



Richard E. Gordon

Professor of Politics, UC Santa Cruz
1945–1996

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“In Tribute to Richard E. Gordon” by Linda M. Kimball

On March 25, 1996 we lost Richard Gordon, or "Rick" as most of us called him - a great man, a brilliant scholar and teacher, a generous, loyal and appreciative friend, a tremendous lover of life. A professor of politics in the classical sense, Rick was a theorist, an historian, and a comparative analyst who became a major authority on advanced capitalist states and contemporary political economies,

Richard, the elder of two sons of Doug and Bunty Gordon, was born in Melbourne, Australia, on June 2, 1945, After graduating in 1968 from that city's prestigious Monash University with a first-class honors degree, he began his career as a teaching fellow in the politics department. It

was at Monash that Rick discovered the progressive politics that were to influence his scholarly work and political commitment throughout his life,

In 1970, Rick was drawn to America by the presence of Professor Barrington Moore, Jr. at Harvard University, Rick wrote: "It was his magnificent work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. which induced me to leave Australia and seek out its author. As a student in his seminars, I learned the full power of a critically informed historical sensibility."

Coming from Australia on a Fulbright Scholarship with his first wife, Leonie, Rick lived the next seven years in Boston studying and teaching at Harvard and caring for his newborn son while also doing archival research in Europe for his Ph.D, dissertation. At Harvard, he found himself at the core of a group of exceptional young scholars who were deeply influenced by the student politics of the 1960s and who incorporated this experience into their academic research, intellectual commitment, and professional identity. Congregating at Harvard's Center for European Studies, these scholars were to transform the entire discipline of comparative western politics during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In 1977, in the midst of completing his seminal 673-page doctoral dissertation on "Pre-Capitalist Social Formations and the Transition to Industrial Capitalism" - an analysis of feudalism, rural industrial modes of production, and the agrarian economies and political states of Britain, Germany, and France in the late 18th century - Richard Gordon began to teach comparative politics at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). Though the dissertation was accepted "as is" by Cambridge University Press, its publication was postponed by Rick's own insistence on perfecting the manuscript. His new enthusiasm to monitor the rapid and revolutionary changes generated by the burgeoning high technology industry centered only 30 miles away in Silicon Valley became a permanent distraction, however, and the Cambridge book never reached publication.

At the time, only a handful of people were studying the high technology industry. While America was mesmerized by its technical wizardry, venture capital, and entrepreneurial genius, Rick realized that its social, political, economic, and geographic impacts would be more profound and long-reaching. In 1979, Rick started the Silicon Valley Research Group (SVRG) with a small collection of faculty and students to give it the attention he felt it deserved. Under his leadership, the SVRG staged numerous conferences, workshops, and an extensive series of working papers and research projects. He was a constant catalyst for broadening and deepening people's perspectives.

Rick gave a unique unorthodox twist to everything the group did by bringing unlikely combinations of people together to exchange ideas and work. Conferences and workshops were deliberately diverse, involving participants from labor, management, local and national policy arenas, as well as academia. He encouraged students to investigate, present and publish their own papers, helping them achieve unusually high standards. And as time went on,

research projects attracted collaborators from abroad, throughout Europe, Japan, and eventually South Africa.

"Without his talent for cross-fertilization, these activities would simply not have happened. Rick brought an international and historical perspective few of us native-born Americans had. He was one of the scholars who shaped our understanding of high technology and its impact. " Professor Harley Shaiken, University of California, Berkeley

For more than 10 years, Rick dedicated himself to international research collaborations. After he and the late Philip Aydalot met in Santa Cruz in 1985, a sustained scientific collaboration ensued with the Group de Recherche Europeen sur le Milieux Innovateur (GREMI). Only four weeks before Rick's death he was still helping to translate and edit articles for GREMI's latest book, *The Dynamics of Innovative Regions* (Ashgate). Rick was very enthusiastic about an introduction he was writing for that book, but unfortunately his illness prevented him from transcribing his handwritten notes onto the computer.

For Rick, it was an exceptional honor to be the primary "American" contributor to otherwise all-European teams. He was delighted to find that European colleagues truly appreciated his contributions and that they weren't looking for simple answers to complex questions.

"Richard was very good inter-culturally. American professors tend to see Europe through American glasses, but Richard knew the proper attributes of each European society. He was a wonderful combination of Australian and Californian. " Professor Franz Lehner, President, Institute for Work and Technology, Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Collaborative research continued to be central to Rick's vision of academic life. He also co-founded GLOBE, an international global production research team. It was through research and theoretical debates with GREMI and GLOBE members that Rick came up with some of his most brilliant formulations about globalization, innovation, production systems, and territorial networks. Through GLOBE, he developed the concepts of "social innovation" and "problem-solving growth" and contributed some of his most original work on "human-centered" production systems and the future of industry in Europe for the European Union's FAST (Forecasting and Assessment in Science and Technology) Program. According to GREMI members, his ideas and comparative findings enhanced GREMI's theorization of the operation of milieu effects and local synergies in Europe. His early discovery and deep understanding of the workings of strategic alliances among firms became a major pillar in our understanding of the way trans-territorial innovation networks function to overcome the limits of local competence, linking local dynamics with global evolutionary forces. Concurrently, his research on Silicon Valley and other U.S. high technology regions demonstrated, among other things, the increasing impact of extra-regional relationships on territorial learning processes and economic development.

In the last few years of his life he was authoring two books of his own: one on "the collaborative economy," presenting a new theory of comparative state policy alternatives and the political economy of innovation, production and globalization; the other, a definitive book on the regional development of Silicon Valley. And there was a third in progress with his GLOBE partners on global production and the future of industry in Europe.

"Rick's work consistently shed light on this immensely complex construct called capitalism with all its advantages and disadvantages, above all in its constant flux and metamorphosis. In doing this in a deeply informed historical context and with a broad comparative and theoretical base, he actively entered the major theoretical debates about capitalism in contemporary political science, sociology, economics and geography. "

Professor Andrei Markovits, University of California, Santa Cruz

Rick's recent policy work was driven by a passionate desire to understand and convey the complex dynamics of our world economy. His purpose was to guide us towards a sensible, democratic, and sustainable path for regional economic development on a global scale. For one of GLOBE's reports he writes:

In order to pursue innovation and sustain growth, regional economies can no longer be self-contained, as many current models assume, but, instead, must extend their connections with the global economy. On the one hand, industrial regions are compelled to integrate with global production networks as an essential component of the regional innovation process itself. On the other hand, global production networks must valorize, rather than simply exploit, specific regional attributes in their search to forge new logics of innovation. Globalization in this context involves not the leavening impact of universal processes but a calculated synthesis of cultural and regional diversity on a global scale. Positive-sum linkages between global networks (offinns) and specific regional innovation capacities provide new opportunities for the joint advancement of new innovation and production regimes.

There was an extraordinarily deliberate thoroughness, care, and high standard with which Rick approached everything - whether it was in interactions or lectures with his students, writing their evaluations or recommendations, or engaging in his own work and friendships. This is why he often took longer to finish things. For him it was audacious, presumptuous, and even disrespectful to take short cuts. Time was precious, but for him, truth was more precious than time.

A thoroughly disciplined scholar, he always surveyed and engaged every angle on a subject before formulating his own, usually masterful, synthetic perspective. He especially resisted over-simplification, commanding the highest synthetic ground, one that usually shifted the debate entirely. His brilliantly critical mind always had a way of seeing contradictions, limitations, and even outcomes long before anyone else did. The fun part was experiencing his effervescent enthusiasm once he figured something out and began to explain it.

It could be agonizing keeping up with his demanding work ethic. He felt that if he could work that hard, so could his co-workers. Of course, he often found himself in naturally disappointing situations, having to do the bulk of other people's work at the last minute. This happened with me at times and with numerous others where there was a common responsibility at stake. Though he wasn't explicit about it, there was no point in the exercise if you weren't uncovering the truth. This required "doing things properly," and so few knew how to do this as well as him.

Rick was acutely aware that his high standards, generosity, and "co-dependent" behavior often came at the sacrifice of completing his own individual books. Given his sudden and unexpectedly premature end, he realized that to have accomplished what he wanted, he would have needed to be a lot more selfish. However, selfishness was against his nature and his spirit.

In the last years of his life, he was extremely pleased to find collaborators like Roberto Camagni in GREMI and Tony Charles and Franz Lehner of the GLOBE project really "pulling their weight," both in the substance of their ideas and in the work they did. He had a tremendous affection for these colleagues. It is primarily through his work with them that Rick was reaching new levels of productivity and coming closer to completing his own books.

One might wonder what drove Rick. Those close to him knew that he was genuinely driven by a passion for democracy, truth, and human justice. The commitment to their attainment underpinned everything he did. He always brought people together to facilitate change. His leadership, collaborative style, and progressive politics are traceable to his native roots in Melbourne, where at Monash University he co-founded the Australian chapter of the New Left in the 1960s which spearheaded the student protest movement against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. His first book, *The Australian New Left, Critical Essays and Strategy* (Heinemann, 1970), emerged from this experience.

More recently, Rick's dedication to social justice was rewarded by the opportunity to give a series of lectures in Natal, South Africa at the University of Durban-Westville in 1994, closely following the presidential victory of Nelson Mandela. He was especially delighted to join his son Nicholas, who was there at the time following the democratic process as a Harvard student studying abroad. Rick left a lasting impression among South Africans with his fresh and powerful ideas on globalization, innovation, and economic policy alternatives for the nation. His warm enthusiasm, comradeship and compassion for the struggles for social justice were affectionately appreciated, and his return was enthusiastically requested for subsequent years. Unbeknownst to him, Rick's second visit in 1995 was his last professional experience abroad (followed by our enormously enjoyable adventures in Zimbabwe on safari and white water rafting down the Zambezi River) although he had others planned just weeks before his death.

"Rick always represented to me an engaging and embracing of the future as well as a cherishing and celebrating of the otherwise everyday things in life, with an undiminished sense of fun. We'll remember his laugh, his sense of the ridiculous, his critical sense

always able to discriminate between what was genuinely new and what was bombast. To encounter his view of things, which was very far from uncritical, made the future exhilarating, welcoming and worth embracing. " Professor Gareth Steadman-Jones, Center for History and Economics, Cambridge University

The untimely death from cancer of this debonair, yet rigorous character, tragically leaves his most ambitious work unfinished. Colleagues and co-workers, and especially Rick himself, felt that he was just approaching the pinnacle of his career. Nonetheless, he confronted his sudden illness and astonishing death not with self-pity, but with outstanding courage and lucidity. This Tribute or Festschrift represents an expression of honor, admiration, and affection for our beloved colleague, and hopes to extend, if only slightly, his grand intellectual, educational, and political influence. I think Rick would be deeply moved by this tribute. Knowing his modesty, however, his appreciation undoubtedly would be masked by embarrassment and captured by some witty ironic remark.

On Rick's behalf, I want to thank Martin Carnoy, whose idea it was to approach Competition and Change about publishing this special issue in honor of my husband. Without Martin's co-editorship and continual encouragement, I could not have done my part. Our thanks extend to: Rich Appelbaum and Jeff Henderson of Competition and Change for their support and patience, and for providing the perfect venue for featuring topics that were near and dear to Rick in recent years; to all our contributors for enthusiastically accepting our invitation; and to all of Rick's friends, loved ones and colleagues who helped make his work so enjoyable and meaningful for him. We are sorry there wasn't space to include everyone who may have wanted to contribute. I am also grateful to Rick's friends Warren Osmond in Australia, Roberto Camagni in Italy, Remigio Ratti and Gaston Gaudard in Austria, Stephen Bornstein in Canada, Peter Euben, Jack Schaar, and Andy Markovitz in Santa Cruz, and to his son Nicholas and former wife Leonie for the splendid tributes they all worked on for other occasions and providing material for this one. And lastly, I want to thank Rick - my husband, my colleague, my teacher, my dearest lover and friend - for his inspiration to live on, have fun, do right by others, and be the best one can be.

Linda M. Kimball

Postscript A memorial fund has been created to host an annual lecture and to foster graduate scholarship-in Rick's name. Contributions may be sent to: The Richard Gordon Memorial Fund c/o Politics Board of Studies University of California, Santa Cruz Santa Cruz, CA 95064 USA