



Anderson's refusal to be
hemmed in by professional identity
is an inspiration...

BENEDICT
RICHARD O'GORMAN
ANDERSON



In Memoriam
1936-2015

...and reminder of the creative insights that come from a willingness to learn across social, intellectual, and political boundaries.

by Gretchen Ritter, dean of arts and sciences and professor of government

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT at Cornell back in the early 1980s, Ben Anderson looked the part of the Cornell professor. He was a bit ruffled, with hair that seemed as though it had been repeatedly raked through by his fingers. Whenever and wherever you saw him on campus, he had a book in one hand and a small cigar in the other. It often appeared as though he was lost in thought. At the time he had a reputation as that really smart guy who read and talked about everything in his classes. He ran the gamut when it came to intellectual companionship—intersecting as much with anthropologists, historians, literary theorists, and economists as he did with his colleagues in the Government Department. On the eve of the publication of *Imagined Communities*, Ben Anderson was seen as the slightly less famous brother of Perry Anderson, the well-known British historian, who was one of the editors of the *New Left Review*. That changed, of course, with the publication of *Imagined Communities* in 1983.

There are two things that I admire deeply about Ben Anderson's career. One was his utter disregard for disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boundaries. Anderson wrote his dissertation at Cornell under the direction of Professor George Kahin. Like Kahin, Anderson was often mistaken for a historian rather than a political scientist. Learning from a range of seemingly disparate sources and questioning commonsense wisdom about politics and culture was Anderson's trademark. His first book was inspired by a passing comment by Alan Bloom—then Anderson's senior colleague in the Government Department—that the Greeks had no concept of power. Anderson tells of running to the library to check the classical Greek dictionary and discovering that indeed there was no general concept of power there. It struck him that the same was true in classical Javanese culture. From this came Anderson's first book, *The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture*.

Anderson was deeply influenced by colleagues and graduate students in the Southeast Asia Studies Program at Cornell, who came from a wide range of departments. Reflecting on this period, he wrote joyfully about teaching with James Siegel, a professor of anthropology (and student of Clifford Geertz) with whom he taught a graduate seminar on Indonesian fiction. From this, he wrote: "I began to think about how I could use my early training in classical and Western




European, as well as Indonesian, literature for a new kind of analysis of the relations between imagination and reality in the study of politics." On this campus, in that interdisciplinary space, the seed of what became *Imagined Communities* was born.

At a time when there seems to be a great devotion to disciplinarity and even larger disciplinary categories, such as humanities and social science, Anderson's refusal to be hemmed in by professional identity is an inspiration and reminder of the creative insights that come from a willingness to learn across social, intellectual, and political boundaries.

The other thing I admire about Anderson's career was his willingness to bring a political and ethical perspective to his work. He believed that politics and scholarship were inseparable. Along with Ruth McVey, Anderson penned the famous "Cornell Paper" chronicling the mass murder of Communist Party members in Indonesia following the coup of 1965.¹ He also served as one of only two foreign witnesses to the trial

of the Communist Party secretary in 1971 and later translated the secretary's testimony into English. As a result of all of this, Anderson was banned from Indonesia and was only able to return after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. As one of my classmates from the early '80s said in a message to me, Anderson "exemplified the values of courage and speaking the truth even when powerful government forces fought to suppress that truth."

As someone who stood up against government power, who challenged received categories and wisdoms, and who offered insightful ways of understanding some of our most important political categories, such as nationalism, Ben Anderson will continue to serve as a model and inspiration to us all. 



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he simply set you up, pushed you forward, and said...

explore.

by Tamara Loos, associate professor of history and Asian studies

IN THE WAKE OF BEN'S PASSING, I have heard many of us express deep, abiding respect for him and a profound sense of loss. I have also learned through these conversations, that few felt close to Ben or knew how Ben felt about us.

Ben was formal, maybe not in the way he dressed, but in his interpersonal relationships. He would never express directly his care for you or his praise. But I've been thinking about this: Here he was, a world-renowned scholar who could have taught anywhere, lived anywhere. He travelled to Jakarta or Bangkok or Manila and would return again and again to Freeville, to the Southeast Asia Program, and to us, his community, his family. He was devoted to us here and committed to our work on Southeast Asia. Ben expressed his affection and his respect in this and many other meaningful ways.


Ben helped establish the journal *Indonesia* in 1966. In 2008, when Ben and Jim Siegel decided to retire from the journal's editorship, they selected Professors Eric Tagliacozzo and Josh Barker to replace them. Did Ben say to Eric and Josh: "Good job! We think you're the best scholars imaginable to edit this journal for all the amazing scholarship you've written about Indonesia!" No. Ben was complex socially and interpersonally. He revealed he cared in many other ways, though. Like asking Eric and Josh to shepherd his literal brainchild.

Ben's friendship was expressed in many uncommon ways, and his mentorship was freeing. Ben did not dictate or inter-

fere with your scholarship or ideas—he didn't need to mark it, to make it his, even when the projects (like an essay about his life as it related to his scholarship on Thailand, or his baby, the journal *Indonesia*) were of profound personal significance to him. Instead he simply set you up, pushed your forward, and said *explore*.

Exploring is something Ben did in his life with gusto. Ben expressed this in an email he wrote in 2012 in response to my description of a torrential thunderstorm whipping past me in my high-rise Bangkok apartment. His response:

"I envy you—I really love the *rydu fon* [Thai: "rainy season"] seen from 9 floors up, flash lightning, exhilarating downpours. I have fond memories of *rydu fon* in Jakarta in the early '60s. In the slums, like energetic young cockroaches, the kids would pour out of their hovels, all stark naked, including even little girls, loving the warm rain, the freshened air, and looking for a few pennies from bourgeois cars stuck in small flooded streets—[the kids] pretending to help push these cars into drier places. It is what the French call *jouissance*. Mad ecstasy against the dull ruts of every day life."²

For Ben, a small bite out of life would not suffice. He experienced what life offered via *all* his senses, not just his intellect. Life was sensuous, textured, tactile, vibrant. 

by Isaac Kramnick, professor emeritus of government

I RISE TO SAY A FEW WORDS about the incomparable Ben Anderson—a colossally influential and courageous scholar—and his membership in one particular imagined community, one within which he spent some 40 years: the Cornell Government Department.

Ben came to Ithaca as a graduate student in the early 1960s, and in 1967 began his teaching career in the Government

Department, which he proceeded to work on with a pen throughout the meeting, smoking his small cigars or cigarettes as he quickly filled in the blanks....

...Like many communities, real or imagined, the Government Department had an identity crisis, which took place during Ben's years as an assistant professor in the late '60s... Government had to make a decision: Should it go to Uris



Department, never really to leave it until his retirement in 2002. He arrived in Ithaca and to the Government Department during the tumultuous years when Cornell was one of the national epicenters of campus anti-Vietnam War protest and civil rights activism.

When he joined the Government faculty some of his colleagues were the leading campus conservatives, such as Alan Bloom, Clinton Rossiter, and Walter Berns, who saw themselves defending the barricades of academic tradition, collegiate hierarchies, and law and order from the barbarous attacks of student radicals. The obvious political exception within the imagined community called the Government Department was George Kahin, Ben Anderson's mentor, a nationally renowned anti-Vietnam War activist who helped create the "teach-in" movement in the United States.

Ben Anderson was very much the disciple of George Kahin. Like Kahin, he combined meticulous scholarship with passionate political engagement...Anderson's essay refuting the official story of the September 30 Movement and the anti-Communist slaughter of almost a million people in Indonesia led to him, like George, being banned from that country from 1972 until the end of Suharto's dictatorship in 1998. But Anderson differed from Kahin in one very important respect. George was a consummate inside player, who was deeply interested in and involved with Government Department politics....

...Despite this, he almost always attended department meetings, though he seldom weighed in. Wearing always his Indonesian long white safari shirt, Ben sat at the meeting table invariably holding a copy of the *New York Times* open to

Hall with the social scientists or to McGraw Hall, where History was going?

Led by traditionalists like George Kahin, the Government Department, which had never imagined itself as a "political science" department, consulted its soul and voted to join History in McGraw Hall, where the two would be paired for more than 35 years. Government imagined itself not as

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a quantitative social science community, but as institutionally and historically focused. That decision was made over many department meetings, with George Kahin arguing and persuading, and with Ben Anderson doing his crossword puzzles.

The decision not to go to Uris provided a congenial departmental home in which over thirty years Ben could produce his qualitative and historical scholarship, including of course in 1983 his magnum opus, *Imagined Communities*, which brought him international acclaim while shining a tiny spotlight on his home, the historically branded Government Department.

...It seems somehow fitting that Ben, a citizen of the world, died in Indonesia. But it also seems to me entirely appropriate to declare with great pride that the identity of this brilliant intellectual was bound up with Cornell's Government Department, a community that was, and remains, both imagined and real. *le*

All Night Markets and Other Soundscapes Now Lost to Us

LINES FROM W.H. Auden's poem "Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone...Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun" surfaced strangely in fits and starts in Japan on Sunday, December 13, when I heard the news of Ben's passing. I was with 500 other people at the inaugural Southeast Asian Studies in Asia Conference in Kyoto. The conference had assembled scholars from all ten ASEAN countries, plus Timor Leste, and fifteen other countries in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. Among the participants were many friends and colleagues of Om Ben.

The conference immediately became a place of mourning, an impromptu wake, in the words of Jeff Hadler, a place where we grieved individually and together, comforted each

other, and celebrated Ben's life. We are/were, as Ben's former student Carol Hau described, "mere nodes in a larger network, as Ben's students have found jobs in—and in some cases headed—institutions of area studies and discipline-based fields around the world. That network also includes Ben's loved ones, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances from all walks of life, and parts of that network have already come together in the many memorials in

Surabaya, Bangkok, Manila, Jakarta, Ithaca, London, Berkeley, and other places that trace the wide arc of Ben's journeys across time and space."

We are never prepared for death, especially the loss of someone so vital to our Cornell community, a mentor, colleague, teacher, adversary, and friend. I want to thank you all, particularly those of you who have come to speak and to say prayers on Ben's behalf, and perhaps more dear and meaningful to Ben, those musicians, some of whom have traveled from as far as Middletown, Ct. Pak Marsam, who will be playing Ben's *gender*, and Bu Maeny, for braving the often unpredictable winter weather, and coming to today's memorial service at Sage Chapel.

As the director of the Southeast Asia Program, I cannot claim to be one of Ben's "chosen," but I can recall many conversations with him over the years, conversations that always entailed a specific line of questioning in which we covered everything from shadow puppets (like the flatulent, fun-loving Semar on the memorial program) to masks, ghosts to explicit hell scenes, East Javanese *candi* to *capung* (dragonflies), and especially the savory smells, tastes, and

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hustle bustle of night markets. Choice paintings by Balinese artist Ida Bagus Made, the life and work of Claire Holt, Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger*, and of course, the novels and short stories of Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, all entered into the oddly imbalanced mix. Now I realize what tied them all together was a richly embodied relationship to the natural and built world that they inhabited filled with soundscapes, many now lost to us....

...I still see Om Ben gliding in this way, cutting across the Arts quad in his black-and-white poncho looking all the world like a version of Clint Eastwood—Ben's irreverence for clocks, for clothing that constrained, and especially for the designated pathways at Cornell, always brought the theme song from the spaghetti western *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* to mind. (I can hear it now!) I told him that once, and he laughed a deep belly laugh, a rich guttural soundscape strangely lost to us. So now in the hustle and bustle of Sage, we come together to remember a remarkable man, and with eyes raised to the ceiling, where rivers of stars intersect at nave and apse, I close with "I See You're Here" (*Kulihat Kamu Ada Disini*) by the Indonesian poet, healer, and political activist Putu Oka Sukanta:

*If you are here tonight
even though we know you are resting in the earth's embrace
if you are here with us
even though we know you've gone
come, sit here with us
as we plan out the path to dawn
for we know your spirit is not dead
we still feel the warmth of your embrace
we still feel the beating of your heart
Knocking
Ticking tick tock tick tock tick tock tick!*³ 🍷

by Ben Abel and Eveline Ferretti

Pond Tales, Om Ben

FOR OVER 40 YEARS, Ben Anderson's home in the United States was an old farmhouse on a few acres in Freeville, N.Y., about 12 miles east of Cornell's campus. There, for two of those four decades, Ben was our neighbor and our dear friend. Our two sons, teenagers now, knew Ben Anderson as Om Ben—a large, round, white-haired, exquisitely quirky, and profoundly kind figure in their lives. He was for them the grandfather at the dinner table, unsparingly observant, prone to kooky questions and puzzling (and in their opinion, no doubt, tedious) intellectual riddles, decidedly unhip in his relationship to the trappings of American teenage modernity, yet always fantastically playful, always eager to spar with deliciously low-brow jokes and fake boxing maneuvers, and often surprisingly given to defending their youthful perspective against the interventions of dismayed parents who hoped to curb some of the breathtaking excesses of teenage self-centeredness.

For as long as we lived with him as a family, Ben spent only part of the year—the part that extended from warm summer into colorful fall—in Freeville. Yet the slow languor of countless summer and early fall evenings afforded us the opportunity of getting to know him from many angles. And one of the most revealing and precious of these was his love of the animals around his Freeville home. The wooded hills and wetlands of Pleasant Hollow harbor an abundance of wildlife. Ben was comfortable, even enthusiastic about most of it, but three particular animals stand out as Ben's favorites in this landscape. They were creatures he would look for especially eagerly each time he returned to Upstate New York in late spring. And really they say a great deal about the Ben we knew and loved.

The first was the blue heron. A frequent, silent visitor to the marshy pond on the downhill side of Ben's backyard during the summer months, the heron was much loved by Ben for its somewhat grouchy look, but also for its remarkable ability to stand stock-still, head bent over the pond's edge, for what seemed like hours. Of course, we know that herons behave this way because they have perfected the strategy of waiting patiently for an edible something to present itself and ever so skillfully snapping it up. But from Ben's own perch on his small second-floor porch, it was easy to imagine that long-legged visitor on the far side of the sagging dock as a being who had perfected the art of losing himself deeply in thought, waiting for that one breakthrough insight that made all that stillness, all that thinking, all that separation from cheap distractions, very, very worthwhile.

The second animal that Ben had particular fondness for during his summers at home was a more elusive character, presenting itself only occasionally after sunlight had faded from the evening sky, and then only by call. Nothing would put Ben in a better mood for the evening than the hoot of the barred owl making itself heard from the tall pines by the



back deck. We could never see that owl, of course. But when it called, the dinner conversation would come to a sudden stop, and all would peer rapturously up into the branches high above, each of us envisioning the look of that wide-eyed bird, watchfully peering around and over, scanning the night above and below, for what is and what moves.

Last, but by no means least, of the natives that Ben most loved in the forest-field-wetland habitat around his home was the dandy skunk. The two places of skunk hibernation that we discovered around Ben's house over the years ensured a frequent number of visits from these creatures over the spring, summer, and fall months. Ben was absolutely delighted when they came to call and was ready to defend their reputation fiercely, even as the rest of us proved far more skeptical and far less able to shake off our nervous unease in their presence. No doubt the skunk's magnificent attire—that gorgeous white mane against that jet-black base—explained at least some of Ben's admiration. Ultimately, however, it is also easy to believe that what drew Ben most to these handsome fellows was their strategy in face of untoward developments—their ability to deploy a non-lethal yet most effective strategy to persuade any oncoming menace to stop, re-evaluate the sense of its attack, and more likely than not, back off.

The blue heron, the barred owl, the skunk—all animals native to the Finger Lakes, and thanks to the years that we were able to spend with our peripatetic Om Ben, ones that will always remind us of him, of some of the values he held most dear, and of some of the most important lessons he gave us, both in word and by virtue of how he led his own life: The importance of taking the time to stop and think, of looking up and around, and, yes, when the situation calls for it, of having the courage and presence of mind to make a bit of a stink. *el*

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Frederick Bunnell helped both Ruth and Ben as they wrote this paper.
- ² Personal email, July 18, 2012.
- ³ From "I See You're Here" (*Kulihat Kamu Ada Disini*), translated by Keith Foulcher, in *Surat Bunga Dari Ubud*, by Putu Oka Sukanta (edisi dua bahasa), (Penerbit Koekoesan, 2008), 128-131.