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# PEDAGOGY

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## **Anthropology and Pedagogy: An Interview with Bill Maurer**

SC: Well, maybe you could start by describing what classes you teach.

BM: I teach an introduction to anthropology class which has between 400 and 500 students in it. It's a large lecture class with required discussion sections that are led by TAs, like Jennifer. What I try to do in that class is to get the students as involved as I possibly can. You know, have activities even during the lecture just so they stay focused, pay attention, and keep coming. My biggest fear always is that as the quarter goes on fewer and fewer people will show up.

SC: Are they mostly anthropology majors or is that a general education course?

BM: It's basically a general education course. It counts as a distribution requirement for the undergraduates. So almost everybody in there is taking it to fulfill one of the distribution requirements.

SC: And when you say, "you want to keep them coming." For you personally what is the important point of this course? Are you trying to recruit people into the major? Are you trying to [just] expose them to anthropology?

BM: It's all of that. I'm trying to recruit but it's not a major that a lot of people are going to be drawn towards simply because they don't know how it's going to make them money later in life. I figure if I can get eight to ten people interested then I've succeeded. If they go on to another class in anthropology even, that's great. You know, as far as general education goes, it's probably one of the only classes they're going to get where they're really encouraged to do some critical thinking about the kind of world we live in today. And that might sound really harsh to say about other classes, but a lot of other classes are simply "read the text books, learn the terminology, get a general sense of a particular field of study," and the boundaries of the field are always really tightly drawn. Like "this is political science" and "this is what we're learning now." And I don't approach the anthropology class that way. I could care less if they come out with the definition of anthropology; what I'm really interested in is that they come out with some tools that they can use. I really like it when I have the students tell me things like, "You've ruined everything for me. I can never watch another movie the same way again, you've totally ruined it." Or, "I used to love that movie and now I see all these things in it and it drives me crazy." That's what I'm aiming for.

Another thing, and this is also sort of terrible to say, but in the U.S. and in the social sciences and in other disciplines as well, the sort of common sense knowledge that's out there in the world about how human beings behave is totally biologically reduc-

tionist. I mean, sociobiology reigns supreme. Everybody thinks that everything is an adaptive behavior, and it's all about the dim mists of evolutionary time. And how people get mates to reproduce to "carry forth the species" and if we don't do that then there won't be any more humans, and all that sort of stuff. A lot of what I try to do in that class, basically, is to inoculate them against that way of thinking, and to let them see that the world is a lot more complicated than any kind of reductionist argument, biological or otherwise, would let you grasp. And just to give them handy one-liners they can use when they are faced with that kind of stuff. For example if you teach them a little bit about genetics, you can teach them that genes don't work the way that popular science and popular media tell us they work. So I have them read stuff by geneticists who say "genes don't work that way." And saying, "genes don't work that way" is a really nice catch phrase that they can memorize and take with them. I don't know how many of them do take it with them, but that's the idea. That's why I try to keep them coming.

SC: So you have a kind of political goal, right?

BM: Yeah, yeah, but it's a political goal now in the 90s and in the "00s." Twenty years ago that would not have been a political goal, right? Twenty years ago that would have just been general education. But general education has changed so much. I think. Kids used to really learn history and were learning languages and were given ways to think about the world, to now where everything is geared towards getting skills to get a job. I think there has been a real transformation in the mission of education, especially public education, from creating citizens to creating employees. So, yes, today what I'm doing is political but it shouldn't be—

SC: And what are the students like age-wise, ethnically, etc.?

BM: The students are seventeen to twenty-two. There are some older students at UCI, but they're mostly college-age kids who are coming for their four-year degree. Ethnically, UC Irvine is incredibly diverse. Well over 50% of the students speak English as a second language. Around 60-64% are Asian or Asian-American, in which [are] lumped groups like Azeris, South Asians, Armenians, Persians, and so on. So it's just not East Asia but all of Asia. And of the Asian-Americans, we have more Koreans, Vietnamese, Filipinos than we do Chinese and Japanese. Chinese might be a close second after Koreans. It's a very different mix than you have at say Berkeley or other universities, mainly because of histories of immigration and whether those play into class. We have more working-class kids who are from later waves of immigration, who are more likely to be Vietnamese or Cambodian. We don't have very many third generation Japanese-Americans or third- or fourth-generation Chinese-Americans. It's mostly first generation Koreans and Vietnamese.

SC: And how well prepared are they academically?

JH: Mixed bag.

BM: It's a very mixed bag. I've had people at UCI who are better than the best Stanford students I've ever taught and I've had people beyond horrible. I think basically you get the entire range.

JH: What other classes do you teach?

BM: I taught once a survey course in Peoples and Cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean. I also do a course called "Law and Modernity" which is an undergraduate class, upper division. It's in the anthropology of law and it also draws a lot of people from the Criminology, Law and Society department over in the school of Social Ecology. Then I teach Social Science 11 which is called "Global Interdependence I: Origins." It is part of a required three-course sequence for undergraduate International Studies majors. The first course, which I do, "Origins," is to give them some background in the origins of the current global order. So basically my job is to teach them feudalism, capitalism, colonialism, and nationalism. Again, giving them a tool kit. In the second quarter, they have a course that deals mostly with the twentieth century and mostly with the rise of international institutions and organizations. That has a political science focus. The third quarter is called the Global Economy. It's supposed to be your basic "what is the World Trade Organization, what is GATT, what is the globalization of finance all about," that sort of thing. At the graduate level I teach a seminar called Law, Colonialism, and Nationalism. And then finally I teach the first of a three quarter graduate proseminar sequence which is on the History of Anthropological Theory. One quarter I did a reading group that I called Alternative Modernities. We did about three or four weeks of readings on the idea of modernity and alternative modernities—basic cultural studies and anthropology literature. And then we tried to find readings from modern traditions in the west that didn't "win," if you know what I mean. So we looked at things like various millennial movements, we looked at scientology, we looked at UFO cults, we looked at a lot of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stuff, sort of counter-Enlightenment traditions.

SC: What are your goals in each of these classes?

BM: You know, I don't really think that I teach my undergraduate or my graduate classes that differently. In the graduate classes I lean on the students a lot more to be ready to discuss and bring issues to the table, but in the smaller undergraduate classes I do the same thing. So, you know, I guess the difference and expectation has to do with the kind of work that they're going to produce out of the class. Part of the goal of the undergraduate classes is just helping people learn how to think and write, to be citizens in the broadest sense of global citizenship. I think the goal with the graduate classes is much more about creating professionals. I want them to know how to think and write but I want them to be able to write stuff that eventually could turn into an article or things that will help them map out their dissertation project or the essays they have to write for the oral exams.

SC: How does your understanding of what a global citizen is or ought to be inform your understanding of what you are teaching?

B: At both the undergraduate and graduate level?

SC: Well, I suppose at both levels. But you mentioned that, you said that for graduates it's more trying to help them become professionals in the field.

B: Yeah, but I also feel, I guess there's a connection...but with undergraduates, I feel there is both more and less at stake. There's more at stake because this might be the

only chance they get to have any of this sort of critical thinking. There's less at stake because I'm only going to see them once, probably. I'm not responsible for their professional careers or professional development. Whereas for the graduate students, it's not just about professional development, in the sense of making them into anthropologists, it's also about teaching them to be colleagues and "workers," like in the sense of people who know how to get things done, people who understand that being a professional academic is only a teeny bit about big ideas and brilliance and writing. It's much more about administration, planning, organizing, and creating spaces for collegial interaction. It's more important to teach a graduate student how to create a space for collegial interactions, in some ways, than it is to teach them how to do the interaction itself. I think very often, you can interrupt me, but I think very often graduate students get this thing in their heads that they need to be the most brilliant, most stellar, most stunning, have the most original idea and very often that means not being a nice person. And not being willing to contribute to a broader project or a mission, even if the mission is just organizing a potluck or something. I like to try to use the classroom a little bit to teach them to be good colleagues.

SC: So do you say, "Okay you guys, this quarter we have to organize a pot luck?"

BM: I've done that. The first graduate class I ever taught at Stanford, when I was teaching there, was like that. I gave them a project. I said, "Look, by the end of the quarter you all are going to organize a show for the department. You're going to put on an event and we're going to work on it together this whole quarter." The event was going to be about pedagogy and teaching. It was a teaching practicum that I taught and it was really successful. They learned how to work together and they got over some of the conflicts they had amongst themselves. I've had a couple of occasions where I've had to actively intervene and tell people, "No, the way you're acting is not an appropriate way to act in a graduate seminar. You can't tell people off or roll your eyes when someone is speaking." I've had to have a couple of conversations where I explained to people that it doesn't actually make you look smart if you put people down. It just makes you look like a jerk. And you don't want to have the people who are your colleagues in graduate school think you are a jerk because these people are your most important support network for the future.

JH: You've talked a lot about graduate school and teaching and professionalization. I was wondering if you could say more about your goals for undergraduates.

BM: You know, it's also about being a nice person. For example, trying to teach them about the complexity of the world and that there aren't any easy answers and not to rush to judgment, you know? To sit back and think, "Hey, wait a minute, you know, maybe I don't have all the answers."

SC: But do you find that they tend to be judgmental?

BM: Oooh yeah.

SC: I guess I'm wondering politically, where are they coming from?

BM: They're from all over the place. I would say that they're mostly moderately conservative. On the other hand, because of ethnic, racial, and class mix, once they're given

certain tools, I think they learn to see things differently. There may be people in the room who vote Republican, for instance, but those very same people understand that the Republican party in California is a hindrance to their efforts to get a university education. So even if they are going to vote for George Bush, they probably didn't vote for Pete Wilson. So even if they're moderately conservative about certain issues, like gender or sexuality or religion, and over 50% of them are probably fundamentalist [Christian] of some sort, they still have an understanding that even though they're fundamentalist Christians, no fundamentalist church in the South would have them, so they have their own organizations.

SC: What do you do to get the students involved and to get them thinking along these lines?

BM: For every lecture, I have to have a gimmick. There has to be some thing that keeps them awake during the lecture, keeps them interested, and forces them to make connections that they wouldn't otherwise make. A lot of these things are borrowed from colleagues that I had here and there. For instance, [in] my very first [introduction to anthropology] lecture, which is a "what is culture" lecture, I give them the Geertzian culture concept, that culture is a system of meaning embodied in symbols. And I ask them, "Well, what's a symbol? Give me some examples of symbols." And they always shout out things like the flag or a cross or something like that.

JH: A ring.

BM: A wedding ring. And we talk about those for a bit. And then I hold up a toothbrush. And, this is completely stolen from my first undergraduate anthropology class. We talked about how a toothbrush is a cultural symbol. It signifies hygiene and standards of beauty and all those sorts of stuff, crystallized in one object. Then what I do over the course of the next five minutes of lecturing about "what are symbols" is I start undressing. This is the very first class of the quarter, and I come wearing a suit and tie, and I give them this little story about [how] I know that they're all trying to figure out what sort of professor I am, and how are they doing that? One of the ways they are doing that is by looking at how I move, how I talk, and how I dress. After that I say to them something like, "What if I start breaking the rules?" And I take off my tie. I talk more, and I'm continually taking off clothes to reveal a completely different outfit underneath, like jeans and a t-shirt and a leather jacket or something, which totally changes the way that I look. And they go crazy, right? All you have to do is *something*, you don't have to do much to get them going. When I just start taking off the tie, people go crazy!

SC: Like what, you get cat calls, and—?

BM: I get cat calls and screams and cheers and laughter. I'm doing something that the professor's not supposed to do.

SC: So does it sort of create a mutual conspiracy, in a way?

BM: Totally!

JH: Yeah! That's a great way of putting it. I think that's linked to empowering the students in a certain way, breaking the rules, and through that empowerment, and saying, let's

break the rules together. That's what we're here to do.

SC: So you're inviting them to break the rules?

JH: Exactly.

SC: Your violating the rules in turn invites them to question the rules and to violate rules?

BM: What's sort of sad about it is that the way that that manifests itself is that they ask questions. And that's what's so pathetic about the whole thing. It shouldn't be a big deal when a student in a 450-seat lecture hall has a question and raises their hand and asks it, right? But it's unheard of. By mid-way through the course to the end, I routinely have students ask questions from the back row. And that's great! It's ridiculous it doesn't happen in other classes. This is the thing. There are some people who I've heard go on and on and on and say, "Look, it's like the MTV generation. they want to be entertained, well, we're not in the business of entertaining, we're in the business of teaching, dammit! Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I think that's total laziness. I'm the MTV generation too. I have a short attention span. If I'm going to get myself through a lecture I have to give that's an hour and 20 minutes long it better be fun! And it [had] better matter! You know? The people who say they want to be entertained and [are] not in the business of entertaining are really saying, at some level, "I know that what I have to teach them doesn't matter, or I don't care about it."

SC: So, what else do you do? What are some of your other gimmicks?

JH: The ritual.

BM: The ritual. When we're talking about magic and religion and ritual, the TAs do a ritual. They plan it in advance and have candles and bells and just sort of do antics. chanting and walking around the lecture hall.

SC: How does this work, though?

BM: (laughing) I have no idea.

SC: (to JH) Maybe you'd want to describe this—

BM: It just sort of happens!

SC: Do you go into class and go, "We are now going to hold a ritual"?

BM/JH: No, no, no, no, no!

SC: So you're up there lecturing—

BM: I'm up there lecturing and all of a sudden—

JH: —we come in. We come in after he does; we're all dressed in black. We have candles and we have bells. We weren't allowed to do incense—fire codes.

SC: So they have no idea this is going to happen?

JH: No, they have no idea it's going to happen.

SC: They're sitting listening to a lecture, and you're talking about religion and the theory of religion.

- BM: Yeah, basically the whole thing is Malinowski. [He] talks about how religion helps us deal with uncertainty, right? And every time I say the word “uncertainty”—
- JH: —we ring bells.
- BM: They ring bells. And it’s a catch phrase, right? They need to learn the catch phrase.
- JH: Right. And they need to have concrete examples of how it works. And the TAs actually do this little thing where they’re like, “We’re doing this because we don’t know what grades you’re going to get and we want you all to get A’s.”
- BM: And it sort of ropes them in. It gets the students involved.
- SC: So the catch phrase in this case is, “Religion helps us deal with uncertainty.”
- JH: Well, the word “uncertainty.”
- SC: But what you’re hoping to get out of this is that they interrogate their own ideas about what a religious system is.
- BM: Yes. It’s in the context of the lecture about magic, science, and religion. They read Malinowski because I always have them read primary stuff instead of textbooks because textbooks are stupid. And Malinowski’s whole thing is that magic and science are a lot more similar to each other than either is to religion. That magic and science are things that people use when they actually think they have some control over the world. And religion is what they use when they don’t think they have any control. So the thing is to get them thinking both about religion but also about magic, because most of them do things with religion that Malinowski would call magic, right? Such as a cross dangling from the dashboard or whatever. You know. They think they can somehow manage the uncertainty of driving on the freeway if they have their lucky rabbit’s foot.
- SC: So you’re also trying to get them to interrogate science as possibly a magical or religious system?
- BM: Exactly. Because the next thing that we do then is talk about science, and they read ethnographies of scientists.
- SC: And so how do they respond to all this?
- JH: They love it!
- BM: They love it. They love it! I think that people who are really invested in science are more flipped out than people invested in their religion. That stuff really strikes a chord. [They have been trained to believe in] real facts, answers, [that] there’s always an answer, [that] physics isn’t cultural. I’ve used Sharon Traweek’s book *Beamtimes and Lifetimes*, which is an ethnography of physicists, and she has these senior scientists saying things like, “Oh, come on, the only people who believe in real facts in the world are undergraduates.” I mean, this totally disparaging tone, it’s really jarring. I also use that book not just to teach about science but also about universities and the educational system, because Traweek really does a nice job of showing the way that the educational system [produces not] physicists but people who are willing to accept unquestioningly.



- SC: So is this sort of like consciousness-raising, in a way?
- BM: I give them Paulo Freire without naming him. Basically, they learn the banking model of education, and other models of education.
- SC: So are you explicit with them about your goals and why you're trying this differently?
- BM/JH: Yup, yup.
- SC: What do you convey to them about your expectations of them? Because I would imagine as a student, being told "This is going to be different from what you know" could be scary.
- BM: The very first day, I give them a little lecture that's actually written on the syllabus about how this course could be profoundly unsettling to you and really disturbing and really scary but we also hope it'll be exciting, and anthropology always challenges our assumptions and that can make you feel ungrounded and confused and that's a good thing. Far better to be confused than to think you have all the answers and be wrong.
- SC: How much do you think what you're doing is linked directly to anthropology? Have recent critiques of anthropological theory sort of opened the space to do the kind of thing that you're doing?
- BM: I think it's both recent critiques of anthropology as a discipline, and that anthropology is one of the few spaces left [in the university] where you can do stuff that's not about corporate training. It's one of the few spaces left for general education. For instance in Social Science 11, which is an international studies course, but is basically taught as an anthropology course, they read *King Lear*. And we use *King Lear* to talk about the transition from feudalism to capitalism. They're probably not going to read any Shakespeare anywhere else. Which is really ridiculous. And you know I'm not one to defend the canon. But there's a lot to be said for reading books and plays, and if I can give them a little bit of it, I think that's a good thing. If you look at my syllabi, it's not all anthropologists on the syllabus. It's all sorts of things. I think it's both that anthropology has that freedom now, and that few other places in the university have that freedom anymore. I sort of wonder what's going to happen with political science as a field, since there's no more cold war for them to worry about, and bombs and rockets aren't the order of the day, and rational choice theory is kind of on the outs, I think, political science is ripe for the kind of reconceptualization that anthropology went through a while ago. I don't think it has the same kind of attachment to the "Real" that, say, sociology does—the Real with a capital R—sociology is always going to have the General Social Survey to play with. But political scientists seem to be talking about something at a higher level of abstraction than that. So I wonder. Or an interdisciplinary field like international studies or international relations. It would be really interesting to see where that goes.

Another really important problem is that there are a lot of people [who see themselves as] "the teacher." And the TAs are TAs. And the TAs assist. That's not how I do it at all. The TAs are co-conspirators, the TAs are co-authors of the course, and I would not be able to do the classes that I do without having that kind of approach to the TAs.

Because I'd just be too scared. Quite literally. When you're in front of 400 people you don't know what they're going to be like. What's sort of fun is to show the students the kind of relationship that you have with the TAs. If you can show them that we're all part of a team here, then I think that you don't get students trying to pull fast ones and also you get them having a little bit more respect for the class.

SC: Do you see a connection between the theory that you're trying to teach or the ideas or whatever that you're trying to teach, and this method? Obviously they're very interconnected.

BM: Oh yeah, they're totally interconnected.

SC: So would you characterize your teaching approach as part of the move in anthropology in terms of connecting form and content, etc. etc.?

BM: Exactly.

SC: I wonder why that step hasn't been taken more.

BM: Look, I mean, people will say to me things like, "Oh well, you know, my teaching is the lowest priority this quarter, I'm just doing so much other work." Whereas to me, in the quarters when you're teaching, that's what you're doing. At a research university, you get time off, you get teaching reductions. Even if you don't have one coming to you, you can always get something, somehow. And to me, I want to use that. In the quarters when I'm not teaching, I'm not teaching. I'm doing research and writing. In the quarters [that] I'm teaching, therefore, I'm teaching. And that's it. And maybe a side benefit is that the quarters when I'm teaching one of the things I'm doing is trying out ideas with the students and the TAs and the grad students, which I'm going to be able to incorporate into my writing. For instance, in the fall quarter, we did this King Lear stuff. And last quarter, I wasn't teaching, but I was using some of the thinking I did doing King Lear to work on some writing about accountancy, accounting forms, and alternative systems of accounting in Islamic banking. So in this paper I'm working on right now, I start with King Lear. I start with the beginning, when Lear is partitioning his kingdom to his daughters and he wants them to quantify their love in monetary terms, and the two slimy daughters do it, and Cordelia, the good daughter, refuses. King Lear says, "What will you give for your share of the kingdom? How much love will you give?" And she says, "Nothing." And he flips out. He's like, "Nothing??" And she says, "Nothing." Finally he says, "Nothing will come of nothing." This whole part the students act out and we talk about double entry book-keeping. We talk about zero and how troubling it was for people in the Renaissance to think about [the concept of] absolute nothing. Also [we want to think about] how modern forms of currency that were coming into being then seemed to be able to reduce things into each other without remainder, right? Which was SCARY! Anyway, all of that teaching is coming home now as I try to write, and I'm finding myself going back to my lecture notes to help me write. I think that people don't get that. People just think, "Okay, teaching is this thing that we do to put meat on the table." That loops back to what I was saying about the graduate students. I really don't want to teach graduate students that teaching is this thing you do to put meat on the table and your research is the "real stuff." Because I think that a lot of graduate students,

in an effort to be brilliant, poo-poo teaching.

**JH:** When you're putting together a class, how do you think of all these different layers and make it all work?

**BM:** Partly it's post-hoc. I throw stuff together that I think will work but I'm not quite sure. I always have a vague idea that it's going to work and that [certain] themes will continue to loop back throughout the quarter. I rely on the TAs to pick up on stuff I might have missed, and figure out ways of connecting things. That's another thing too, I "use" quote, end quote my TAs very differently from other people. Other people go in and give their lecture and the TAs come up with the quizzes, exams etc. and do all the grading and that's that. The professor really doesn't know what the TA's are doing in section. Whereas I try to plan out with the TAs what we are going to do from week to week, both in lecture and in section. So we're planning the sections together as well.

**JH:** Another thing that works well is the fact that all the thinking is done either out loud or explicitly, so that's where the students pick up the tools to do this themselves. And the undergraduates see us thinking through it. So it validates their process.

**BM:** And it makes it more interesting. Because the other way of teaching is, "I am the professor. I have knowledge. Knowledge is in textbooks. You will read textbooks. You will listen. You will repeat." And so they think, "Okay. It's mysterious how the professor got the knowledge. Ah-hah! It must have come from memorizing the textbook. I will now memorize the textbook. And I will either fail or succeed."

**JH:** "And then I will have the knowledge."

**BM:** "And then I will have the knowledge." And that's just crap. They have to understand that learning is not a solitary affair, they have to understand that dialogue is totally essential. They have to realize that everyone is always working stuff out.

**JH:** And that's why I think this freaks out the science students the most. Because their whole life right now is based on memorizing the molecules or whatever, and that's what's going to get them the job and that's what's going to make them a real person.

**BM:** And the thing too, what's so frustrating is that, again, going back to those physicists, for whom the scientific method is a method. Just a method. A method that is really cool for lots of things but just a method. It's not going to give you eternal truth. Science is all about provisional knowledge, not about final knowledge. And that is not communicated to them at all. We're just taking the gamble, "Tell them now." I think that's why some of the more religious students actually understand it better. Some of them come from faiths that really place a heavy emphasis on exegesis, discussion, and interpretation.

**SC:** To whom is this particular approach threatening?

**BM:** I think the way people are able to *not* feel threatened is by doing the whole, "Well, teaching just isn't my thing. I'm too busy thinking great thoughts." Or, "Whatever, he's just got gimmicks, he's just got tricks. He's young and energetic and he'll burn out." But see, but the thing is... Renato Rosaldo has this little article somewhere called something like, "The New Students Don't Get the Old Jokes." And that really

impacted me. I think that that's part of the problem. A lot of people who do have more engaging teaching styles are still using the old jokes, they're still doing the old gimmicks. And what are the old gimmicks? Sports metaphors. Football analogies. Talking about the game. Talking about women. And I think the trick is to think about, what are the new jokes?

In California especially and at UCI within the UC system, the new jokes are about being flipped out all the time, in a good way. I can't imagine what the life of a UCI undergraduate must be like. Because, for example, you're a first-generation Vietnamese, you've just talked your parents into letting you live on campus. Your roommate is an Orthodox Muslim woman in hijab, who wears Armani underneath. The guy next door is a surfer who rooms with a Wiccan and—you know what I mean? It's really out of control!

JH: It's really crazy, sometimes.

BM: It's really crazy. And there's a real energy from that. And I think that's what the new jokes are. The new jokes are, "there are different kinds of people..."

JH: These strange juxtapositions of things that you don't normally expect.

BM: Exactly. There's stuff you don't get right next door [to you].

JH: —and that you'll never get. But we try to get them to say, "You can get it. But look what it's showing us when you do get it. What are the new forms? What do the new punch lines of these jokes tell us? How do they make sense to us in our world?"

BM: And in a way, in Irvine, the punch line is Irvine itself. You know what I mean?

JH: It is!

BM: Everyone thinks of Irvine, you know, white-bread, planned community, no fun. All cul-de-sacs, all speed-bumps and no speed. And yet, there's all these things right there. That's the joke. We have a room where there's no white-bread people at all in the middle of suburbia which is supposed to be homogenous. The punch line is something like 99-Ranch market, which is this mega-mega supermarket. On the outside it looks like a Ralphs or a Safeway but on the inside it's an all-Asia market with live squid in the back and food from all over the place and workers from all over speaking hybrid Cantonese-Spanish. That's the sort of thing you get [in Irvine]. When you walk around UCI you feel this big, collective kind of "Arrgghh!" like anxiety/scream/excitement. And that's the punch line.

JH: And it's also about how to tap into that in a way that resonates to their lives. For example, "Oh, he's talking about stuff that I experience."

BM: And it's hard because my training, most of our training is [that] there's a canon and we're reading it and we're also reading against it. And the thing is, there are other canons I don't even know anything about that I need to know about to help them read and read against. You know, like China. There are entire traditions, literary traditions that I know nothing about that I ought to know something about because it would really speak to these people. For instance, I would love to use *The Broken Spears* and Shakespeare and then something that's more relevant and throw it all in there. When

I do colonialism right now, my example in the International Studies class is India and we also talk about partition and nationalism. That's great, but it'd be really great to talk about China and Vietnam or Japan and Korea as well. This year I tried to find a few novels, but it's so hard to know what to use, and it's so hard to select. Because no one has really done this kind of stuff before much, outside of Asian American Studies or Ethnic Studies. I think people are just now trying to work it out. It's hard to "module-ize" it. You know what I mean? We know how to module-ize *The Broken Spears*. Everyone's been doing that ever since the Western Culture debates. So you can plug it into a course. We don't know how to module-ize other things. For example, this novel about a Korean prostitute that a friend of mine recommended, that talks about American soldiers and the war and has all these reflections about the colonial period of Japan. Anyway, I don't know how to use it.

SC: You didn't tell your toenail story.

BM: Well, the toenails thing I stole from Diane Nelson who teaches at Lewis and Clark College. Everybody when they teach Mary Douglas does something. Some people spit into cups and then drink it. Or they have students talk about when it would it be gross to have your shoe on the table. They always try to do boundary things. And I think it was Diane who told me that she cut her toenails in class. And so I decided I had to do more. So, I cut them and then I offer them to people. I walk around the room holding them out to show people, and then I put them in my mouth and then I offer them to the TAs to see if I can get any takers to eat them, and someone always will. That's the toenails.

JH: And then TAs will bring them into sections.

BM: Yeah, then I give them to the TAs and they carry them around, and, you can have all sorts of conversations then about Saints' body parts and reliquaries and the flesh.

SC: How do you grade your students'?

BM: Well, there's always a component of the grade that is participation, and it's always pretty hefty, like 20 or 30%. And that will include some in-class exercises or quizzes or presentations or whatever. They have to learn how to talk in front of a room of people and be bold. And find their voice. Basically if they come up and do their presentation, they get credit. If they have the nerve to do it, they get the credit. With the papers, we always have a rubric that the TAs and I come up with collectively. Things like style and form and grammar are some of it. but the bulk of the points that we give them are for critical thinking, making interesting connections. You can have a paper that's written poorly, but really you can tell the student is trying to struggle with some new idea, or is taking two texts and putting them together in some interesting way. You can tell it's really making them think, even if it's not beautiful prose. I don't necessarily care about beautiful prose, I want to see what they're thinking. On the final exam for Anthro 2A, we have a question about the banking model of education, and how has this course been similar or different? And the "or similar" part is always harder for them, because they get "Oh, we did different sorts of things here," but the really good students are able to say, "Hey, wait! I'm taking an exam right now. You graded me on a point scale." And that's the answer that gives them full credit.

- SC: And there's another story that I wanted you to tell. This is your fieldwork story.
- BM: Oh! When I teach them about participant observation, and anthropology's methodological contribution to the social sciences, I bring a camera and I take pictures of them. I take out the camera and just pan the room and take photographs. That always freaks them out. The funny thing is, they always think that's the attendance check! They think that we are going to look at those pictures (laughing), and identify the faces and give them credit! Well then I ask them, "Well, okay, let's imagine I develop these. What kind of information do I have? What could I learn about you?" And you could learn certain things, like the sex ratio in the class, and you could maybe guess the racial/ethnic composition, or you could count the number of people wearing Nike baseball caps. You can count stuff and you have data. But then I say to them, "What would you really learn about undergraduate life at UCI?" And basically they all agree, you wouldn't learn much. Then what I do is I walk out into the lecture hall and sit in the middle of the classroom. I'm wearing a microphone so they can hear me, and I just sit down and I say, "What if I did something like this instead?" I just sit there for a while and talk to the people around me, [saying things] like, "What are you doing? What are you writing down? What's that? Why did you bring that notebook to class? What do you think of this class?"
- JH: It freaks them out.
- SC: So you're violating the spatial constraints of the classroom. And you do this throughout the quarter. Not only in the fieldwork class. But also the ritual violates those constraints too.
- BM: Even in sections they do it. The thing is, it's SO easy. You don't have to do much at all. In the lecture hall there's this invisible line, that's like, three feet away from the first row [everyone laughs] and if you just cross that line, they go crazy. Even if you're not going to do anything! In Social Science 11, we divide them up into groups and they have time to figure out what they're going to do and have to perform. For example, acting out parts of a play.
- JH: That's a great story!
- BM: Which?
- JH: When each of them had a product and a kingdom?
- BM: Oh, yeah! We had them enact a tributary society, and each group had some objects.
- JH: And what's really great about that is when you have them start doing different things, they expect the unexpected. They expect you to throw things at them and say, "Okay, here's a paper bag and tape. Tell me how this relates to the partition of India."
- SC: So they're just thinking a lot more.
- BM: You know, in the Latin American Studies class, we did different stuff, they enacted things and the whole bit. So finally, I decided to just throw out the final exam. I borrowed this idea from Diane Nelson. I passed out the essay questions that I was going to have on the final. There were 20 of them and they were going to pick 10 of them originally and write short essays. No multiple choice. I passed them out in

advance and told them that they should just prepare, work in little groups outside of the classroom, think about the questions, think about how they would answer them as if it really were a test and I'd surprise them on the day of the final with something other than a written final. And they all showed up. And you could tell that they were sort of nervous. Like, "Oh God! What is he going to do? What are we going to have to do?" And I said, "Okay, what we're going to do is, you've heard of open book exams. This is going to be an open mouth exam. I'm going to divide you up into groups at random" — and I had done the groups in advance and I had rolled the dice, and I put together people who I knew didn't know each other and weren't friends. And each group then, there were maybe six people in each group, drew a question out of a hat. And they were given fifteen minutes to prepare anything at all in response to that question. And it was incredible! Some of them acted out little skits, some of them acted out game shows, some of them did Oprah-style bits, some of them staged a debate, and it was really, really good. At the very end, we went around the room and talked about how to grade them. I said, "Okay, look. What was group one's question? What's the answer, if you were to write an essay? What sorts of topics would you bring up? What sorts of arguments would you use? What sort of evidence would you use? What texts would you go to? How do you think those guys did? What did they bring up? What didn't they bring up?" We had a three-hour slot for the final, and we went over three hours. It was far more rewarding [and] educational than any exam could have been. And in the end, I just gave them all A's for the final.

JH: What about those situations in which So-and-so comes and says, "You're giving too many A's in your class."

BM: It hasn't happened yet. And my curve is comparable to everyone else's. One thing is that in the UC system you're guaranteed to get the top 12% of the students from high school anyway. But still you're going to have people who are illiterate. I really think that higher education has to resist the whole teaching-to-the-test thing and the whole grade thing, in some sense. For instance, right now in California they're doing all these new tests at the elementary and junior high level. And in ten years we're going to end up with students who know how to take a multiple choice test and that's all. I'd much rather have a student that's not afraid to put pen to paper or to get up in front of a room than a student who knows what all the answers are.

The importation of accounting methods into education is really really really bad and stupid. The idea that you can assess or do a cost-benefit or something. It's completely counter to the kind of work that we do as anthropologists. We know that the world doesn't work that way. That's mean, but, we know that the world isn't just a world of numbers and aggregates and statistics. We know that it's a world of meaning and interpretation and fuzzy boundaries and complexity and all of that. And I think we haven't been really good at translating that to administrators. I think the people in the field of education get that. In the education schools, I don't think you find professors of education saying, "Let's make standardized tests." And I think they're right. It hasn't hit the university system yet, and it probably will. And we need to think more about how to handle that when it does. Especially as people talk more and more about taking the quote-unquote "content" out of our courses and putting it on the internet and letting people do distance-learning. You can't do distance-learning the way that

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we do our courses. You need to be present, you need to be there, you need to be interacting with people in real time, face-to-face. So the task is both to come up with a way of measuring and assessing that kind of education but also convincing people that those are the wrong tools for the job. And that gets back to the citizenship thing. Trying to make people global citizens. We're trying to make them into that, not into automatons.