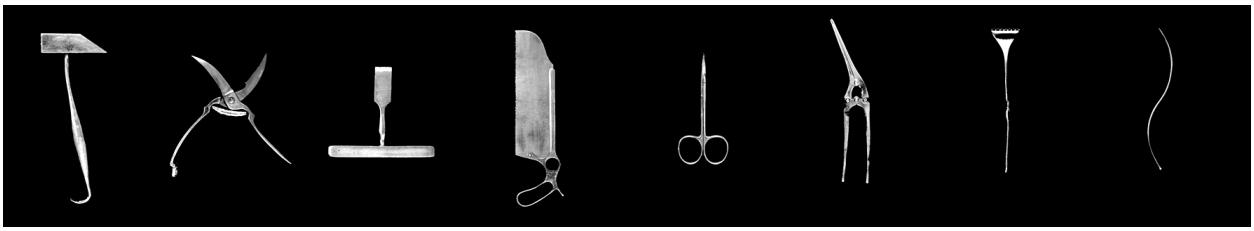
Stephan Apicella - Hitchcock



I am not precisely sure what I was expecting when I finally arrived for graduate school at Rhode Island School of Design; however, it certainly was not to encounter a fully developed intellect housed within a hyperactive teenager, mixed with a curious monkey, but to my joy, that is what I found after the first class I took with William E. Parker.

His lectures traveled all over the place on extraordinary tangents, ricocheting off the walls and faces of astounded students, yet always came back on point with closing arguments tied up with a bow by dismissal time. I emphasize dismissal time, as opposed to the class end, because that was all relative to the increasing number of students that remained after the official class conclusion to coax more gems out of this well-dressed (he always wore a vest) charming and humorous professor. I remember that there was always laughter in his classes and that I always got home very late.

Beyond his lectures to ever-growing groups of students—students were always bringing friends from elsewhere to his talks—his responses to our projects were legendary. His written assessments were beautifully crafted and extraordinarily extensive. Once, I handed in a project delivered inside the belly of a giant stuffed bear, and when I collected my project after grading, the bear was skillfully sutured and lovingly taped with bandage and gauze. Bill's project note was inside of the bear—typed, single-spaced, five pages long, and with a bibliography to boot —and required me to go searching in the maze of the gut for his thoughts. A creative and considerate response to student endeavors was classic Bill. There was even a get-well card for the bear along with his notes.

Of course, they were barbecues with a gang of motley and ravenous students showing up, who, by the end of those incredibly long days, would have stomachs filled with delicious treats and minds packed with new ideas. Timmy was always there co-hosting, her stories retold enthusiastically, rivaling Bills. It was a challenge to do much speaking between the two of them, but that was OK because everything they had to say was fascinating. They were quite a package deal.

I still frequently think of Bill. In my 28th year of teaching, I often imagine how he would handle a situation to inspire a student or encourage someone's curiosity. He did what great teachers can do: make students want to be like their teachers, to be curious and committed cultural producers engaged in primary research, and, most importantly, to share that excitement with those around them. Bill was a treasure and the most intelligent and animated monkey I have ever had the good fortune to meet.