

Irony AND THE DILEMMAS OF A SCIENCE HISTORIAN.

[Sadly, I could not be in Merida but Luis Campos kindly agreed to pretend to be a few decades older and deliver these few recollections for me. He also edited them to fit the session's rather narrow time slots. That, of course, does not make him in any way responsible for the content, which, according to John Dee, John found utterly false but mildly entertaining which, coming from John, I take as a compliment. So thank you, Luis and you are welcome, John. By the way, when you have a moment, I'd love to hear what Clavius-the-Grinch thinks.

I arrived in Berkeley in August 1984 from the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY, a quirky art school I attended while also sitting in on seminars in the philosophy and history departments at the University of Rochester. I had no background in the history of science and did not even know there was such a discipline. I had not read any work by Galileo at that time, and it was much later that I realized that my maternal grandpa spoke a pretty archaic form of Tuscan language that used words and expressions that, aside from my grandpa's speech, I have found only in Galileo's work. (That created the false impression that, somehow, I had some connection to Signor Galilei (my (and John's) future research topic). Also, I had a barely better background in philosophy of science, which I picked up after a few courses in information theory, computability, system theory and cybernetics. It was an honor to work with Henry Kyburg at Rochester, but he was far too close to probability theory than to history and too busy running a Black Angus ranch to bother being an advisor.

I had not met John or read his work at that time, but I had taken a few courses at Rochester with Theodore Brown who, like John, was a former student of Tom Kuhn. Ted put me in touch with Kuhn but also drilled into me that I should go to Berkeley to work with John, whom he presented as a one-in-a-generation young scholar who had just completed a field-changing (or field-making) book on the history of electricity.

That winter, I travelled to Berkeley to meet the OHST group, dressed for Lake Ontario weather (Don't be distracted by the cool weather maps: the lake effect is *real*", not meteorological fake news spread by the deep state through the National Weather Service. That 'back from the North Pole look triggered laughter when I stepped out of BART in downtown Berkeley with a gigantic puffy jacket and bear-style snow boots. I was permanently back a few months later, having squeaked through the graduate admission process, despite a strange profile that did not seem very scholarly [some CS, quite a bit of photography, some philosophy of science, and bits and pieces of the knowledge that a respectable Lycee is supposed to instill in the distracted minds of bourgeois kids.] The excitement of being in Berkeley, leaving Rochester's bone-chilling winters made harsher by the post-industrial derelict feel of the place featuring too many thick plastic sheets in lieu of windows, was quickly tempered by realizing how few HS course offerings there were, as well as the cultural distance between us (the historians of science and medicine in Stephens Hall) and "them" (the grad students in all other disciplines, in the many, many buildings all over campus). There was somebody --possibly an alumn -- who walked a few

goats and pot-bellied pigs around campus. I met the bestiary well before I met, say, a cultural anthropology student.

When John's seminar on scientific prizes started (he was working on the Nobel Prize then), I was struck by how consistently ironic he was, which was quite entertaining. Several remembrances of John at Merida mentioned his wit and linguistic skills, but rarely mention that his was not just general 'wit' but, more specifically, irony, sometimes biting, but always entertaining. The other conspicuous feature of John's modus operandi was his love and pride for California, with a large print of the Bay Area (described as "the New Jerusalem") hanging over his desk. I'll leave comments about John's significantly less enthusiastic views of the East Coast to friends and colleagues who are more familiar with that. But, again, the east-west dichotomy was not fake news, but part and parcel of the scholarly perspectives and ambitions that drove John.

The last minute of my 'presentation' is ticking away, and Luis is nervously eager to reclaim his identity, so, to conclude, back to irony. Not having John's gift of language, I was both appreciative and envious of the way he could deploy irony to suggest that his remarks about mistakes, unwise statements, screw ups by past scientists, or even borderline fishy statements or results were nothing personal. Months later, noticing that his use of irony sprinkled not just his seminars but also his books and articles, I slowly became convinced that irony, for John, was mobilized to imply that although he was 'only' a historian, he could teach something to the scientists and institutions whose work he was discussing, without telling them so. It was polite irony (or maybe fake irony that did not ruffle feathers that, in my view, John was in fact ruffling them with intent and gusto. In his hands, irony functioned like the discursive equivalent of anesthesia: "It's just going to sting a little..." but in fact was more and more long lasting than that. Unlike Galileo, John would not have been caught by the Inquisition, but, he might have tried to quietly take it over, while also working with UCOP to buy out the Vatican, convincing the UC prez that the study abroad programs would need presentable headquarters to properly do fundraising and ensure that the faculty would go to heaven despite the irrelevance of much of their scholarship

He wasn't just playing the role of the 'modest witness' sketched out by Boyle and then articulated by Shapin and Schaffer into the exemplary subject position of the new experimental philosophy. Rather, he was actually constituting a role for historians of science that was neither passive nor constructivist, neither dismissive of science's truth claims nor a rehashing of the traditional hierarchy between science and the social sciences. Neither realist nor relativist, cognizant of Galileo's proximity to the culture, skills, and taste of early modern literati social but not reducible to that. Toward the end of his career, John has written a great book on Galileo as a literato. I humbly suggest that such a figure is modeled after John himself.

Other participants have commented on John's skills as a writer and editor. I very much agree, and want to add some real appreciation for the ways in which he basically taught me and several other students how to write academically. (Some of you might think this is a gross overstatement and that, in my case, John's teaching fell on deaf ears, but please humor me).

He, and everyone else knew I was a non-native speaker, and that a lack of serious writing skills was limiting my ability to engage and convey complex arguments. Very hands-on, his response was to microscopically edit the first seminar papers I wrote. I do not mean 'microscopically' as a metaphor. He basically rewrote them, sometimes in a virtually unreadable microscript and then basically say: I've shown you how it's done, but, next time, do it yourself. I am not sure he thought I got the message, but I've since tried very hard to teach my own students that you "don't have an argument, which you then "write up." . As historians, we work from effects, not causes, and our 'methodology' boils down to writing, editing, and rewriting. Both mundanely and essentially (or perhaps 'ontologically,' as we say today, arguments can only emerge from writing, editing, and rewriting.

And for that, John, I do sincerely thank you.