THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE COMMON: IVAN ILLICH'S PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

EL ENCANTO DE LO COTIDIANO: LA PRÁCTICA FILOSÓFICA DE IVAN ILLICH

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Abstract: The author describes his experiences with the philosophical practice of Ivan Illich. He sketches Illich's biography and compares his convivial way of philosophizing with other philosophers. On this background, he analyses the underlying concept of Illich's practice of philosophizing and gives several examples for it. This leads to several important explicitly explained terms of Illich's philosophy. With these basic concepts, the author delineates the structure of Ivan Illich's philosophical practice in the metaphorical form of a "house of conspiracy". Concluding he shows, that the "house of conspiracy" is a convincing edifice of concepts not only of Illich's but also of every good functioning philosophical practice.
Keywords: philosophical practice, Illich, conviviality, vivification, humanism, dramatization, common, proportionality, conspiracy, philia, problem-solving, reflection, dialog.

Resumen: El autor describe sus experiencias con la práctica filosófica de Ivan Illich. Esboza la biografía de Illich y compara su manera alegre de filosofar con la de otros filósofos. En este contexto, analiza el concepto subyacente de la práctica filosófica de Illich y da varios ejemplos de ella. Esto lleva a varios términos importantes de la filosofía de Illich, explicados explícitamente. Con estos conceptos básicos, el autor delinea la estructura de la práctica filosófica de Ivan Illich en la forma metafórica de una "casa de la conspiración". Concluyendo, muestra que la "casa de la conspiración" es una construcción convincente de conceptos no solo de Illich, sino también de toda práctica filosófica que funcione correctamente.

Palabras clave: Filosofía Aplicada, Illich, convivencia, vivificación, humanismo, dramantización, común, proporcionalidad, conspiación, philia, solución de problemas, reflexión, diálogo.

Philosophizing at grassroots level

Reflecting on *philosophical practice,* we tend to forget those who did more or less exactly that but who never called it philosophy or even *philosophical practice*. If one cannot find them in the general lists of philosophers and if they did not call themselves such, the sight of them is almost completely lost. Nevertheless, philosophical practitioners can sometimes learn along their lines much more than from the ideas and methods they use to reflect.

Ivan Illich was one of these inspiring figures for many people around the world. Only a few people would have called what he did philosophy or come near to calling it philosophical practice[1]. Why then do I do it? In order to explain that I give a first example of Illich's way of mutual reflection.

Nearly everyone who had to do with him would very soon call him with his first name "Ivan". That shows that he had the ability to create an uncomplicated atmosphere of confidence, closeness, or even of friendship. The first time I experienced him personally – at the University of the German City Kassel – he gave a lecture with a small discussion. Nearly half of the auditory sat on the corridor floor in front of the lecture room for at least another hour or more afterwards and discussed with him all questions and ideas that had come up. Doing so was quite uncomfortable in a cement building and with people continually coming through the corridor. However, even under these unpleasant circumstances, Ivan showed

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[1] An exception is Andrew J. Taggart, who in his blog of June 3, 2011, gives a short hint in this direction: https://andrewjtaggart.com/2011/06/03/ivan-illich-on-friendship-as-conspiracy/ .

repeatedly, that the mutual dialog had his full focus. This intensive, engaged common reflection builds up ties of acquaintance not only with the objects of reflection but also with persons – and out of that, friendship arises. Therefore, dialog needs time, very often much more than we think we have in our scheduled society. He also showed everyone who was interested that he or she is equally important, that he liked to be with us – even under uncomfortable circumstances.

This was an experience, which I frequently had throughout the years when I encountered him, visited his lectures, courses, groups, suppers: limitations to the dialog imposed from outside were of no final importance to him. The dialog was engaged dialog, and *everyone* engaged in it were important to him. He definitely did not believe in inner circles, but in the immediate contact mediated by a spirit of conviviality[2] – as he called it.

This experience was an experience in philosophizing at a grassroots level – even if the ideas or knowledge Ivan contributed were not at all just grassroots. Nevertheless, the way of dealing with them and discussing them and the possible conclusions with anybody interested: that was philosophizing at a grassroots level.

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[2] see: Ivan Illich, *Tools for conviviality*, Harper & Row, 1973. The book found great resonance. In France it had been introduced by André Gorz. The main intention of the book was a similar one than the one of Erich Fromm's "To be or to have". Convivial is a society, which limits its tools (techniques or institutions) in a rational way. Today science and technique not only are problem solvers but even more they are problem creators, because every new problem is faced by the intention to find a technical solution for it. Not experts should control these common tools. The concept of *conviviality* has its roots in the book *La physiologie du gout, ou Médiatations de gastronomie transcendante* (1825) by Jean Anthèlme Brillat-Savarin, a French philosopher. He named the amicable communication of a company at table with this word. With this tradition and with the ideas of Illich and other promoters of similar thoughts in France grew a still today active movement of convivialists (www.lesconvivialistes.fr and http://convivialism.org/).

This – I think – is one of the main characteristics of philosophical practice: no matter with whom I'm going to philosophize, as a philosophical practitioner I'm doing it at grassroots level, not academically. Nevertheless, the subject of reflection can be quite sophisticated – if it might be of relevance in a reflection of existential issues.

Ivan – person, life and rumor

Some saw in Ivan Illich a supposed leftwing anarchist, others saw in him a Jesuitical fool – a not too trustworthy person at least. He used to question our view of reality – independent of political directions. His thoughts showed the blind spots of awareness and opinion one used to have in Western society with their guiding ideas. He easily could inspire his listeners and readers to look out for new perspectives – he tried to give some first ideas, but never tried to convince anyone. The delightful food of inspiring view-turning questions and concepts attracted many different people from all professions and countries, but what they found was not someone who would support them with new ideologies, but with radical human questions. He wandered around the world doing this, most of the time without any fixed profession, and what he did, he did in a way that professors and "uneducated" people equally admired him for. But for what? – Was he a modern prophet, even if he was one who warned of the ideas of modernity? A *parrhesiastes*, in Foucault's words, who could open one's eyes and animate to engaged questioning and thinking?

One would, experiencing him and reading his books, never be sure. In addition, if anything, this was the most philosophical side effect he had. Yes, he was one of the destroyers of the belief in modernity and therefore he might unwillingly have been one of those who established the basis for postmodernity.

Ivan was at home everywhere in the world, but he was born in Vienna 1926 and died 2002 in Bremen. His mother had been Jewish, but converted to Christianism, the Catholic father came from Croatia. They were friends with Sigmund Freud and his family. Ivan had to leave school in 1941 because of the Jewish ancestry of his mother. Therefore, he went to Florence to take his high school diploma. There he began his studies, later on in Split and Rome, philosophy and theology. He became a priest and a doctor of theology 1951. His thesis was entitled: *The philosophical foundations of historiography in the works of Toynbee*. First, he worked in the Vatican, then for 5 years in the parish of Incarnation at the West Side of Manhattan, mainly with Puerto Ricans. Until 1960, he was rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico. In 1960, he founded with friends, for example, Paulo Freire, the Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, México, and became its director. When his promotor Cardinal Spellmann died, he got into many difficulties with the Catholic Church, and finally 1969, he resigned from the active priesthood.

In the 1970s, Illich was popular among leftist intellectuals in France, his ideas having been discussed in particular by André Gorz. In the 1980s and beyond, Illich travelled extensively, mainly splitting his time between the United States, México, and Germany. He held an appointment as a Visiting Professor of philosophy, science, technology and society at Penn State. He taught at the University of Kassel (1979), University of Bremen (occasionally, from 1981 onwards), and at the University of Freiburg, among others. In later years, he lived in Bremen, at Barbara Duden's house, which became a meeting point for mutual suppers and reflections.

I had read some of his books during my time in school. He was well known in the 70s, and his thesis of "de-schooling society" and others were discussed in German schools as well. Then I met him in person when I studied, first in Kassel (1979), later on in Freiburg

(in the 80s) where I realized that one of my professors was a friend of his. To become a teacher – not very convinced about that – I went to Bremen, where I met him again (in the beginning 90s). I, therefore, experienced his style of philosophical practice during different stages of his life. Nevertheless, I never experienced him as a priest, nor did I call, what he did, philosophy. He brought in inspiring ideas, concepts and questions that regularly generated reflection and discussion. Even if all these were near to everyone's existential experience, they were in no way well-grounded, pragmatic stuff – far from it. The soil of everyday life was ventilated with ideas and eye-opening terms. Therefore, it is true to say that this was real philosophical practice with existential relevance.

Ivan Illich compared to other philosophers

Similar to Socrates, Illich could gather dozens of people around him and leave them with new questions, and perhaps even with one or two new terms. Similar to Plato, he founded a school (the CIDOC in Cuernavaca), and even his – unfulfilled – last wish has been the foundation of such a common learning center in Bologna. Like Protagoras, "the human being (was) the measure of all things…"for Illich. If one sees the sophists and especially Protagoras at the start of the influential movement of humanism, one can see Ivan in the last century as one of its fiery defenders. Similar to Wittgenstein, he could reflect things in a cautious, often not easy comprehensible but nevertheless, fascinating, manner. He motivated many others to reflect upon themselves. His reasonable doubts about institutions hindered his ideas being systematically reflected and a big movement of followers becoming stronger and long lasting. In contrast to Plato, he did not leave an edifice of ideas, something his followers could go on to work with. And

again, in contrast to Plato he was not at all convinced that a well-constructed institution like a state could be a solution – he saw it as the beginning of all problems, despite of all good intentions. He believed in the individual human being and in humanity – but he did not believe in progress. Similar to Günther Anders he was convinced that the future, if the ongoing principles of progress lasted, was not at all bright, but rather dominated by some sort of evil, which tends to turn good things into destructive ones.

Philosophy is ongoing philosophizing, and is dynamic. As long as institutionalization is small, this *dynamis* of philosophizing (which is the good of philosophy) remains. The more it becomes institutionalized, the more this *dynamis*, this good is missing. Nevertheless, structures are helpful and institutions allow something like tradition – of text, of ideas etc., if institutions follow the overall aim of conviviality.

One of the central concepts of Illich's thinking is *conviviality*. Whether Ivan was in a dialog with you and others, whether he was developing ideas in a monologic way, whether he was just paying attention to the words of texts or other people – he always emphasized the possibilities everyone had to be part in a mutual event. Its atmosphere was the important factor one could attend to and form at the same time. This spirit of conviviality was – if something – Ivan would have called the most valuable in the dialog and relationship between human beings. Not only between living people, but as well in cautious dialog with already deceased thinkers, whose thoughts in a text may be a similar vineyard for this spirit: needing arduous efforts, but bringing sweet fruits forthwith and even more inspiring beverages.

Gilles Deleuze developed 1969 the concept of *dramatization*; he explained that *dramatization* is the vivification of a concept, which allows that a problem can be imagined and thought. A certain way of is *dramatization* is the *conceptual persona* (Deleuze / Guattari 1991). In his eyes, a philosopher is someone who is creating

concepts and terms and hereby lets a problem show up and offers the possibility of addressing and discussing it. That is exactly what Ivan Illich did: he created some new concepts and corresponding terms, which focused the mind of the reader or listener to see new spheres of problems or connections and enabled them to get into dialog about these.

Next to this, Illich incorporated a way of philosophizing that was extraordinary. He not only gave an idea of the answer to the theoretical questions he showed. He invited everyone in his boat about new questions and thoughts on their way to finding new land. In addition, he became during his lifetime, and after death as well, a *conceptual persona* himself. A *conceptual persona* for – I would say – engaged humanistic philosophical practice.

Ivan Illich's practice of philosophizing (I): inspiring reflection instead of problem-solving

The way Ivan philosophized was dialogical, but first he customarily introduced into a subject and the questions and concepts arising from it. Thereafter, a set of new terms or views on the subject promoted an engaged discussion. I very often call this "engaged" – why? Compared with usual university professors, teachers or instructors the quality and intensity of the discussion was different: he was engaged, but scholars, students and pupils too. It was easy for him to immediately create this existentially touching 'atmosphere of inspiration' which allowed such an engaged dialog. Philosophical practitioners, might be able to admire something like that, but can this example be of some use for us? – I think it can be, if we get into it deeply enough. As a Jesuit Ivan was a well-educated rhetorician, but he had become unsure about his message. Seeing the discrepancy between political, social and pedagogical convictions and the reality of human beings he discovered a context

of delusion, which was carried by abstract administrative and sociological or pedagogical terms and imagination. Illich revealed the dubious effects of certain very common and positive associated terms seemingly describing today's reality and human future aims. But the very questionable terms and concepts like "development" were so deeply rooted in the self-understanding of the cold war society that to question them brought a deep insecurity into people's mind – and it was not easy to let them go. Therefore, it was not sufficient to show the weaknesses and destructive power of terms, but he had to alternatively propose some new concepts, at least.

This is deep-rooted philosophical practice: to find the defining existentially meaningful concepts of a period, question them in an engaged mutual dialog and discuss possible new alternative concepts.[3]

Very often, we experience – personally, in a philosophical consultation or in the mutual reflection of a philosophical café, a discussion group or a seminar – the mind widening and freedom creating effect of a new concept. The space of understanding extends and the possibility of grasping one's own life situation and oneself grows. To promote this experience and therefore, to promote understanding and reflection itself, we have two tools: questions and concepts.

With questions, we do the "negative" work of defining: Does the term fit the concept? What exactly does it mean? What does it not mean? Does it help to gain new knowledge? Is it misleading?

With the concepts, we allow ourselves to discover virgin territory, which allows another realization of our world, and ourselves. That

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[3] That is more than Hegel's "Philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts", because I add "existentially meaningful". The direction of thought therefore is different: Hegel looks from the universal to the particular, whereas the dialog in philosophical practice goes from existentially relevant particular, enriched with a general idea or question, to a more universal level.

is the "positive" side of our work.

Nevertheless, Illich's philosophical practice went deeper: It gave an answer to the question out of which attitude this practice has to grow. To exemplify that he took the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus:

> the primitive world was governed by fate, fact, and necessity. By stealing fire from the gods, Prometheus turned facts into problems, called necessity into question, and defied fate. Classical man framed a civilized context for human perspective. He was aware that he could defy fate-nature-environment, but only at his own risk. Contemporary man goes further; he attempts to create the world in his image, to build a totally man-made environment, and then discovers that he can do so only on the condition of constantly remaking himself to fit it. We now must face the fact that man himself is at stake[4]

This very exactly describes what philosophical practice should be: not problem-solving, but reflection of our life situation from a general point of view. Not creating a man-made environment in our minds, but contemplating its ratio.

Unfortunately, today the overwhelming approach of understand ourselves – not only we as philosophical practitioners but generally – is through the concept of problem-solving. If I reflect on what I do with people in seminars, groups or consultation in philosophical practice, I have to admit that I am not solving any problem and I do not show how to do it. That is not a shortcoming of philosophical practice but its greatest value: to be a space just for reflection on a situation without any need to solve anything. Nevertheless, the solution might be sometimes an unintended effect. Therefore, philosophical practice is completely different to a commonplace understanding of therapy.

There seldom are "safe places" for real reflection in our societies:

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[4]   Ivan   Illich,   *Deschooling   Society*,   1971,   Chapter   7. http://www.preservenet.com/theory/Illich/Deschooling/chap7.html

often reflection is misunderstood as discussion in the sense of exchanging opinions. Sometimes even that is hindered. Nevertheless, the highest we can think of is that people really develop concepts in order to solve all the problems we have – and the number of these problems seems to be overwhelming. But perhaps not problems have to be solved but attitudes to be changed. If this is the case, then all discussions and problem-solving does not really bring forward a *solution* of the situation, which is that the situation *dissolves*, vanishes.

"Problem-solving" might just change the situation a little bit, but altogether the problem gets bigger. Take the example of the CO_2 production per person by using airplanes. In order to reduce that, the kerosene consumption per airplane has been technically reduced, more persons per plane are transported today, the carriage per person has been reduced as well. Because of that, the costs could be reduced as well. However, the result is that today one easily flies somewhere perhaps just for the weekend. This has become widespread and altogether the flight kilometers per person worldwide have increased. For the next 10 years, Boeing and Airbus, the world's biggest airplane producers, have more than full order books. Therefore, the problem of CO_2 production by flights has not been solved at all. Just the opposite: It has become devastating because worldwide kerosene is still exempted from taxation and the attitude to flying has not changed – or if it has changed, than to an even more unreflected attitude.

If reflection is a strong force it does not solve the problem directly: reflection in itself changes attitudes in a subtle way, not by moral sentiments like guilt or fear, not by engineering or new inventions, but by changing the priorities.

Digression: the vernacular lifeworld and the constructed sphere of control

For Deleuze and Guattari the Cartesian Ego is a *conceptual persona*: the Ego that radically doubts everything perceived or guessed and tries to find a solid provable ground – which is the thinking of the self itself and out of which the rest of the world can be reconstructed anew. This concept cannot be explained without depicting this drama – and for a drama an actor is needed, the Cartesian Ego. The dualism of Descartes' ideas has often been bemoaned, but here something else is of importance for us: that the Ego alone is the center of this world and the world becomes an epistemic construction of this Ego and of science. Descartes was one of the most profound philosophers of the beginning modernity and left broad traces in scientific understanding of the world, in technical conceptualization and even in the self-concept of human beings. If Egos are seen isolated and the interconnectedness with others is neglected, if they become individualists, narcissists: what has been lost then?

To grasp that, an understandable and catchy concept is needed. Ivan Illich's proposal is *the commons*. That is what is common to all, common property, public domain, creative commons, but as well reciprocity. It is the form of autonomy which goes well with community. Descartes' Ego is a solipsistic one, conceptualized without any other. Ivan Illich sees the human being as one living in *communities*, and as being interconnected by the institutions of this community and by its *vernacular* language. The *vernacular* – may it be the language or their way of living or their resources – is owned by the people themselves. The state very often is not the adequate institution to support that.

To exemplify this, Illich tells the story of Antonio Nebrija who 1492 handed over the "Gramática Castellana" to Doña Isabella. This grammar book of the Castilian language was the very first

modern Grammar and should be a tool of power, allowing the princess to reign a completely new country, language, and by this reign her whole empire more effectively. Up to today his idea dominates the Spanish thinking: *armas y letras*. The grammatically regulated Castilian Spanish really became the main language in a big part of the world. However, what about the vernacular languages and dialects? They were oppressed or weakened, because they were not used in most everyday life any more, especially not in the important parts. Here only the administrative language indicated the right use and right term.

The result of this is an expropriation: The people are expropriated from their own vernacular language and now they are taught a new language during long school years. Together with that, the vernacular values, always connected with language, become weakened. The power of the centralistic, absolutistic state became strengthened.

The state should be the custodian of its people and its communities. Nevertheless, to support and maintain the commons very often is not in the interest of those persons who govern the state – and very often they follow seemingly attractive concepts which lead into a different direction.

Ivan Illich here goes along with Leopold Kohr and Ernst Friedrich Schumacher: The vernacular resources can only be maintained with the adequate measure, and this is not big, but small and in relation to the common everyday life of human beings, *proportionality*.

If the institutions are expropriating the people, weakening the commons and the vernacular knowledge and abilities, people become dependent on them. Then new institutions are created to meet these "needs" arising from this dependency – but altogether people become even more dependent and expropriated. In the end, they are mainly seen as consumers of the services of these institutions. This administrical view tends to forget about the self-reliance of everyone and about the fact that everyone is an

owner. But in societies where mainly material richness is desirable, other forms of ownership are only seen if they can be used to become materially rich.

A vernacular value, for instance, is that I have something to do with the things I own. It is not necessary that I have made them myself, but they should have a relationship with me and my everyday life. One part of this relationship is that I should be able to repair everyday tools – or at least use them for something else. With most of our electronic equipment, which is closer to us than most other tools for people in older times have ever been, this seems to be impossible. We can just discard them after a while. This is not just ecologically very dubious, it is a further expropriation of the so-called "user" – the IT companies think of the owners of the material, which they produce like absolute kings: We are just allowed to "use" what they present to us. Consequently, they have begun not to sell their products as before but just lease them from year to year. Only these companies – this the idea behind it – are real owners, we are all just users of their services. As one easily sees, the IT trusts took over the administrative ideology of the centralistic, absolute state.

Ivan Illich's practice of philosophizing (II): The house of conspiracy

Let us come back to Ivan Illich's practice of philosophizing. Four new concepts have been explained in the digression: *the commons*, *vernacularity*, *ownership* and *proportionality*. Let us see these as the pillars and *conviviality* as the roof of the house, in which his philosophical practice can take place. If someone understands his or her philosophical practice as convivial, it should support the four pillars as well.

    I.   Everything now is about the way of the philosophical

dialog and the attitude behind it. It has to be COMMON dialog, not dominated by anyone – just inspired by the philosophical practitioner. The others shall be partners in the dialog. S/he shall never become just an expert and solely answering questions, but support the dialog with questions and concepts.

II.   The dialog in philosophical practice may be inspired by philosophical texts and concepts. Nevertheless, what they mean in everyday life has to be grasped. Therefore, the meaning and the dialog has to be transformed from written terms to VERNACULAR language and everyday experiences, so that the existential relation to what the text is about becomes clear.

III.   Ideas and opinions in a dialog are someone's OWN but they don't remain such because, when discussed, they change and come into new light, becoming enriched and more differentiated. Nevertheless, the whole dialog must be conduced in a way that everyone participating can feel it as being one's own dialog, our dialog and not a conversation dominated by just few.

IV.   The PROPORTION of the dialog in philosophical practice has to be one of partnership. Because philosophy itself only functions if everyone sees oneself on the same level. In philosophical practice, when arguing rationally, hierarchy or expertise are not valid categories. Being familiar with Plato and Aristotle and their concepts might be useful – nevertheless, philosophical practice grows from the grassroots. It is not, at least not primarily, an academic approach to a text or a problem; it is a process of common reflection. In it the philosophical practitioner has a special role, but s/he has this is in proportion to the common task, the philosophical dialog. Protagoras was convinced that people in a state themselves could find out what is best for them and did not need special experts for leading them. Ivan Illich shared this view of Protagoras. Therefore, Protagoras' sentence, ''The human person is the measure of all things, the existent, as they are, and the non-existent, as they are not'' also says that the dialog in

philosophical practice has not to be in proportion to some doubtless existing truth, but in proportion to the existential experiences and discernment of the human beings partaking.

V.   Now the roof of our building: These four pillars allow CONVIVIALITY shelter the sphere of philosophical practice. Now an atmosphere of mutuality, confidence and open-mindedness can grow. Philosophizing in a mutual dialog, in such an atmosphere, often implies friendship.

VI.   If we ask, what quality now can emerge in this house, we can with Ivan Illich answer: it is CONSPIRACY.[5] Conspiracy not in the usual malign sense, but in the sense of the exchange of spirit making the philosophizing fellows to a *we*. Out of this mutual situation the spirit of *philia* can emerge, but it is free to do so or not.

Philosophical practice in my conviction has to provide a qualified space in which next to all mental orientation and growing self-

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[5] The following words are cited from Ivan Illich, *The Cultivation of Conspiracy*, a translated, edited and expanded version of an address given by Ivan Illich at the Villa Ichon in Bremen, Germany, on the occasion of receiving the Culture and Peace Prize of Bremen, March 14, 1998. (www.pudel.uni-bremen.de/pdf/Illich98Conspiracy.pdf) "You never know, what will nurture the spirit of *philia*, while you can be certain what will stifle it. Spirit emerges by surprise, and it's a miracle when it abides; it is stifled by every attempt to secure it; it's debauched when you try to use it." (p. 5) "Peace, in this sense, is the one strong word with which the atmosphere of friendship created among equals has been appropriately named. But to embrace this, one has to come to understand the origin of this peace in the *conspiratio*, a curious ritual behavior almost forgotten today." (p. 7) "*Conspiratio* became the strongest, clearest and most unambiguously somatic expression for the entirely non-hierarchical creation of a fraternal spirit in preparation for the unifying meal. Through the act of eating, the fellow conspirators were transformed into a *we*, a gathering which in Greek means *ecclesia*." (p. 9) "Community in our European tradition is not the outcome of an act of authoritative foundation, nor a gift from nature or its gods, nor the result of management, planning and design, but the consequence of a conspiracy, a deliberate, mutual, somatic and gratuitous gift to each other." (p. 9)

understanding this atmosphere of *philia* can be fostered. Not every term Illich used is easy to understand because they are used according to an original meaning or they are used in a much broader sense than usually. That is why I draw this picture of the "house of conspiracy", knowing that Illich himself developed the different concepts and terms used here in different times of his life and never brought them together like this. Nevertheless, I am convinced that my interpretation meets the connection in which they stand. In addition, I am convinced that this "house of conspiracy" can be a rewarding stimulation to our own understanding of philosophical practice.

Taking Ivan Illich's way of philosophical practice as a heuristic tool to better understand what the essentials of philosophical practice are, we now can sum up the following results:

1) Philosophical practice is not art for art's sake but has an **aim**. Illich has conceptualized that aim with the term *conviviality* and later with *conspiracy*, but it is not necessary to adhere to a certain term. In this aim, freedom and community should coexist, that is why many philosophers think philosophy is a hotbed for friendship. Therefore, if someone is doing something which he calls philosophical practice and sells it as a tool to gain benefits for oneself – he has misunderstood its value and aim. If one tries to find its use in something where it cannot be very strong, this form of philosophical practice cannot convince.

2) Corresponding to this aim it has – even if the background and character of the philosophical practitioner modulates it – a certain attitude of open-mindedness and interest for the other, for her or his ideas, concepts, questions and experiences.

3) Along with this goes the conviction that mutual philosophizing is enriching to everyone partaking in the dialog. It builds up a mutual relatedness, respect and insight for the benefit of all humanity.

4) This dialog is a dialog free of domination[6] as a necessary presupposition. The "conspirative" *we* which may emerge remains open and is not the *we* of an in-group, because in-groups are related to power. Conspiracy in Illich's sense, however, is the open-minded spirit of *philia*.

Some actual examples of a similar way of philosophical practice

This comprehensive overview on Ivan Illich's way to practically philosophize with people and on the leading principles of it can be relevant in common philosophical practice today. To show this I want to give some examples and name some experiences out of my own philosophical practice.

I) Every one of us knows the difficulties of moderating a common, mutual dialog. The theme can be too complex, the words too difficult, the questions and ideas too difficult to grasp – and instead of a dialog or polylog it may turn into a question-answer-game between a participant and the philosopher-expert. The complexity of a theme has to be reduced, so that crucial points can be understood, difficult words and terms have to be explained. Common, therefore, means mutual and simple enough. If the philosopher gets the aura of an authority (because of his title, of prominence or because he adopted the master-role in master-pupil-

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[6] in the sense of Jürgen Habermas, who described in an interview the atmosphere the concept of a „discourse free of domination" points to: "Es sind Vorstellungen von geglückter Interaktion. Gegenseitigkeiten und Distanz, Entfernungen und gelingender, nicht verfehlter Nähe, Verletzbarkeiten und komplementäre Behutsamkeiten - all diese Bilder von Schutz, Exponiertheit und Mitleid, von Hingabe und Widerstand steigen aus einem Erfahrungshorizont des, um es mit Brecht zu sagen, freundlichen Zusammenlebens auf. Diese Freundlichkeit schließt nicht etwa den Konflikt aus, sondern was sie meint, sind die humanen Formen, in denen man Konflikte überleben kann." Quelle: www.ztg.tu-berlin.de/download/legewie/Dokumente/Vorlesung_5.pdf

relationships, willingly or unwillingly) the style of the dialog becomes more and more monologic and is not a common dialog any more. To promote this it is essential to see the others as equal partners. For example, I had the experience that university teachers often had more difficulties in moderating a philosophical café because they tended to fall into the role of an expert or master and answered questions instead of nurturing a vivid common dialog.

II) Philosophy has become an academic subject and therefore developed a certain jargon and terminology difficult to understand if one is not accustomed to it. The terminology in most cases is useful because it allows differentiation and more clearer understanding. It is actually the core task of philosophy to find illuminating concepts and terminology. Apart from that, philosophical jargon often is not very useful in philosophical practice and should be transferred into vernacular language. That's easy to say, nevertheless, it means that the philosophical practitioner oneself has fully understood the meaning of the concept and can discern between useful terminology and jargon in the respective context. If so, it is not too difficult to find other words or metaphors or to exemplify them. Therefore, the usage of vernacular language instead of jargon and even the critique of jargon as a means of domination is an ambitious task. Seen from this point of view, to use vernacular language does not mean being less precise. The converse is often true: jargon terminology and seductive administrational or political catchphrases[7] obstruct clear thought. Therefore, vernacular language is very useful in preventing this. I live in Switzerland where the usage of vernacular language – in philosophical cafés as well – is very common. One can easily see the differences: vernacular language is much more personal, one uses everyday words and very few terms and nearly

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[7] see Uwe Pörksen, *Plastikwörter. Die Sprache einer internationalen Diktatur*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1988.

no catchphrases. In standard language it is the other way round: more catchphrases and terms, more opinions, less personal experience is expressed. Both language types have advantages and disadvantages, but one should be conscious of them and more often use vernacular language and think from vernacular experiences.

III) Abstract terms are generalizations and therefore tend to lose contact with the phenomena and experiences themselves. To use them does not necessarily mean that the thoughts expressed with their help are experienced as own thoughts. That is why formulating a thought in one's own way and language is helpful to grasp it and to promote a fruitful dialog. The danger of every dialog is that it can become idle talk. The dialog should be experienced as substantial, and a way to get there is that it should involve own experiences. Another way is that theories and ideas are expressed in one's own language. The third way is to get into own thinking. Normally we just *understand* – what others say or write or how things are – a *reproducing comprehension*. As soon as we really begin to produce own thoughts and follow them, reflection bears fruits and new insights are experienced as own insights. Whereas abstract terms – if the underlying concepts are scarcely understood or if they do not correspond with one's own existence – can easily lead to alienation and can be misused for domination. Own thoughts, concepts and insights make us stronger and invigorate us. In philosophical consultation often values, aims or concepts are a topic. If useful, they can be differentiated, criticized etc. It is important that those are rooted in one's own life and are not just words or more or less empty phrases. That is one of the tasks of philosophical practice: to re-connect living and conceptual thinking in a way that the concepts do not just affect one's life from the outside, but one becomes the owner of one's thoughts and life with

the help of one's own thoughts.[8]

IV) In philosophical discussion groups very often the question arises – in most cases not explicitly – what is the suitable proportion of chatting and philosophizing. In groups, people develop a deep acquaintance with one other, and therefore the tendency to chat about this and that grows. Another question often arising in philosophical practice is the proportion of text and reading and dialogical reflection on the mentioned issues. A third challenge is the right proportion between real reflection on philosophically formulated questions or concepts and rambling conversation associated with them. Seen this way proportionality in philosophical practice is the art of finding a suitable dynamic between focused concentrative reflection and the free, broad flow of conversation. The philosophical practitioner often enough has to tame the wild, free flow of conversation, which sometimes brings about interesting new ideas but frequently just ends in some swamp of side issues.

V) Philosophical practice, especially philosophical consultation easily tends to be misunderstood as philosophically assisted problem-solving of individuals. This instrumental view of our profession is completely misleading. More fitting is a description such as "philosophical analysis of life-situations in order to find new orientation". But this is a narrow specification as well, philosophical practice is a broader profession with its focus on the general implementations of conviviality. Human existence cannot be understood as existence of radically individual beings, because it finds fulfilment in the relationships to other human beings. Philosophical practice therefore always finds its task in creating a space for convivial reflection. Even if, in philosophical

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[8] In a philosophical café, someone told of a Kurdish woman who came to interest herself in philosophy being for a longer time somewhere where internet and smartphone would not work. Therefore, she had to think completely on her own terms.

consultation, the practitioner is alone with just one client, in reflection other people are present. Actually, what is the essence of conviviality in philosophical practice? What is a sign that the fire of conviviality has ignited? – It is humor: if common humor develops, conviviality grows. I once was one week with a philosophical group in a seminar hotel together with other, not philosophizing groups. Once, a woman asked one of our group members: *You must be the philosophers. – Why do you think so?* asked the woman from our group. – *You are laughing all the time.* – Nobody of us had realized before that we were laughing more often than other groups around us, but obviously, it was as the other woman had observed. Mutual philosophizing lets an atmosphere of openhearted conviviality grow, and one indication of that is intensified humor.

VI) From here to conspiracy in philosophical practice it is just a little step further, nevertheless, one big thing is required: time. An ingredient that conspiracy, and at the same time, friendship needs is confidence. Especially this ingredient requires some time to grow. During this time, openness is needed. That sounds clichéd, but it is the most important presupposition. As a philosophical practitioner, one has to be open even against the most peculiar seeming persons and ideas. Philosophy has only one authority: convincing arguments and concepts or questions; status, titles, or a tenure do not count – regarding philosophizing there is no hierarchy or power next to the power of a good argument. Philosophizing is practiced equality. However, it is not easy to get there, because outside this philosophical space hierarchies and differences in appreciation are quite common. To leave these differences and power games outside the door, the philosophical practitioner has to foster the open, non-hierarchical, confident atmosphere Illich describes as conspiracy. Through conspiracy, in Illich's sense, the philosophizing persons become a *we* or even friends. To give an example for that I may tell of a philosophy week which I lead in the Bernese Alps some years

ago: The rest of group had already gathered when a couple arrived. The woman very quickly made clear that she was a merited scientist and had solved a lot of world's problems. The usual reaction would be to throw one's hands up in despair: the week just begins, and one participant from scratch proclaims that she nearly knows everything (or at least much more than all others). How then can we philosophize, lead an open, equal dialog? – But I remembered myself that I really could not judge her merits – perhaps she really had solved a lot of world's problems. Therefore, old Socrates helped me to release the situation. Because as soon as she felt accepted, because I did not doubt her merits, she behaved quite normally and became an uncomplicated member of the group. This spirit of *philia,* which Illich calls conspiracy, is not only a possible outcome of our work as philosophical practitioners, it is a presupposition for its success as well. Because philosophizing is not just discussion – discussion does not necessarily need fair partners, rational arguments and questions. Discussion can be show for a public and often is guided by personal interests. A philosophical dialog needs as presuppositions equality, openness, fairness and mutual acceptance – and if this can really be experienced in the dialog, confidence grows, an atmosphere of conspiracy, a *we*, comes to exist and from this, friendship may develop.

Philosophical practice – that is my conviction growing out of my long years of experience in philosophical practice and out of my analysis of this experience – is increasingly important in a world full of conflicts, power games, distraction and individualism. Because it can make people experience a *we* in which they are individually accepted regardless any personal preconditions.

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