Remembering John Bernard Bate (1960–2016)
A Memorial Session of the Chicago Tamil Forum

Friday May 20th, 2016, 2:40–4:20pm
Haskell Hall 315

John Bernard Bate, or “Barney” as he was known to his friends and colleagues, was a central member of the University of Chicago community, among the many other social and academic circles in which he travelled and was loved. He received his PhD from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago in 2000, and was a frequent collaborator and visitor to the campus. Since 2014, he was an integral member of the Chicago Tamil Forum, a workshop held annually at the University of Chicago. An ethnographer and historian of communicative practice and democratic politics in south India, Barney tragically passed on March 10, 2016 in Palo Alto, California. In this session of the Chicago Tamil Forum we remember John Bernard Bate and reflect on his academic legacy.

The Chicago Tamil Forum’s 2016 workshop “The Politics of Media, The Media of Politics” is sponsored by the Committee on Southern Asian Studies and the Department of Anthropology. For more information, contact Constantine V. Nakassis, cnakassi@uchicago.edu
Remembering John Bernard Bate (1960–2016),
A Memorial Session of the Chicago Tamil Forum,
Friday May 20, 2016, Haskell 315,
University of Chicago

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Introductory comments by
Constantine V. Nakassis

Written remembrances from
Paul Friedrich
James Fernandez
McKim Marriott

Remembrances from
John Kelly
E. Annamalai
Blake Wentworth
Whitney Cox

David Shulman
Malarvizhi Jayanth
Amanda Weidman
Sally Noble
Indira Arumugam
Anna Seastrand
Kathleen Morrison
Zoë Woodbury High
Welcome everyone and thank you all for coming today to participate in this memorial event. We’re here to remember John Bernard Bate, or “Barney” as he was known to all of us, but also to reflect on his academic legacy and look forward to the paths of scholarship that he opened up for us in his own work.

For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Costas Nakassis. I first want to say a couple of words about the larger event of which this memorial is a part as a preamble to some remembrances and reflections about Barney and his scholarship.

Today’s memorial is part of an annual workshop about Tamil studies that I began in 2014. Dissatisfied with the scholarly venues to share work with like-minded and similarly regionally focused colleagues, I decided to bring together a small group of congenial Tamil scholars whose work I respected. The first person I thought of, of course, was Barney! Barney was absolutely central to our group, a vocal and active participant who helped to shape the different topics that we’ve collectively taken up over the years (indeed, this year’s theme is The Politics of Media and the Media of Politics, which is as good a phrase as any to describe Barney’s research). Barney also gave the group its name, “The Chicago Tamil Forum.” And he gave its first keynote in 2014 with an electrifying lecture on the emergence of public oratory in the Swadeshi movement in the first decade of the twentieth century.1 Barney was slated to be here this year, to present the introduction of the groundbreaking book that he was working on; and it is with the time that we would have discussed his chapter that we decided to have this memorial session, to fill his absence with our words about him. As Barney taught us, in our speech for and with others we find the highest virtue and the deepest of our passions. To quote the ancient Tamil aphorism that Barney began and finished his dissertation with,2 the 641st Tirukkural:

1 Bate, John Bernard. “Elocutionary Incandescence: Charisma, Oratory, and Revolution in Provincial South India, 1908.” Keynote lecture of the Chicago Tamil Forum, Thursday, May 29th, 2014 – Foster Hall 103, 4:30pm.
Or as Barney pithily explicated at the end of his dissertation, “There is no nalam (‘virtue,’ ‘good thing’) like nānalam (‘eloquence,’ ‘knowing how to speak’).” Let us speak, then, of Barney and his virtues.

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Barney was a ‘big man,’ in the Tamil sense of the phrase, a periya āḷ: tall, regal, an imposing and radiant figure. I always found there to be something classical and august about his face-cutting, like the statues of the ancients that I spent my summers gazing upon in Greece as a child. From afar I stood in awe of Barney, as I think many of us did before meeting him. He was a beautiful man, a man who spoke beautifully in Tamil and in English, who also radiated good cheer with a big laugh and his twinklingly sly, almost mocking eyes.

I first met Barney over e-mail, when he generously advised me on setting up a research project in Madurai in 2004. We only met face to face, however, years later in 2008 in Chennai when he was working in the state archives and I was conducting my own dissertation fieldwork in some nearby city colleges. At his suggestion, we met over an ice-cold, properly aerated beer, a draft pint—which was a luxury for me at that time—at a very nice hotel in the south of the city. We spoke of our ongoing research, and Barney shared some of his memories of Madurai from the late 1980s and 1990s, when he conducted his dissertation fieldwork. From that meeting on, I always looked to Barney as my “(super) senior,” as they say in south India, someone older to turn to for advice and respectful affection.

I think many of us younger scholars had such a relationship with Barney. He was extraordinarily generous with his thoughts and time. He was an incredible scholar of and was interested in all things Tamil; and from what I hear, he was an amazing teacher. Seeing him speak in public—oratory was his topic of interest, after all—I can’t but believe it. His enthusiasm for the biggest of ideas and the littlest of details was contagious, his energy radiating out from his body when spoke, carried by his booming voice.

As you all know, Barney was a Chicago PhD, from this very department, Anthropology, from this very building, Haskell Hall. His dissertation defense was downstairs in room 101, the room where we’ve been meeting for our workshop for these past three years. And his defense took place almost sixteen years ago to this day, on Monday, May 22, 2000. I’m sure he attended numerous Monday seminars in this very room, as well as moving between the hallways and offices of Haskell Hall.

After Barney passed, so soon and unexpectedly in Palo Alto, California just over two months ago, I decided to read over his scholarship, from his early translations with A. K. Ramanujam to his dissertation, all the way
up to draft chapters of his second monograph (which he was working on at the Stanford Humanities Center at the time of his death). In that reading, what struck me was a particular theme, one that linked Barney, our friend and colleague, to John Bernard Bate, that esteemed author of those touchstone works in the anthropology and history of modern Tamilagam. That theme is love.

Love, or some cognate of it in Tamil or English, is something Barney talked a lot about in his work. Barney writes about the love of a language, the love of Tamil and the joy in speaking it; the love of an orator for her leader, and the love of that same leader for those who would stand in his expansive presence, a love manifest in his florid speech, rolling off his “red tongue” through a blaring public announcement system to his enthralled audiences.

But Barney’s work was not just about that love, devotion, or attachment to language that has often been taken as distinctive of modern Tamil Nadu and its politics. Barney’s work itself radiated a kind of love, his love for the Tamil language, its culture and its people, its music and its poesy. This love was most visible in Barney’s deep, deep analyses of Tamil poetics and in his fine ethnographic attention to detail; it was most audible in Barney’s fluent Tamil, for which he was renowned across many continents. It could be felt in the way he embodied the materials of which he spoke, taking them on and channeling them, even as he critically analyzed them at the same time. It is this love, this tough love, we might say, that makes his scholarship exemplary.

Partly, this love emanates from the very phenomenon that Barney studied, that is, from the Dravidian movement of twentieth-century Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian movement, as Barney taught us, put the Tamil language on a pedestal, framing it as an ancient language (which it is), as a pure language (which it could become), as a language that demands our respect, adulation, and devotion. As someone who has also worked in this region, I can attest that the enthusiasm, even fervor, for Tamil that was cultivated by the Dravidian movement is infectious, seductive. Barney showed us how that passion worked, because he understood it, because – in certain measure – he too was seduced by it. As we all know from our own experiences, to love something or someone is to see that thing or person with a clarity and truth that other modalities of knowing are incapable of. To study oratory as Barney did, to study the passions that surround language in south India rigorously and thoroughly, as only Barney did, requires a mode of ethnographic inquiry that is subtended by a form of care and love for its object. Barney had that love.

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlrcPoJ8l_Q
But as we also all know, love also often forces us to turn a blind eye, to become an apologist for the trespasses of the object of our love. This risk was something that Barney knew well, and he was neither afraid nor too proud to admit and learn from those moments of blindness. Barney admired the oldness of Tamil, its ancient traditions, its deep culture. He was taken with what his interlocutors were taken with; and their blind spots could be his own as well. For example, in a short essay entitled the “Fields of Toronto,” Barney discusses one such moment, in this case regarding his research on one of the first orators of Tamil, Arumuga Navalar. The challenge happened in a Tamil Studies conference in Toronto by its Sri Lankan Tamil participants, who claimed that Barney’s argument ventriloquized a non-Brahmin, upper-caste Vellala Jaffanite point of view, and in exclusion, in particular, of Dalit voices. Barney writes in this essay:

My training in Tamil Nadu and Chicago … had sensitized me to hegemonic claims by Brahmins, not non-Brahmins. Ironically enough, my own Dravidianist biases, cultivated in the fields of Chicago, Madurai and Chennai, had blinded me even further to the socio-ideological flora and fauna of the fields of Toronto.4

In Barney’s work, then, we find an ambivalence of and about love, a love that reveals as much as its obscures, that opens the truth of the world as much as it encloses it.

Let me suggest that this ambivalence, this love, is itself a trope. And let me follow Barney’s own tropological analysis of Dravidian aesthetics, and further suggest that this is a trope rooted in and that blooms from a uniquely Tamil tropology, that of ākupeyar, what we can loosely gloss as metonymy. As Barney demonstrated in his dissertation and 2009 book, ākupeyar is the central trope of Tamil aesthetics, of its language ideologies and its modes of political adulation. Relevant to us here is how ākupeyar denotes a particular kind of metonymy where the part wraps back around and encompasses the whole, englobing that which it stands in for, revealing the kernel, or essence, of a phenomenon while shielding and perhaps even blinding it to its own exteriorities, by veiling it with its own diaphonous affections.

Barney was an ethnographer and an historian of communicative practice and democratic politics in colonial and postcolonial Tamilagam; he was an investigator of the old and the new, of “tradition” and “modernity” (to invoke, as Barney did, Milton Singer’s Janus-faced terms). While as an ethnographer, Barney often spoke of an inherent and ancient “Tamil

“Tamil culture” was a new thing, inaugurated with and through the colonial encounter. Western form / Tamil substance, Dravidian aesthetics / Western ideologies, culture / history, old / new – these were the binaries in which Barney’s thought worked. But it never rested with them, it never allowed them to stay still, to stay as they were. Indeed, the strength of Barney’s brilliant arguments, and the guiding principles of his ethnographic and historical methodological practices, was that there was always a dialectical relationship between and within each of these dualisms, a ceaseless oscillation and interconversion of the old and the new, form and substance, aesthetics and ideology, feeling and knowing, being and representing, poesis and poetics.5 Barney’s work kept these tensions tense, refusing to resolve them or to let them go. And productively so. The unwillingness in Barney’s writings to shed these dualisms enlivened his work. It gave his work a level of care and detail, a sensitivity and genorosity and circumspecion and fallibilism whose graceful, if taut, union I would characterize as his love for his work, in both senses of the phrase.6

So, to Barney, who showed us in his writings and by his example, who imparted his love for his scholarship through his scholarship and who demonstrated the care with which he engaged the worlds that he evoked in his words with his words, we remember him for and with love, a generous but tough love reserved for only the very best of us.

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6 This love, however, was also, I might conjecture, the love—and the enclosure—of anthropology itself, and in particular, of the anthropology that Barney learned here in Chicago in the 1990s. Are not these antimonies that Barney united not also his own mediation of the resounding voices of his great teachers, of the dialogic encounters that shaped Barney’s own thought here in rooms such as this one, between the voices of Paul Friedrich and Michael Silverstein, James Fernandez and Marshall Sahlins, McKim Marriot and Barney Cohn? In Barney’s 2007 review of Diane Mines’s Fierce Gods (Journal of Asian Studies 66(2): 578–80), one hears perhaps a description of this experience in his description of her post-field return.
Before ceding the floor to our colleagues who will speak about Barney and his work—John Kelly, E. Annamalai sir, Blake Wentworth, and Whitney Cox—and before we open it up to a more general discussion for all to participate in (which we’ll do after our speakers), I wanted to read written statements from two of Barney’s dissertation advisors, Paul Friedrich and James Fernandez. Unfortunately, Paul and Jim can’t join us today. But they sent in remembrances, which they asked me to share.

Barney explaining the making of Hindu sculptures to Yale-NUS students on a week-long trip to Tamil Nadu (“Cosmology and Culture of the Chola”). Photograph posted on Facebook by Rachel Quek Siew Yean, October 3, 2014 (used with permission)
Paul Friedrich  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology,  
The University of Chicago  

*Remembrance of Barney Bate* (May 13, 2016)  

When Barney spoke in my class, as he often did, after a few syllables featuring his retroflex sounds and all his unique linguistic tension and excitement, he seemed to leap out of the world sample and became the essence and the distillation of all the timeless poetry of the world, all the nuances and passion of its beauty, condensed for those few minutes through the mastery of the man, to whom we can only look back at today with inexpressible nostalgia.

Farewell, Barney.

James Fernandez  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology,  
The University of Chicago  

*Abrazos for Barney* (May 10, 2016)  

In those first moments when one heard that so vital, indeed joyful, a person – a word often used for Barney Bate – had passed away in his sleep, things seemed to shudder and stop in their tracks. When a valued and well-loved being like Barney – one with whom it was so easy to feel a kinship – leaves us so abruptly the world seems to stop in its endless becoming. More painfully yet I think this departure has occurred at the height of his powers. His year at Stanford promised important work.

One recalls, of course, all the good times. The many times that Barney over the years came into my classes and lectured illuminatingly on the rhetoric of Indian politics. The many times, in my visits to my daughter’s family in New Haven, that Barney and I went out for what we named our “boisterous breakfasts,” turning over and over and debating some of the central problems of what Barney liked to call “anthropoesis” or “the poetics of social interaction” and I, too playfully perhaps, called “an-trope-ology” or the “figuration of social thought and action.”

If a long time had passed since our last breakfast, the question would arise of giving and sharing an abrazo. Like most North Americans, Barney was not totally comfortable with this Spanish arms-around re-affirmation of (mostly male) solidarity and mutual recognition. And, in intellectualizing this discomfort, one or the other of us might recall Edward Hall’s work on the
“differential proxemics of cultures.” In the final years of our friendship Barney would go so far as to end his letters with “Hugs.”

In memorial sessions such as we are having here many will speak to Barney’s work in India, his happy relation to the language part of it, his perceptive account of its politics. We will hear, as we should, from his many area-study colleagues with whom he developed comradely relations in both subcontinents, North America and India. It was easy to feel a kinship with Barney across cultural borders.

I would like to speak briefly to Barney’s central and ultimately organizing role in a joint project that an “intercommunicating cluster” of us have long been undertaking on the analogics of human solidarity and conflict, that is to say on the central place of the human capacity for analogic thought and its agglutinative and dispersive consequences for social order and disorder. Or, as Barney might put it, we periodically spent time pursuing the anthropoesis of human sustainment and deprivation, the underlying imaginative predications upon uncertainty on which so many cultural structures are built or unbuilt, defended or abandoned.

Barney, in a series of national meetings, was central to organizing and keeping our “intercommunicative cluster” going in repeated sessions. Somehow, when thinking of his role in our cluster, the work of Peter Kropotkin comes to mind and Kropotkin’s animating idea of the centrality in human evolution and human survival of mutual aid. Barney over the years served as a kind of mutual aide to that cluster of us in prodding us periodically to write about and better understand the anthropoesis of life, the analogics of social order and disorder. In these times of aggrandizing individualism, his efforts to foster our understanding and appreciation of the mutualities of human solidarity seem all the more important.

Resonant with the Kropotkin idea, and delving more deeply into it I believe, is Marshall Sahlins’s notion of “mutual being,” his answer to the implicit question in the title of his recent book, What Kinship Is—And Is Not. The one thing that kinship surely is about is affirmation of mutual being. I might say, and not incidentally, that the affirmation of mutual being is what, it seems to me, the abrazo is also all about. Anyway, Barney’s repeated organizing and reorganizing of our cluster of interests in anthropoesis kept us in a state of, we might say, “mutual being in becoming.”

But now Barney is gone. His physical, arms-around being so central to our becoming in this particular instance of ongoing intellectual inquiry, is no more. There is no abrazo that will bring Barney and his friendly being back to

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9 Margaret Mead’s phrasing!
us. And yet, though temporarily stopped in our tracks, these memorial sessions for Barney are also a form of mutual aid and a way of returning stalemated being back to its necessary and natural mutuality and its becoming. These are moments of recollection in which we can collect ourselves and become once again mutually engaged with the particular tasks at hand. For our “intercommunicating cluster,” the problem of anthropoesis, a task at hand to which Barney Bate recurrently returned us, he has now left for us to carry on. The mutuality with which his being was engaged lives on!}

Photo: Barney in Madurai, 1982 (photograph by Richard Davis, used with permission)\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} Richard Davis appended the following caption to this photograph on Facebook: This [photograph] was taken in May 1982, during the Chittrai-Alakar festival in Madurai. Down in the dry Vaikai River bed, among hundreds of thousands of folks celebrating Alakar’s arrival, I looked up to see the tall white Barney wading through the sea of festive people. This is one way I’ll remember Barney: immersed in the river of Tamil.
McKim Marriott
Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology,
The University of Chicago

Barney was only briefly and informally my student, but impressed me as few others have for his vocal and physical enthusiasm for Tamil language, especially for its political oratory. I will remain personally grateful for his continual reminders not to overgeneralize my North Indian perspective. His lavish hospitality for other students of foreign lands was a major, although informal asset of the department of anthropology.
John Kelly
Professor, Department of Anthropology, The University of Chicago

[...]

E. Annamalai
Visiting Professor, South Asian Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago

Barney: Tribute of a Tamil

தமிழ்க் காலம் ('These are bad times for Tamil'). In the short span of past one year, Tamil lost Noboru Karashima, A. Velu Pillai, Barney Bate, and Lakshmi Holmstrom. Barney was the youngest of these.

My relation with Barney is through Tamil. I have known in the last fifty years many Westerners who studied Tamil and have had a life-long relationship with it. Some of them have more than a professional relationship with Tamil. Barney is one of them. What is special about him? He is accepted as one of them by Tamil speakers in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, and Singapore. He was more than a Tamil-speaking white man for them. He was a Tamil. He lived like them in their midst – ate like they did from street vendors in Madurai in the middle of the night, relaxed in a lungi at home, sang film songs together, gossiped about everything with them, and so on. He was a true anthropologist. His instincts were like theirs. He identified himself with their world-view from a subaltern and non-Brahmin perspective. His entry into Tamil was through film lyrics, not the classics. But he traveled through all periods of Tamil. To explain the meaning construction in political oration in Tamil, he drew from a grammatical concept of old grammars.

His love for Tamil was organic. To a Tamil speaker who asked Barney what the duty of Tamil speakers like him towards Tamil should be, Barney in a booming voice responded, with surprise on his face, that no one should think of having the joy of being with the Tamil language as performing a duty. It is a joy to speak Tamil, read Tamil, and learn Tamil. It’s not a favor done to Tamil.

At the same time, he didn’t lose his distance from the subject of his love when studying it. His love for Tamil was not thus blind; his study of Tamil was not to sing its glory, as many lovers of Tamil back in Tamil Nadu would be expected to do. His study of subjects such as the Dravidian political culture of the Tamils, in which the younger generation of Tamil scholars grew up and to which they can relate themselves, drew them to Barney. They will miss Barney’s sense of belonging with them and his inspiration for them.
He was one among those who brought the Tamil program to Yale, and me to that program. He argued for the sprouting South Asian program at Yale to include the modern with the classical. He was a great moral support for me in establishing the Tamil program there. Though his love for idli brought him to our house often, we had many interesting conversations on Tamil and his research on it.

Barney came out strongly against any injustice inflicted on people marginalized by race, ethnicity, class, or gender. He never forgave political leaders with blood in their hands, be they in the U.S. or in India. He was a person ever willing to help people in need. When I went to New Haven for the first time to join Yale, he walked with me and my wife to see houses for rent and sat with us to assemble together the IKEA furniture he helped us buy. One day during such a sojourn of searching for houses, he made us walk with him in the protest march against Iraqi war. His friendliness with people, however, did not keep his mouth shut when he disagreed with them on principles he held dear. This caused some of his professional problems.

For a person so vivacious and optimistic about living like Barney, death came so surreptitiously and suddenly. All of us find it difficult, even now after two months, to believe that Barney is gone, and to accept it as a fact. It will remain so for a long, long time to come.
Blake Wentworth  
Assistant Professor, South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California – Berkeley  

In Memorium: John Bernard Bate

I read Tamil with Barney at the University of Chicago, I worked with him for about three years at Yale, spent a lot of time with him in India, and then spent a great deal of time with him over this past year while he was ensconced at the Stanford Humanities Center while I was at Berkeley. And there, as we know, he was drafting his forthcoming book on the early articulations of a Tamil public, to focus particularly on the great poet C. Subramania Bharati. I knew him, I suppose, for about twenty years, and I have to say that I miss him very much and I took great delight in his company. I used to tell Barney, during some of his more animated moments of discussion, that he had no filter whatsoever. This was a man for whom the world came at him directly. It vivified him with its joy, grieved him with its sorrows, and filled him with purpose. He was, and I think we can all agree, always excited: consuming enthusiasm for a scholarly idea he was pursuing; a commitment to ethical life in a world he knew to be unfair; indeed a world that had given him directly much more than his share of very hard times; conversation with friends and strangers; for teaching young people; for, in the last year of his life, getting seriously into birding with me, then seeing a new bird on a hike and calling me late at night to discuss the species he might have seen. I know of no one else who felt things so strongly.

The result was a man of passions, and for Barney it could have been no other way. But his was a kindness and generosity that made those passions wonderful to be around. His deep sensitivity to people made them people he valued: all people. Barney listened to those with whom he did not agree, and he sought to build connections. I have to say, I worried for my friend, thinking that his long hours on hard right-wing Internet sites spent talking to political adversaries who were growing increasing confident, truculent, about a really virulent American ethnonationalism, would end up damaging his own spirit. He was a man who had no filter. But Barney could no less stop such exchanges than stop breathing. It's important to remember, I think, that he was a fiercely political man. Our own discussions would grow excited on such fronts. Barney's voice rising with eagerness, the hands we all remember moving in animated tumult. But I needn't have worried, in the end. He felt things deeply, but he was able to engage callousness and anger without it burdening his own gentle nature. He was, to the end, one of the kindest people I have ever known.

Others are going to speak, and have spoken, about Barney’s extra-
ordinary facility in Tamil, his unique ability to actually engage with what he termed “Tamil worlds.” It was a very important point to him that the study of Tamil moved through the language. And again, all people. His was a Tamil you could call organic, as at home on the campaign hustings as on the narrow, sort of life-of-crime neighborhood he once lived in in Madurai. I met so many new people in Tamil Nadu through Barney; he seemed to be friends with everyone. Of course his scholarship was superb. No other Westerner I know of had the capacity in spoken Tamil to express so much, to see so many things. “Tamil Nadu,” he told me more than once, “was where I became a human being.” Through him, as friend, interlocutor, or teacher, many others came to experience that same depth of that feeling.

Characteristic of the peripatetic life that humanities scholarship imposes on us, Barney lived in many places as he raised a family and advanced in academia. Chicago, Yale, India, Singapore, northern California: in each and every place Barney made a home. And everywhere he made good friends. When I had the sad duty to call friends and inform them of Barney’s death, even those who had spent only a single day with him felt the loss of a brother. My childhood friend Duncan, who spent time hanging out with Barney and myself on vacations in Tamil Nadu and Connecticut, said it well: “You didn’t have to know Barney well to know how much he meant to you. He made occasions special, I remember times because he was there.”

What some of you might not know is that Barney found a spiritual home in California that he had never found before. He had come out before his time as fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center, and he had discovered the California coast. I think of him laughing and talking as we hiked along the ocean cliffs, Barney dangerously jumping up and down at the edge of a cliff after he saw a gray whale, dancing in the street to puzzled and delighted looks with a festive crowd after seeing music in Monterey, walking in stillness among the California redwoods. He was not a mystical man, but he spoke of mystical experiences in these places. I have known and walked them for my entire life, but Barney invested them new meaning for me. How could it be otherwise, in the company of someone with his enthusiasm?

It’s also important to note that, while in residence at Stanford, Barney found a new community—the community of Christ. He plunged into this new aspect of his life with characteristic eagerness, at Trinity Church, where he worshiped, sang, and conversed in study meetings with like-minded friends. In one of the last conversations we were to have, enjoying breakfast together a few days before he died, Barney turned our conversation about the principled struggle for social justice toward his increasing engagement with the teachings of Jesus, and the satisfaction he took in sharing time with others committed to a life in which all human beings have dignity. Barney knew Jesus as a
principled ally of the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the struggling. His life in the church filled him with the spirit of their hopes.

When I think of Barney’s scholarly work, I see these themes throughout. We might consider, along these lines, Alfred Gell’s understanding of “distributed personhood.” Artists have the capacity, in this model, to fashion indexes of themselves that carry their own agency, and that of others, beyond the limits of their own lives. The personal moves beyond the living body, to survive after the life of its own creator has moved on. Such, for example, was Barney’s understanding of the political life of Bharathi, who, in an anecdote that Barney loved to tell, was seen by many on Marina Beach in Chennai, dancing and singing during a Swadeshi convocation, when records tell us that the man himself was not there at all. Bharathi’s artistry, as Barney argued, had vivified him there as concretely as if he had been. And for those who saw him, he was there. Barney, to my mind, crafted distributed personhood in his own work, writing texts that will continue to live and inspire beyond the man himself. Whether discussing the aspirations of Tamil political parties, the orations of Arumuga Navalar, or the work of Subramania Siva and V.O.C (V. O. Chidambaram Pillai) to agitate for the mill strike in Tuttukkudi in the first decade of the twentieth century, Barney wrote of a Tamil public aligned with the laborer and the hopeful that also allowed him to understand himself. I hope that his scholarship on the articulation of a Tamil public reaching for justice and inclusion, will be taken up and carried on in our scholarship.

Bernard Bate passed away peacefully in his bed in the prime of life. He had just returned from a solo trip, which he described as a “spiritual voyage,” to the California coast. I caught flits of that trip in Barney’s excited and frequent messages to me that weekend, describing the weather at Pescadero Beach, the delicious beer he had just enjoyed at the local brewery, the birds and creatures he was seeing, the sheer pleasure he took in being by the Pacific Ocean waves. It was a journey that was, in the end, to take him directly onward. He came home, went to bed, and he slipped away. His self-described “spiritual voyage” to the ocean was a beautiful end to his life, and I know that it filled him with such joy. I shall never stop thinking about my friend, of how much he enriched my work and my own life, and of his powerful laugh. I hear him so often still, starting a conversation as he always would, looking over with a conspiratorial grin, “Hey man, you know what I like?”

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Whitney Cox
Associate Professor, South Asian Languages and Civilizations,
University of Chicago

A Rare Man

I’m going to repeat much of what’s been said already. What I’m going to say is actually the English version of some remarks that, very shortly after Barney’s passing, I gave to A. R. Venkathachalapathy, who translated them into Tamil. They appeared in the April issue of Kalachuvadu. I want to thank Chalapathy and Kannan of Kalachuvadu for the opportunity to speak to a Tamil audience about Barney, about how I felt about him.

I’d heard of Barney, like a lot of people, long before I ever met him. It was twenty-two years ago, I think, when I was his student in Madurai for the

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first time. People already told me about him. You’d run into people on the street who’d tell you about him. He was an unprecedented man. An *abūrva manitan* (‘a rare man’), which I asked actually to be the title of the remarks in *Kalachuvadu*, but they didn’t use it. He was this *velleikkāran*, this foreigner, who could speak Tamil so well. And who loved Madurai, and loved Tamil Nadu so much.

A few years later, I started graduate school, here at the University of Chicago, and I found out that this man was going to be one of my Tamil teachers. I was excited, and I was incredibly intimidated. Now Barney, of course, was quintessentially an anthropologist. And his dedication to Tamil was, if anything, even greater than I’d heard. And most of the time, I’m a Sanskritist and a philologist. Almost necessarily, we didn’t always agree about things. But it was one of the unique pleasures of our friendship, and one of his finest qualities as a person, that we could get so angry, we could shout at each other and then seconds later could be laughing so hard that tears were in our eyes. Blake said it better than I could, but this captures something about Barney. His capacity for a kind of intellectual and emotional intensity that was like nobody else I’d ever known. Barney just felt things more strongly than other people. It was a gift. It was like being a natural athlete or having an ear for music. It was why he was such a great anthropologist, and why he was such a great friend.

Barney taught me my first verses of the *Tirukkural*: “*Karka kacatārak karpavai karrapin niṟka ataṅkut taka.*”¹⁵ Barney, Blake, and Uma Gunasekaran and I, we read the *Kalinakkattupparani* with him.¹⁶ I remember very intensely, he was resistant to it at first, if I remember. But just the joy that this very modern man could access when reading old poems! On a separate class together, we read Tho. Paramasivam’s wonderful ethnohistory of Alagar Koyil, from beginning to end, including all the appendices. Tho. Pa., who passes by in these pictures (see photograph above), had been one of Barney’s beloved teachers. And reading the book with him was a memory that I cherish.

Barney and I liked to drink beer together, we liked to watch movies together, we liked to argue about politics, whether American or Tamil. We shared a love for science fiction. And we shared the fact that we lost our fathers at a young age.

Barney’s eulogy for Norman Cutler stayed with me more than fourteen years later. He called it “Tamil Lessons.” Unique among my friends, Barney gave me silly nicknames. He tried to call me “Chutney” for awhile ((laughter

¹⁵ ‘Let a man learn thoroughly whatever he may learn, and having so learned, let his conduct be worthy of it’ (*Tirukkural* 391).

¹⁶ A twelfth-century war poem on the victory of Kalinkam (modern Odisha) by the Chola king, Kulothunga.
all around)), until I just insisted that he just had to stop! And for most of the years that I knew him, he persisted always in calling me “Winston”—the only person I know who does that—for reasons that he never expressed. He did smoke Winston’s cigarettes though, and I suspect that might have something to do with it.

I want to talk a little bit about *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic*. It was a first book, but it was one of those rare things: it was a first book that will continue to find new and enthusiastic readers for years. Barney was committed to anthropology as a social science. And it was something that can be seen above all else in his commitment to the theoretically and lexically challenging realm of linguistic anthropology. But what stays with me about the book is really what I think are its humanistic qualities, which seem to me to be some of its most vital elements. When Barney compared passages from the *Manonmaniyan* to the speeches of Vaiko, or V. Gopalakrishnan, he wrote as a literary critic and as a real genuine connoisseur of language. He could admire and explain these texts and many other like them with an eye to their formal complexity and to their sinuous beauty, only to return to their political contents and their social location in a kind of seamless way that I’m envious of. And he combined this with the narrative and the emotive, the empathetic skills of the best kind of journalist: in the ways he structured major parts of his book around the speeches of the DMK activists, like N. G. M. Kavitha, or how he was able with a remarkable ability to place himself and his readers among the multiple public media, the hoardings, newspaper advertisements, and public displays used by the local AIADMK key figures to welcome Jayalalitha (General Secretary of the AIADMK and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu) to Madurai in the early 1990s.

But there’s another side of *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic* that makes it particularly valuable, if selfishly to me, which is its subtle engagement with the long cultural past of Tamil Nadu. I don’t want to say this to impose facile millennium-long continuities. And Barney for his part was very, strongly and vigorously resisted the overreaching claims of a kind of classical authenticity by modern Dravidianist ideologues. But there is much in the book as well as in Barney’s other work that gives historians and philologists new ways to look at much older parts of the Tamil cultural repertoire. Costas already mentioned this – this can be seen in Barney’s effort to connect modern speech forms to the *Nammūl* theory of ākupeyar.

But the book raises a lot of other questions as well—questions that indelibly effect my own thinking about Tamil texts of the medieval period,

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18 A play by P. Sundaram Pillai published in 1891.
texts of the Chola period, such as inscriptive eulogies of meyķirtti-s, or indeed our old mutual friend, Kaliṅkattupparaṇi. It’s not that medieval texts and present-day speeches are realizations of some single transhistorical Tamil aesthetic. Mēṭaipeccu, which was Barney’s object of particular interest, is a very modern form that relied on mass meetings and on electrical amplification. It was addressed to an electorate grounded in universal adult suffrage and is bound up inextricably with the cinema industry. But thanks to Barney’s work, it’s possible to see the ways in which the very different societies of medieval Cholamandalam and postcolonial Tamil Nadu possessed, in certain ways, a shared currency in the expression of public life.

Strangely enough, Barney and I were only ever in India together once. Barney stayed with me for a while when I was living in Pondicherry, during his first visit in many, many years. And it was a joy for me to see him there among his friends. The last time I saw Barney was here, was exactly a year ago, at Costas’s workshop. He spoke about returning from Singapore and how he felt like a stranger in America, mentioning the Black Lives Matter movement and the increase of deadly police violence against African-American youth. And that’s-, and others have said this, but that was Barney: always on the side of justice, filled with an overwhelming human fellow-feeling, and able to seamlessly link the worlds of scholarship, politics, and ethical life. After a talk, he and I had a drink together. We spoke a little bit about our work, and about what had happened to us in the few years since we’d last seen each other. We made plans to meet again. I told him I hoped we could have him come to Chicago soon as a visiting professor. We corresponded over email about that and about some other things besides. In November, he wrote to congratulate me on a piece that I published, and we made plans to meet, and for him to come home when he was to visit us for this workshop.

I loved Barney Bate. He was a great scholar, a true friend, and in the best possible way, a Tamil. I will never meet his like again.
General Discussion

Constantine V. Nakassis
We scheduled the memorial so we have some free time, because I know there’s so many of us who knew Barney. So if anybody would like to share some remembrances of Barney and the time that they knew him here in Chicago, Singapore, or in India, we’d just love to hear from you.

David Shulman (Hebrew University and the University of Chicago)
I think a lot of people really knew Barney longer and better than I did, but actually I too loved him, and I remember a moment, which I think Blake will remember too. As many of you know, Barney was scheduled to be the translator of the third volume of the Kamba Ramayanam for the Murty Library, the Āraṇiya Kāṇṭam. And he had a lot of trepidation about this, because he’d never actually taken on that kind of a task with a sort of major, you know, classical Tamil text. He’d translated a lot of Tamil texts, but nothing like that and on that scale, a classical text. And so there was a
moment when we convened the whole team of the *Kambam* translators at Yale—must have been, was it three years ago?, yeah, like three years ago—to talk about how we were sort of going to manage this huge project, which Blake was masterminding for us. And we brought a friend of mine, Peter Cole, who maybe some of you know the name, he's a very well-known poet, to talk to us about the art of translating poetry. And you know we had this discussion, people brought samples of their poetry, and so on. Peter, he gave a series of very useful principles and rules and things to keep in mind. And you could sort of see that Barney was like, sort of taking this in as kind of a whole new world which he, I think, you know, was beginning to love. And the final principle that Peter mentioned—he said, after having giving us all these kinds of interesting pieces of advice, he said: “But, you have to remember, that every verse that you’re translating is a masterpiece.” And Barney, and some of you here will be able to imagine him saying this, in that booming voice, he said, “Now you tell us?!” ((Laughter all around))

**Malarvizhi Jayanth** (University of Chicago)
I just wanted to add, as someone who grew up in Tamil Nadu, that Barney had a reputation that was well known in the field. I don't know if many anthropologists can claim that. People who talk about his speeches in American College (in Madurai), the fact that he could go on in Tamil for a long time. And though I just met him last year, his reputation had preceded him by several years. And it happened that a young man who helped him in Madurai was brought to Chicago with Barney's assistance. His name is Ismail. And Ismail, he helped me move into my apartment in Chicago. There were many ways in which Barney changed the world around him, that continues to impact, I think, a lot of the next generation of scholars as well.

**Constantine V. Nakassis**
Yeah, he was always such a great support to junior scholars—willing to meet anybody. I went back to look at some of my old correspondence with him, I said, I’m going to Madurai, you know, trying to look for a dissertation project, and he wrote me this long long long email just filled with different ideas, and with contacts like Sundar Kali, and some other people. And he didn’t, he never really hesitated to help somebody, especially when it came to young students.

**Amanda Weidman** (Bryn Mawr College)
I was never in India at the same time as Barney, but I did have the experience of following in his footsteps, and witnessing people’s respect and love for him. And I remember one time I went into a bookstore in T. Nagar (in Chennai),
and the owner of the bookstore kind of was suspicious of me, “What’s this white girl doing?,” you know? And he didn’t really pay me much attention, and I was wandering around the bookstore, and after about twenty minutes, you know, he came over to me, (and) he’s like, “Where are you from?” I said, “U.S.” He said, “Oh … do you know Barney Bate?” ((laughter all around)) I said yes, and then I was in the bookstore for two hours after that with the owner of the bookstore, who was showing me one book after another, talking about Barney. So that’s just a personal kind of reminder of that—but I also, you know, I’ve been rereading Barney’s work, in the last few days, and there’s a phrase that he used in … I think he liked to use this phrase, some of you might know this: “fateful entailments”? That sound familiar to anybody? He always used it in that in a lot of his writings, and I just think it’s an interesting (phrase). I always puzzled over it. Like, what exactly does he mean by this? But there’s something about the intertwining of the past and the future in there that I still think about.

Sally Noble (City Colleges of Chicago)
I met Barney actually-, we lived next to each other in the same building in Madurai for a year, way back in the salad days, if you can call it that. And I stepped away from Tamil studies, and he stayed very engaged. But at that time he was on-, I believe he was on the AIIS program, and I was doing my dissertation research, and we were in an apartment building and our friends Vidya and Rajasekaran lived downstairs, so we had a really nice little network of friends at that time. And he was mostly away doing his thing, but we would touch base in the evening and have tea or whatever together. But one thing that, outside of these things, was I believe, if my memory is correct, he and Steven M. Bloom, who was the Shansi Oberlin representative at American College, decided to do some dramas and stage them at American College that year. And so he brought The Zoo Story and staged it at American College. And I don’t think he was in the play, but they also did The Glass Menagerie. And so it was kind of bringing the cultures two ways … .

Indira Arumugam (National University of Singapore)
Just as Barney followed you (E. Annamalai) home for idli, he expressed a desire for proper sambar ((laughter all around)), so he came to my house on one varuṣapīṭappu, Tamil New Year. And of course my mother enthusiastically overfed him, and he did a great job trying to make headway into those piles of rice and sambar and everything. And, of course, I know my mother moved from a village in India to Singapore, and it's a huge journey. But I think it never really struck me. And he told me, “Your mother has traveled worlds,” you know? And there was a picture that I put up on Facebook of her
at the Vatican and everything, and he says like, “Have you ever thought about it, your mom has traveled from this little village, to Singapore, to Italy, I mean, she has traveled, like worlds.” And I think it never struck me how tremendous her journey had been until he sort of impressed that upon me. And, as you all know, he was very generous with scholars, so he read my work and helped me so much, and, you know, “Just send it off already, don’t keep thinking about it! Just send it off already!” So yeah, and because I was in Singapore and he was in Stanford, so I still think he’s in Stanford, and he’s going to come back to Singapore any moment. I really cannot come to grips with the idea that he’s no longer there. I still think he’s going to come back to Singapore at some point.

Constantine V. Nakassis
For those of you who knew him during his fieldwork, I was just thinking about this, you know the guys he worked with were not—they were kind of dangerous. (Blake Wentworth: Yeah) And just, you know, you read his dissertation, he’s got these little footnotes about Newt Gingrich. He was so politically engaged. In some ways, as you say, he felt everything and would speak his mind, willing to get into very deep conversations. I always wondered how he how he managed these guys.

Blake Wentworth
Funny story about that. Barney was sitting down with some um...the rougher side of some DMK partisans, and they asked him for a campaign contribution ((laughing all around)), and he said, “You know, I don’t think I’m allowed, as a foreigner, to give money.” The guy turned around and stood up and said, “We teach our lawyers the law.” ((laughter all around))

Constantine Nakassis
Did he give the money?

Blake Wentworth
He did not. But he danced in some circles that were rough, that’s for sure.

Anna Seastrand (University of Chicago)
I’d only met Barney for the first time last year, so I don’t have a lot to say, but I was thrilled to be able to meet him, because I remember … I studied in Madurai in 2001, and in the house where I studied there were so many pictures of Barney ((laughter)), and everyone talked about Barney Bates, because he was always in the plural. And so finally, after so many years, to be able to meet him last year, it was such a pleasure. And when you talk about
his passions, his sparkle in his eye, his voice, even in that one meeting it’s something that so impressed me, and I can feel it still.

**Kathleen Morrison** (University of Chicago)
So Barney was really in some ways a friend to the downtrodden, I would say, even within the field of anthropology. Because I joined the faculty in 1996, when Barney was still a graduate student here, and he immediately made friends with me, even though I don’t speak Tamil, I only work in Karnataka, and so a little next door, and I’m not an ethnographer, but an archaeologist, so we were always sort of neighbors in every sense of the word. And at the time, it was a time in the department when there was never any crossing whatsoever between the subfields of anthropology. And so I was setting up what we called the *Interdisciplinary Archeology Workshop*, to think about bringing archeological research together across campus, and I was talking to Barney about it, for some reason, I don’t know how that happened, maybe at the Friday chai, and he got very excited, and we started talking about his dissertation project on oratory, and about the giant cutout figures of Tamil politicians that you see on the street, and about processions, and the way in which movement occurs in political events, the role of those large objects, and the way in which they were placed, and about the materiality of the kind of political engagement. And Barney, you know, was very excited! Very excited about this! And thinking that beyond the linguistic there was some kind of analytical possibility for understanding not just Tamil politics, but all of politics in terms of its kind of performed materiality. So he actually volunteered to give a talk, one of the talks of the very first round of the *Interdisciplinary Archeology Workshop* (IAW). He was the first non-archeologist to give a talk in the IAW, and it was really one of the best talks we ever had actually too, because he was really open to discussing these objects, and engaged the audience, and we got into, you know, really just a rousing discussion. And also, the other thing is, of course, the archeologists are … it was in John( Kelly)'s comment about Barney maybe not being fully at home in the sort of competitive department of Chicago Anthropology, but the archeologists were a sort of small marginalized subfield within that, and we always ate and drank beer during our talks, not after, and he really embraced that ((laughter all around)) also with a kind of fervor, and, and so … so his presence-, and I don’t remember any other workshop quite honestly, probably from the last twenty years, except for that one, which was really so great.

**Constantine V. Nakassis**
Yeah, he really liked beer. ((laughter all around))
Blake Wentworth
Absolutely!

Zoë Woodbury High (University of Chicago)
Barney Bate was my professor four years ago, when I was a freshman in college and he was a visiting professor at Columbia, for one semester. And it was a graduate seminar that I had signed up for, and convinced my best friend, who was also a college freshman, to sign up for. And so it was kind of the two of us and then three graduate students who focused on Tamil Nadu, and him. And he was so incredibly supportive of me and my friend, and met with me so frequently to talk about my writing and my responses. And really that class was the single thing that really motivated me to develop more of an interest in Tamil and in south India. And I didn't see him again after that, but I thought about him quite a lot, especially when I was applying to graduate programs, and just what an influence that class had on me. And I remember this particularly, his love for A. R. Rahman’s songs from the nineties ((laughter)) and he would constantly be listening to them when he would come into the classroom at the beginning, and sometimes like transcribing the lyrics of them on the board, and he would like explain something about them to us. And then just a few weeks before I learned that he had passed away, I actually sent him an email just to thank him for that class, and for sort of directing me more towards studying south India. And I heard back from him, and we had a really nice correspondence, and it led to (saying that’d we) see each other sometime in the future, also. So, I was really thankful for that, that I was able to have that class, and that last correspondence with him.

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Photograph of Barney, posted by Noah Bate on his Facebook on March 10, 2016 (used with permission)