative. And educational systems are always entirely conservative.

And that's logical, because in a way it's their job to preserve that wealth of knowledge and to transmit it.

And when this kind of thing happens (and you have to go back to the history of the culture to realize this isn't the first time it happens), they put the educational system into question in a brutal way.

So I think that today, this habit of educational systems to punish or restrict restlessness, for example, is taking a turn, because, today, I look at the type of tasks my daughter has to perform, and I see tasks that require more connectivity, that require more juggling of knowledge, and not tasks that are so... endogamous, if you will.

So this is clearly a significant change, and obviously a crisis brings opportunities, and I believe we're lucky to play our part in it.

When I start thinking about these things I say: "It's like living in Gutenberg's Europe or the Greece of Plato and Aristotle, when writing was established as the means of knowledge. Hey, look! Something new is about to land here and it will change everything, everything".