

Introduction to the CLIC Conference, May 19, 1995¹

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Coltrane would say, "Hey, Curtis, try to play this on the trombone," and I would try to run something down. I'd struggle with it and he'd say, "You're getting it"—and so on and so on. Paul Chambers lived all the way in Brooklyn, and he would get in the subway and, gig or no gig, he would come over to practice. He got this thing from Koussevitsky—the Polonaise in D minor—and he'd say "Hey Curtis, Let's play this one." It wasn't written as a duet, but we would run that down together for three or four hours. A couple of days later, we'd come back and play it again. The whole thing was just so beautiful.²

There is the satisfaction of seeing someone pick up an instrument and making it sound a bit like you and then a little different, until it acquires a flavor of its own, a quality that is only vaguely reminiscent of what the teacher said or would have said. There is the satisfaction of giving someone the floor and sitting down not to wonder about whether he or she will be able to pull it off but to actually enjoy the show. There is the tension of the moment of performance, when everyone knows that the players know their stuff and some of the tunes are old ones, but everyone wants to know how they will play them. There is the expectation that some familiar phrases will have to acquire a life of their own. These and many more thoughts are in my mind today, as we kick off our first UCLA Conference on Language, Interaction, and Culture. A Conference completely organized by our graduate students.

As Manny Schegloff reminded us a few weeks ago when we got together in Malibu to think about the Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture, the idea of the Center was in a sense really the students' idea. Not in the sense of thinking out the name. Not in the sense of knowing how to go to the Deans and ask for support. Not in the sense of writing up memos and convincing our colleagues that this is worth attention and we should get new positions in areas that could make the Center stronger. But in the most fundamental sense of a community of human resources, made up first of all by the people on campus who share intellectual goals. It was students who first discovered that it was possible to make links across departments and get faculty together who shared a vision of language—to borrow Toni Morrison's words—as a measure of our lives. Today we see the beginning of the process whereby a virtual community

turns into a reality.

The Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture brings together faculty and students from the Departments of TESL & Applied Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology, the Graduate School of Education, and the Cesar Chavez Center for Chicana/o Studies. What unites us is a vision of the study of language that includes but goes beyond the exchange of information, that includes but goes beyond the closed discourse of academia and tries to connect our hypotheses to the lives of people who can be considered worthy of study—even though in some cases they might not be statistically significant or in some other cases they might not live in far and exotic places but, instead, quite close to us, just a few more freeway exits down south or east.

Is what we want to do a discipline? This will be decided by others. But this is how I see it. I think that a discipline should exist only in so far as it helps its practitioners uncover uncharted intellectual territories and make new analytical connections between phenomena that had long been in front of their eyes, close to their ears, and next to their body, but could not be adequately seen, heard, or felt. A discipline should be a domain of discourse that allows for the exchange of visions that would not be possible elsewhere. It should also be a mixture of tradition and innovation, a realm of frequent social encounters where those who have been around for a longer time do not need to bend their standards in order to welcome newcomers and the latter should feel free to question the work of their teachers and to entertain new research agendas. A discipline should be judged for the past that lies behind as much as for the future that is ahead.

The past is in the many occasions when the Center faculty have gathered together, read each other's papers, commented on each other's ideas, and been inspired to try out some new hypothesis. The past is also in the many committees where we have come together to coach a student and to see our separate conversations blended into one stream of thought. The past is whatever we have done that can be seen as still worthy of reading or discussing or rejecting or improving. The future is here. The future is in the pieces you will play. Don't worry about the wrong notes. The trick is not to avoid them, but to make them sound right. That's how new tunes get written.

NOTES

¹ This is the text, as delivered, of Professor Duranti's introduction to the day's events.

² Curtis Fuller, quoted in *Thinking in Jazz* by Paul Berliner, p. 39.

REFERENCE

Berliner, P. F. (1994). *Thinking in jazz: The infinite art of improvisation*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.