In Memoriam: Edward Branigan (1945–2019)

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Teacher. Mentor. Dissertation committee member. Advocate. Colleague. Friend. These are the many roles that Ed Branigan filled in my life over the eleven-plus years I was privileged to know him. However, merely listing these roles does not really do justice to his impact on me, because it leaves out the kindness, generosity, wit, and enthusiasm that he always had in store for me in all of our interactions, be they postlecture dinners together in Santa Barbara, movie marathons at his house in Oak Park, California, or, as was more and more common over the last few years, e-mail messages.

As I told him in our final exchange last November, he immeasurably changed my life for the better and was responsible for a great deal of my growth as a scholar. Thus, I was honored to be asked by *Projections* to write a tribute to him. What follows is an attempt to articulate what Ed meant to me personally; for an account of his brilliant contributions to film studies, his books and articles are all out there just waiting to be (re)read.

I met Ed in December 2007, when I was in the first year of my PhD at the University of California, Los Angeles, during a graduate student conference. I remember being eager to speak with him because we shared a background in film studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I had hoped to find a methodological kindred spirit, and I was not disappointed. He mentioned that he regularly taught a course on color in film at University of California, Santa Barbara, and after further e-mail correspondence, I enrolled in it the following spring, driving from Los Angeles twice a week to hear his lectures.

As anyone who has seen him talk surely knows, Ed had a particular and unforgettable lecture style, where he would become increasingly animated, so much so that at times it almost seemed as though he were yelling. However, his students always saw the twinkle in his eye indicating that he was simply excited about his subject. I know his style was effective and inspiring, not only because I experienced it firsthand, but also because after his last lecture in this particular course he proudly showed me a drawing that a student had made

of him: a tableau of doodles depicting Ed in action, complete with quotations and, appropriately for this course, splashes of color.

Taking Ed's course on color aesthetics was the start of many good things in my life and academic career. Ed loved the paper I eventually produced for the course, so much so that he encouraged me to submit it to a conference on color, and from there it was solicited to become part of an edited collection—my first print publication. Ed was also the one to suggest that I attend the annual conference for the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image for the first time; it has since become by far the most celebrated holiday in my intellectual calendar. I likely would not have done—or even thought to have done—any of these things if Ed had not pushed me to do so, effectively welcoming me into a first-rate intellectual community and helping me feel like I belong there.

Ed would become instrumental in my academic life again as I began work on my dissertation topic in the winter of 2008. He helped me work out my ideas and approach, responding at length to the ludicrously long e-mails I would send him as I tried to think through some knotty problems. Like any good mentor, he would offer guidance, recommendations for reading, and heaps of encouragement, but looking back on it now what is even more remarkable is that he was under no obligation to do so; I was not a student in his department, and while I would eventually ask him to sit on my committee, at that point he bore no responsibilities toward me. However, that was Ed: extremely generous with his time and energy, and happy to wander down my particular garden path of scholarly inquiry, drawing certain flora and fauna to my attention and helping me determine which forks to travel.

What made Ed even more special was that his mentorship extended beyond academia and into true friendship. Over the next five years, our e-mail exchanges would often revolve around my dissertation progress, but other life topics entered into our orbit as well. Ed became a person I could turn to for advice on more than simply academia. For instance, here he is reflecting poetically on romance: "Nothing is smooth with relationships, for any appreciable length of time anyway. The cork always seems to be bobbing on some sea. Films and careers are easy in comparison."

Ed retired in 2012, but the work never ceased. After reflecting on how a litany of professional responsibilities made his retirement seem more a rumor than a reality, he bemusedly wrote of his exhaustion: "I am drawn to the walrus, on its back, eyes closed, commandingly still, unmoved by any obligation to focus. The sea stars or starfish or whatever, at rest fastened onto, stuck to the cool tidal pool rocks, also seem to have things just about right." A year later, he would reflect: "Presently staring at the hillside from my office window. Need to write letters of recommendation. Staring is better." Soon enough, I would

finish my PhD and become one of those asking, ceaselessly, for my own letters of recommendation, and Ed always diligently wrote them.

As anyone who knew him can attest, part of Ed's charm was his wit, self-deprecating or otherwise. His responses to my inquiries about his life in general often began with something like the following from 2010: "All is chaos, as is normal here." When his house in Oak Park burned down during his move to Bellingham, Washington, in 2017, I told him that I hoped he had not lost all his work and/or books. His response: "Books questionable. Work questionable in general though survived the fire." Ed invited me up to Washington for a visit, but I never took him up on it, much to my regret. Nevertheless, I am glad that I got the chance to tell him how much he meant to me before his passing. He was a central figure in many of the things that I consider to be among my proudest accomplishments, and for all of his support, both professionally and personally, I will be forever indebted to him. I will miss him dearly.