

Obituary and Memorial

Michael Silverstein

September 12, 1945 – July 17, 2020

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In Memory of Michael Silverstein

Michael Silverstein, renowned Linguistic Anthropologist, born on September 12, 1945, passed away on July 17, 2020, following a battle with cancer. Michael Silverstein revolutionized a progressive Linguistic Anthropology, following his grounding as part of a lineage in Anthropology, Linguistics, and other fields, with his work on the semiotics of Language and Society, and on the understandings of Language as penetrable by human intention and by societal complexity.

Michael Silverstein was the Charles F. Grey Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology, Linguistics and Psychology at the University of Chicago, after having studied at Harvard in his academically formative years. Silverstein was central to 20th century academic thought, which included Critical theory, Anthropology, Linguistics, Literary Theory and Semiotics. Silverstein was affiliated with Roman Jakobson, and other current Linguists and Anthropologists who shaped our new and revolutionary understandings of the Social sciences and the Humanities. Michael was awarded the highly prestigious Franz Boas award for Exemplary Service to Anthropology by the *American Anthropological Association*.

His ubiquitous and certainly relentless support and warmth toward students and academics of all levels was unmatched, standing as a mentor and exemplary to all scholars both within his fields of work and outside, yet not once presenting himself above others. Synonymous with Linguistic Anthropology, yet engaging in work above and beyond the bounds of Linguistic Anthropology,

Michael was well known for this reducing academic complexity to play, as he impressed upon others that complexity in thought can become simplicity, while similarly frequently engaging in this verbal play when discussing Linguistics, Literary Theory, and the like. His love of a variety of cultural influences was forever evident in his social interactions with people.

The academic world owes an unpayable debt to Michael Silverstein, one of a lineage of scholars in Linguistics and Anthropology that fundamentally shaped theory both within these fields and beyond, a lineage central to the intellectual re-alignment of both academia and of larger society vis-a-vis positivist thought.