LANGUAGE AND THE COMMUNICABILITY OF RECEIVED WISDOMS

LINGUAGEM E A COMUNICABILIDADE DAS LIÇÕES RECEBIDAS

Charles Briggs[1] interviewed by Daniel do Nascimento e Silva[2]

ABSTRACT: Charles Briggs was interviewed in his visit to Brazil, where he taught in the School of Advanced Studies on Language and Society: Mobility, Multilingualism, and Globalization. The interview revolves around the ways he approaches transdisciplinary problems while also attempting to trace a genealogy of concepts like entextualization and communicability. Crafted by him in decades of intellectual and political engagement with indigenous communities and the academia, these concepts are widely spread in anthropology, language studies and public health.
KEYWORDS: Charles Briggs. Mobility. Entextualization. Communicability.

RESUMO: Realizada por ocasião da Escola de Altos Estudos em Sociedade: Mobilidade, Multilinguismo e Globalização, esta entrevista com o antropólogo e linguista Charles Briggs aborda os modos como o pesquisador aborda problemas transdisciplinares. Também procura estabelecer uma genealogia de conceitos de sua autoria amplamente disseminados na antropologia, nos estudos da linguagem e saúde pública, como entextualização e comunicabilidade.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Charles Briggs. Mobilidade. Entextualização. Comunicabilidade.

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In 2015, Alexandra Jaffe, Marco Jacquemet and Charles Briggs gathered with Brazilian scholars and students in the School of Advanced Studies on Language and Society: Mobility, Multilingualism, and Globalization. The seminar was an excellent opportunity for intellectual engagement around a topic that has been ruled out of much scholarship on language: the mobility of linguistic forms. Whether one considers the early space of linguistic synchronicity in Saussure's model of language or the mind-reading picture of contemporary neo-Gricean pragmatics, problems of signification in language are usually framed as the calculus of variables within the boundaries of a theory. Hegemonic approaches seldom critique what is left out of those boundaries, much less the social process that enables a scholar to extract a stretch of language from a interactive setting and shape it into a "variable" that will be later measured and transformed into data about language.

Ever since 'entextualization' – a notion he devised with Richard Bauman to capture the open-ended process of continuous decontextualization and recontextualization in language – Charles Briggs has notoriously questioned much of these political and theoretical assumptions. His scholarship has been engaged with gauging the advances and risks of understanding linguistic meaning as a flow that moves across gendered and racialized spaces, histories and scales.

As Briggs' scholarship has been influential in many fields of Brazilian academia, I engaged in a conversation with him about the ways in which mobility and circulation were at the very core of some of his influential concepts and about his socialization as an intellectual. Since the main goal of the conversation was to disseminate his narrative form for a wider academic public, the conversation took place in the canonic form of an interview – a discourse genre that he has carefully

deconstructed as a modern linguistic practice which seemingly portrays the innermost thoughts of interviewees. Usually all the cacophony and friction preceding and coming after the recording device is turned on are cast outside the public transcript. To translate this into the terms of the following conversation: Usually the complex metapragmatics or social regimentation of an interview frames its pragmatics or its being-in-the-world as the offspring of a natural conversation between two modern, rational subjects.

We will learn below that the fact that one may not entirely escape the metaphysical chessboard that rules our received knowledge does not exempt us from critically engaging, and perhaps punning, with the later. Briggs' recent idea of communicability is one such attempt. The word 'communicability' is the instantiation of a metaphysical assumption about the necessity of human socialization. However, it may open up critical spaces for reflection upon the infectiousness of discourse and its power of world-making. That one may not escape an interview and its modern framings is also the chance of trying to push its boundaries further. I thus invite you to critically engaging with the conversation below that took place orally on a sunny day, right below Morro da Urca in Rio de Janeiro and was later translated into written text and edited by both of us at the University of California in Berkeley.

Daniel: Charles, I want to begin by asking you an apparently trivial but actually fundamental question: What was your training in Anthropology?

Charles: I was trained in graduate school at the University of Chicago. I worked a great deal with Michael Silverstein, who had a fascinating positionality as a student of Roman Jakobson. At the same time, there were wonderful scholars in the Department of Linguistics. Norman McQuown, a member of my doctoral committee, had anything but a Chomskyan understanding of linguistics. I was deeply engaged with people who came out of the Hymesian tradition of the ethnography of communication, and poetics and performance were central for me. Together they afforded an extraordinarily productive *Buildung*. The ethnography of communication has multiple roots within philosophy, rhetoric, anthropology, and linguistics. These interests led me later to collaborate extensively with Richard Bauman.

And frankly my second way of coming at both anthropology and language has been with people who had no formal education whatsoever but who spent their lives thinking in analytical terms about language, performativity, the power of form, the politics of language. I learned from people who were fighting for their land and for health, or who were just also enjoying the power of a story.

Daniel: Your training was interdisciplinary from the outset. It differs from the formation of other scholars elsewhere, where disciplines demand interdisciplinary work, but, contradictorily, boundaries seem more and more clearly delineated. Would you have some input to give me about why the U.S. anthropological thinking about language seems to be different?

Charles: Thomas Gieryn, in the field of Science, Technology and Society Studies – STS, developed the notion of boundary work to capture the ways in which a particular discipline is constructed. Following his lines, we may find two styles of doing science. One revolves around constructing disciplinary boundaries and saying:

'Uh, sorry, linguistics stops here, and then anthropology starts there.' The most classic stance within linguistics is Saussure, who says something like: 'Here we are going to separate out history, ethnology, and other disciplines; this will be linguistics. Anything that does not relate to this particular object, language, and this way of approaching it will be excluded from serious study.' Think also about the work of Noam Chomsky. He publishes widely on linguistics and politics, but claims, 'Linguistics is a bounded discipline', thus excluding many approaches, such as sociolinguistics, which at the time of the boom of generative linguistics was engaged with the politics of language. So this first way of doing science is: Here are the boundaries. Are in or are you out? To their students, boundary workers say: 'Wait! You can't do a dissertation on that topic. It's not linguistics!'

The second way would be entangled with the true sense of the word 'interdisciplinary'. Here we're actually focusing critically at the making of disciplinary-boundaries and at the making of scholarly and "non-scholarly" approaches and locating scholarly productivity *on* those boundaries An example would be the work of Dell Hymes. He would move from linguistics, obviously countering Chomsky, and saying, 'What can we take from anthropology that could enable us to rethink the way we do language?' So he fashioned the ethnography of speaking – later of communication – and he would go back to anthropology or folkloristics, and say: 'If you take the language issue seriously, if you rethink these ideas in anthropology, this is what you can see.' So he was a scholar who classically occupied those disciplinary boundaries, constantly transforming them. I would locate myself in this second way of doing science.

Now, ordinarily, to gain influence as a scholar, you not only stay within disciplinary boundaries, but you also actually stay within specific micro-boundaries. Within linguistics, for example, there are people who occupy one particular perspective on one facet of linguistic structure. Here I think lies one of the major limitations. It's not just anthropology versus linguistics, but debates about the scope of different models of language.

Daniel: Politics of fields and training in the macro-level combine rapidly with divisions within a discipline or a department in the micro-level, and both of course interfere in the formation of intellectuals. In Brazil we've seen in the past decade an impressive expansion of the public university system in which some new universities, like the Universidade Federal do ABC, opted for interdisciplinary programs in all levels, somehow proving that there are other ways of producing knowledge. Yet the risk of reification of old practices is still there. While looking back at your own training, what would you say about the risks of over-disciplinary thinking in Brazil?

Charles: Another concept from science studies, that of 'boundary objects', would be relevant here. A boundary object lies at the borders of different schools of thought, and it seems to provide a lingua franca, like 'language'. In the end, its meaning and its role in a particular field is different. It provides a mode of communication, but we find that we're not talking about the same thing. Think about Latour's understandings of textual networks. . Here you have networks of referentiality which position texts and also create dimensions of scholarship *vis-à-vis* who and how you cite,

who you read. There are particular approaches to language, not necessarily in linguistics, which are primarily auto-referential. If you look at the citational patterns of works within that field, scholars often cite almost nothing outside that particular small little range of studies. Such restrictions can stifle creativity.

Simultaneously, other constraints emerge.. For instance the creation of what Marilyn Strathern has called 'audit culture', which is prominent in Europe today, of the constant measuring of what counts as scholarly productivity. But there are counter tendencies. In Venezuela, there were relatively few universities in 1999, when Chávez became president. Primarily these were public universities, many of which mostly populated by children of the elite. Now you have a proliferation of public universities, which provides a tremendous amount of access for working-class Venezuelans to higher education. But there is often the transformation of the fields that are professionalized through particular careers. So law, for instance, becomes not only the training of lawyers to populate courtrooms, but also people who are thinking critically about legal processes. You see in Brazil this unforeseen repositioning of professional and institutional power; at present working class Brazilians are suing the public health system to be able to obtain access to medicines. Here is a transformation of understandings of medicine, public health, the law, and issues of class coming together in relatively unprecedented ways. Credentialing, the development of symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms, is very much flux, at the same time that information technologies are entangled in complex ways with the imposition of "the neoliberal regime" in universities around the world, in ways that cannot be neatly subsumed under narratives of either hegemony or resistance. I'm not selling the transformation of higher education in either Venezuela or Brazil, but certain developments do challenge generalizations about the global dominance of a seemingly homogenous—if not universal—force called "neoliberalism." So to even think about what is a university, what is its place in society, is a vastly complex question.

Daniel: Let's switch to the ways you do your own scholarship. There are pitfalls in doing inter-disciplinary work. It is easy to hear someone from another department saying, 'Well, you're not studying the object in the proper way. This is not language!' I wonder if your work, rather than being preoccupied with boundaries was actually concerned with problems. So I'd like you to tell me how you attack problems.

Charles:
If I were to accept such a label, as being an 'interdisciplinary' scholar, I would first need to position myself *vis-à-vis* my own typology of three ways in which we can do interdisciplinary work. The first is the airplane approach, as if you could fly across disciplinary boundaries without even looking at them. The problem here is that often there's no understanding of what drives research within each of these disciplines. Thus there is some lack of intelligibility and engagement with fields— which is often not transformative. The second is the pick-and-choose approach: 'I'm going to take a little bit of this approach, and maybe this perspective from another discipline'. The result is what I call the bad-bedfellows-effect. If you haven't grappled with the presuppositions that are involved with different fields, you are likely to end up with analytic tools or methodological dimensions that don't get along well with each other. There is a model that is evident, for example, in a faculty seminar at Carnegie Mellon University; each

week participants, from various scientific disciplines, had to read an article. They would then come to the seminar, and anyone could be asked to discuss that article and to present the argument to the other participants. There was only one rule: The presenter was never drawn from the same discipline as the authors'. This meant that you had to read each article to understand its presuppositions, logic, and rhetoric. Herein lies the third approach, which presents a different model of interdisciplinarity as involving engagement with the specifics of each constituent approach. It asks scholars to understand the premises, to make sense of how objects are defined, to understand how their models are defined, to understand how methodologies are created, and to critically intervene into those in such a way that working across those boundaries has a transformative effect. This is where I would position myself. It's not an easy enterprise, because it involves inhabiting different approaches, and inhabiting them deeply and critically.

Daniel: Could you provide an example from a project of yours?

Charles: Absolutely. The first project I want to mention is the book I did with Richard Bauman, *Voices of Modernity*, in 2004. We began with received techniques within the field of poetics and performance. We felt as if we were straightjacketed, confined by some of the presuppositions that had emerged at the time in that field. So we started to begin to challenge them: 'Hey, we have to go back another step and ask, where do these presuppositions come from?' And pretty soon we found ourselves in the 17th century, with John Locke's 'invention' of language'. This was simultaneous to the Great Divide that Bruno Latour talks about in *We have never been modern.* . 'Nature' was invented, with the epistemology of science emerging as the only legitimate epistemological locus. To be truly modern you had to understand that culture and nature are different. But Latour also left out something that occurred then. Locke, a member of the Royal Society, wrote the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and said something along these lines: 'There are three great provinces of knowledge: nature, society, and language'. Locke projected the need for a separate epistemological province, semiotics, as the only legitimate mode of understanding language and communication. And he did powerful boundary-work, arguing that language has nothing to do with politics or the nature of things. So for us, tracing back that trajectory was crucial, because many of those radical claims about the nature of language and how to study it have just become common-sense. Characterizing language as a realm of pure reference, Locke expunged poetics, desire, and materiality from what he characterized as language's essence, shaping some of the forms of boundary-work that we are grappling with today. Discovering how these sorts of assumptions got so deeply buried in our conceptions of language seemed to provide a necessary starting point for finding ways to theorize language, poetics, and performance anew.

That was one kind of project. But, frankly, I haven't had the luxury of choosing most of my projects. I went in 1986 to Venezuela, and was interested in learning an indigenous language. But being from New Mexico where many of my friends were indigenous, I knew that the last thing that they wanted was someone to come and study their language. So I wanted to find a place where people thought that I might be of value. Travelling around the country, in the extreme Eastern part of the country, the Warao people said: 'Well, we're beginning bilingual education and also we're also

beginning health programs, and we would like someone to think about language and its social dimensions, so you might be of some value.' So I began working there. And I learnt the language. It became clear that over a third of their children died before they reached 5 years of age. Tuberculosis was quite common. People talked a lot about that illness and death. I was not trained in medicine. But people said, 'Essentially, if you're going to be of any value, you've got to listen to this concern with health and help us think about the conditions that reproduce these unconscionable bad health conditions.'

I thus began thinking about research on language and discourse might possibly add. In the middle of that there was a cholera epidemic. A bacterial infection, unfortunately well known to Brazilians, started in 1991. From Peru, a cholera epidemic reached all South American countries except Paraguay and Uruguay. This disease, which can be prevented with clean water and adequate sewage facilities, , killed approximately 500 hundred people who were racially classified as Warao. This was obviously the worst health emergency in historical memory. I began to work with a Venezuelan public physician, Dr. Clara Mantini, and we worked setting up health clinics in collaboration with indigenous healers and health officials, but also conducting research.

So I began to think, how is it that somehow the *Vibrio cholerae* comes to have racial dimensions, such that it is seen as naturally killing indigenous peoples? So we tracked the narratives about cholera, throughout this 40,000 square kilometer area, in every local town, among politicians, among public health officials, and in Caracas in the Health Ministry; then we went to the Pan-American Health Organization in Washington, the World Health Organization in Geneva, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and recorded everyone's accounts as to why cholera came in 1991 after it had disappeared in the Americas for a century, and why it sickened and killed people the way it did. It was a work of discourse analysis – multi-sited, fieldwork, going to these different places and not just recording the discourse but understanding how it was produced, and how it circulated, and therefore how was it in these different sites in different ways that the bacteria came to seem as if it had racial characteristics.

I thus became interested in medicine driven by life, by people's concerns and by the desire to think that maybe in 1992 if my own scholarship was of any value whatsoever it had to be a value at that time for people in that region. So I took off a year in 1994 and 1995 to see what could I contribute, in collaboration with Clara Mantini. That effort required theoretical work, because I was bounded by models that said, language stops here, medicine stops here, and race stops here. So it took theoretical work as much as methodological innovation to try to understand that, and that was the beginning of the work that morphed into the concept of communicability.

Daniel: So you're bringing up this word, communicability, which is a recent concept of yours that offers analytic punch to thinking about language, culture and society. Your first understandings about language circulation as entailed by the concept of entextualization were shaped into another form through your experience in the field with the Warao. How would you place the concept of communicability within the historicity of your scholarship?

Charles: I'll provide you the narrative. But of course as Derrida taught us, always distrust all origin narratives! So I might claim to have a definitive origin of the development of this concept, but of course in Derridean terms it is always open to challenge. So this really came from a fundamental concern that emerged particularly with Michael Silverstein's work but also from Jakobson's understandings of language, which is the relationship between pragmatics and metapragmatics.

Daniel: Could you explain this relationship I little bit?

Charles: Pragmatics, from a strictly Saussurean fashion, is *parole*, the speaking, the manifestation of signs, in their variation, in their lived existence. Becoming ethnographers of signs within society entails looking at the observed, tracking language as it moves along particular texts and worlds. However, language is always mapping language. In 'metapragmatics' one looks at the models that are constantly being developed, that purport to describe what is going on. 'Now what I said to you is' provides you with a particular modeling that maps a specific type of utterance.. The relationship between metapragmatics and pragmatics is complex. For example, if a sexist joke that is told by a man, is a woman going to accept necessarily that frame as humorous? Probably not. So this tango between pragmatics and metapragmatics is something that interested me from the beginning. This interest was heightened by working with Richard Bauman and by being deeply being influenced by Bakhtin, who was constantly thinking about the complexity of observed signs, and how people report speech, represent linguistic processes. In a performance, in Bauman's sense of the term, you have a particular embodied – or disembodied in some cases – mode of being able to give reflexive commentary on the pragmatics of language as they're enfolding in that moment. Tthat provided for a moment a way to try to take on this problem, grounded in micro-textual analysis and also ethnography. And one problem is then when all of a sudden you're trying to understand the relationship between metapragmatics and the pragmatics of a discourse about cholera, that spread all through these different areas and communities, hospitals, public health offices, epidemiologists, and politicians.

The other problem is one of the great revolutions within linguistic anthropology of the 1990s, the notion of language ideologies. It came also out of the work of Silverstein, who initially used it in a different sense as applying to folk ideologies as to how language works as opposed to the linguist's objective understanding of how language is. In the early 1990s, there was this sense that actually linguists themselves had ideological – or one could say cultural, we certainly don't mean ideological in the sense of distortion – models of language. That's what *Voices of Modernity* is about, a genealogy of dominant ideologies of language, including those that affect scholarship. But there's a problem here. Language is a problematic historically and socially specific construct that delimits what it is that we can see, and how we can see it. I teach linguistic anthropology, so we are constantly constructing models of what language is and how it differs from something else. But the pragmatics of discourse are never neatly bounded by this particular domain. So if we want to study how language is constructed as a concept but not be bounded by it, where do we stop? Even if you accept the proposition that the boundaries of "language" are ideologically constructed, you can't examine everything that lies beyond them. So having done the

cholera project critically, you have the construction of these domains called language and medicine.

So I began to ask: How could we think about these parallel co-construction processes? The metapragmatics of how you construct these domains continually in every visit with the doctor, in a particular area where race is connected with other differences, as well as on a global scale, in policies. Doctors would say: 'That's just communication, I don't need to worry about that, we'll leave it to the specialist in communication.' This was essentially the position even of the critical epidemiologists. Race. 'Oh, we're in a post-racial democracy. We don't need to worry about issues of race.' That was actually the sort of line in the USA until Ferguson became the wave of cell phone documented killings of African-Americans by white police officers. The U.S. is anything but a post-racial society. So communicability began by saying: How do we describe this? And I should add, it's not a typology. Ordinarily, when you set up a concept, you say: 'Here's a typology which divides up the world in advance.' Communicability is meant to say, this is a tool for understanding the ongoing construction of understandings of the production, circulation and reception of discourse. And precisely not to say that the way that discourses function is linear or non-linear, not to determine those ideas in advance but to say, whether you're looking at new media, or you're looking at a clinic, what are the metapragmatic models that are operative within these domains? And I mean models in the plural.

Discourse is no less infectious than bacteria, both circulate along particular circuits. Just epidemiological models track the circulation of diseases, commonsense models—as used by scholars and laypersons alike—purport to track the circulation of discourse. So that is where communicability came from. How do we get beyond seeming boundaries of an ideological construction of language in advance, how do we actually look at the multiplicity and the constantly changing nature of those models and their complex relationship to pragmatics?

Daniel: The name communicability is infested, if I may, with residues from metaphysics and epidemiology. Communication is a metaphysical concept that is with us for a while and it doesn't seem to leave us anytime soon. Saussure begins his classes in general linguistics by saying that communication is the transfer of signs from one brain to another. But communicability is also the ability of viruses to spread. How do you handle the metaphysical bias that is inscribed in the very name of the concept?

Charles: I have wonderful colleagues in the field of cultural studies. They would say, 'Oh Daniel there are still narratives there. You're still trapped by certain narrative forms.' And when they accuse me of this I would say: 'I think I would like to live in a post-narrative world. How do we actually somehow escape from metaphysics?' Communicability at first is a pun. It is hopefully an attempt to use the power of the pun to destabilize those metaphysics. But I think that the best we can do is a dialectical engagement with the metaphysical notions that structure the institutions in which we work, how the definitions and the values attached to the objects that we attempt to discern and the fact that we will never ourselves be free from the concepts like communication, or the media. There is no way that we could simply occupy the constitutive outside, stand apart from these powerful constraining types of conceptions, with their powerful presuppositions, their materiality, and their ways of hierarchizing countries, segments of populations and individuals. So we have to embrace and move

between them, we have to feel them in an embodied sense, and we also have to think of them reflexively..

We are never free from powerful metapragmatic models. By definition, they are selective, oversimplified and performative. So we need to really focus on metapragmatic models, rather than trying to avoid them, and never take for granted that they are transparent. Communicability for me is a way of finding empirically those metapragmatic models. It focuses on circulation, which has been a problem from the time of the Enlightenment, with its privileging of "new" knowledge, of being in the loop, of possessing the sorts of knowledge required to claim the status of a modern subject. Greg Urban calls this 'metaculture' in his very interesting book *Metaculture*. So the idea that it's the movement, it's the newness of discourse that captures us.

I'm interested in how people model that movement. I'm interested in particular domains of the world, such as medicine, journalism, crime, and violence, because communicable models are often domain-specific. Bourdieu is here very important with his notion of social fields. How do we ideologically construct understandings of different social fields, arranging them hierarchically? Communicable models tale particular forms in particular social fields. For instance, one medical model will suggest that motion of information is entirely linear. Usually there are global north research facilities that make knowledge, or in Brazil, places like Fiocruz. And then it circulates through health education, medical journals, clinicians as they talk to their patients, the media, and then linearly, unidirectionaly, to the layperson, who is framed as ignorant. This communicable model structures subject positions in a hierarchical fashion. Being a producer of knowledge in a key research facility places you in a very different position from being a lay receiver of that knowledge, much less being someone who's cast as being out of the loop, incapable of even receiving it. But that's only one model. Communicable models that project the circulation of health knowledge, which Daniel Hallin and I call biocommunicable models, picture you, the patient at the center; you need to grab information from social media, from advertising, from your doctor, from wherever, and be able to process information rationally in order to decide which products and services to consume. That is not linear. That's a different communicable model.

So communicability is an empirical notion, it's a guide for studying the complexities of contemporary communication. In the end, grappling with the metaphysics of communication and other notions can connect us with the fact that we will never escape those metaphysics. At the same time communicability asks us to think critically, to not impose our own but to find them empirically, to always look at how the multiple models collide and come together. And, hopefully, to engender at little bit of humility, of knowing that we'll never exhaustively document all the metapragmatic models as they change from moment to moment through interactions at multiple scales.

Daniel: To end this interview, I would like to engage with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, an essay in which he argues that education ought to be primarily concerned with emancipation. We've talked about your training in Chicago and the rather non-linear trajectories demanding that you come up with theoretical ways of emancipating your own thinking from the canon you received. But now, how do you, as essentially a teacher of anthropology and linguistics, see the work of transmission in your classes? What is your own communicable model for the chain of transmission and

training? How do you position yourself *vis-à-vis* the legacy that you are inevitably communicating to the generations of scholars to come?

Charles: Daniel, this insightful question produces in me both a smile and a strong dose of humility. The smile comes from years of trying to engage with Freire's powerful inspiration, of thinking how education could aim for more than social reproduction: for minting PhD's whose only aspiration in life is to have jobs that are just like their professors. But humility, too. I work at a university that is known for fostering critical thinking, but our pedagogical practices are often more traditional than critical. My labor is constantly shaped by the same "neoliberal" tendencies we discussed above. The state of California's contribution to our university's budget has fallen from 27% in 2008 to 13% in 2014; this downward trend is continuing. Berkeley recruits more and more students who are not California residents in order to collect nearly $25,000 per year from each, above the substantial fees that other students pay. Like a factory, we are increasingly exhorted to demand on-time production, to pressure both graduate students and undergraduates to finish in what administrators declare to be "normative" time frames. Each fall semester, I teach some 200-300 undergraduates and run a seminar with 15-20 graduate students. If Paulo Freire were looking over my shoulder, I wonder to what extent he would think that my pedagogical practice embodies the principles that he so clearly spelled out.

But I do not like declensionist narratives, linear stories of what seems to be an inevitable fall from some glorious past. If there were no Freirean possibilities in my daily praxis, I would probably find a different way to support myself, like going back to photography. The way I organize my graduate seminars suggests how I try to find Freire within these constraints. Rather than a linear exposition of received wisdom, I organize each seminar as a project of collaborative discovery. Each seminar takes on particular genealogies, such as ways of thinking about language in relationship to those focusing on the body, placing distinct networks of texts and actors in dialogue and attempting to radically rethink them. We read each text against the grain of canonical readings. Students are drawn from different backgrounds—including ethnic studies, theology, rhetoric, and performance studies in addition to anthropology, linguistics, medicine, and public health, and their perspectives are crucially informed by dimensions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation. After all, I am humbly aware that a middle-class, white, North American, heterosexual male is hardly in a position to challenge Eurocentrism on his own! Usually, students form small collectives that meet prior to the seminar, thereby bringing a dialogue that is more able to resist hierarchies and performance anxieties to the larger collective discussion. I ask participants to bring their own research into the process, thereby providing a context in which students actively explore the complex process of placing their own projects into dialogue with theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Critical pedagogy, in my book, involves questioning form and context as well as content. In a seminar that looked at epidemiology through discourse analysis, one class focused on the *Health Status Report* for Berkeley, a city that is sharped divided into wealthier and impoverished areas, with a high concentration of African Americans and Latinos/as in the latter. We thus read a bureaucratic document rather than an academic text. We held the class in the Berkeley Health Department, with the city's public health officer and epidemiologist as principal interlocutors. I found in particular that Latino/a and African American participants found the experience to be

transformative as they sought to form a productive as well as critical dialogue with individuals whose daily jobs involve producing highly consequential ethno-racial categories and statistics. These students said that the concerns that brought them to the university and the frameworks they were exploring there were, for the first time, interacting intimately. Several years later, this experience is still memorable and productive for me as well.

In a nutshell, your question leads me to see that I work in an oxymoron—an elite public university. Recent visits to elite private universities brought home the way that a Berkeley and a Princeton, for example, occupy very different social worlds, and the erosion of public funding to public universities seems to be widening the gap each day. But I find a Freirean element of hope here as well. As a public university, many of our undergraduates come to us from community colleges, whose two-year programs provide access to first-generation students, to low-income, older students, and a large percentage of members of underrepresented racial minorities; these students seldom take their place in an elite university for granted. They teach us new perspectives on education and the world each day. Generally lacking the lavish fellowships offered by elite private universities, our graduate students spend 20 hours a week most semesters working with these undergraduates. Thus, in the end, Paulo Freire is alive and well at Berkeley: critical pedagogical possibilities spring up all over the place. I just hope that I am watching and listening carefully enough to feel their pulse when they do. But I don't want to leave it there, within the walls of the academy. My teachers continue to include not just my graduate students but healers, patients, activists, journalists, and many others. Striving to achieve a critical pedagogical practices also prompts me to work on projects that I do not generate or control, in prisons, epidemics, and clinics, crossing boundaries that are not of my own making in ways that demand new ways of looking, listening, and sometimes just getting the heck out of the way.