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A Statement on Teaching  
22 April 2013

I work in the field of Buddhist studies, with a focus on China. At UCSC, I am a professor in the Department of History of Art & Visual Culture. Buddhist studies is a multi-disciplinary field, and my training is in history of religions, philological study of Chinese texts, ethnography, and visual culture. There is no established disciplinary model for transmitting knowledge and understanding in this field, no standard template. As a university teacher, at first I muddled through, constructing courses, giving lectures, and relying as much on enthusiasm and excitement as any formal techniques. In the early years, my aim was to do my best for the students and see to their welfare, but I needed to learn how to go about this matter of “teaching.” In those first few years, students appreciated these classes very much (so they said), but in retrospect I wish that they could come back now and be better served. At this stage, though, they are sending their own children off to college.

In my university education, I studied with great scholars and fascinating individuals. As much as I have appreciated what I learned from them, they did not provide personal models for effective teaching. Three sources, though, were critical in forming a basis for what has been for me a wonderfully satisfying and continually fascinating career in university teaching. At the outset, in the mid-1970s, one of my graduate school professors pressed upon me a book by the classicist Gilbert Highet, whose courses he remembered with something akin to awe. I still have a copy of *The Art of Teaching* and reread sections every few years. Some elements may be outdated, but that book is full of sensible principles, and does truly consider that what we do in the classroom (in part the result of considerable thinking before we set foot in the door) can be an art as much as a craft. Importantly, attention to craft opens up the possibility of art in the teaching process. Highet’s book is pervaded by a fundamental respect for students and a deep concern for their welfare.

In the early 1980s, I studied with the extraordinary saxophonist and improviser Lee Konitz (b. 1927) for a year or two, and we would play spontaneously improvised duets around standard melody lines. This was a profound experience. Konitz is well-known for his distinctive, unique musical voice. He always said (and made this a principle of his own musical life) that every tune you play, no matter how familiar, should sound as if it were being composed at that very moment. It has to be alive. To do so, you cannot fall back on familiar patterns, you cannot feel secure in presenting the same set piece, even if listeners applaud, because then it’s dead (and in a certain tragic sense, at that moment so are you). I have tried to hold to this principle in teaching my students, and in research and writing as well. It has to be alive.

The third powerful influence has been a Chinese Buddhist scholar-monk, Ven. Miaoqing (1930-2003), whose lectures provided wonderfully clear expositions on deep and complex topics, and whose vigorous and dedicated teaching career – largely within a monastic context – sprang from clearly articulated principles. From his work, I came to better understand that effective

teaching is based on principles, that if one can articulate the aims of the project, then there is the possibility of achieving them. Miaoqing understood well the order in which to introduce materials and concepts, and this is part of what made his teaching so effective. He looked first to a foundation and made sure that it was well-established before he proceeded onwards. I try my best to do the same, within an academic context.

I have already taken more than half of this brief essay to speak about other people's principles, and that is because I owe them a great debt. If I am an effective teacher with my students, it is the influence of my predecessors that has helped me to achieve that. Also, I have been fortunate in the students who have worked with me over these past forty years, including the students this year who nominated me for this award. In the ways that I have practiced it, "teaching" is not a generic act, but is aimed at specific audiences within specific contexts. Ultimately, even for a large-enrollment class, I am concerned with individuals, one by one by one.

When I teach a course, I try to frame some key questions, and then proceed from there to organize appropriate material around those questions. Because I teach about matters that in the wider culture have been subject in authoritative ways to simplification, appropriation, and romanticization, I try very carefully and deliberately to open doors for my students to a wide variety of primary sources – so that they may listen closely to voices situated directly within the tradition – and let them see the views that arise from there. And I speak with them about my field experiences in Chinese Buddhist monasteries, carried out over several decades, and try to give them a feel for some present-day social realities. Sometimes this approach can be a challenge for them, because it may not present what they expected or wanted to hear. Beyond teaching about the subject matter itself, which I think is important (having devoted forty-five years so far to these studies), I am concerned about the development of students as educated human beings, who – as a result – have an active curiosity about the world, are well-trained to read and write analytically, and are capable of framing potent and productive questions. We work on these matters together, and students can see that I, too, am studying and making an effort to learn right beside them.

In the *Analects* of Confucius, there is this pithy statement: "A human being is not a pot." Put so bluntly, it sounds amusing or perhaps even foolish. What he means here of course is that a human being is not just a utilitarian thing. That view is at the base of all that I try to do for my students.