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The 2012-13 Fiscal year began on July 1, 2012. That marked the thirteenth birthday of the CSSR, which began with a subvention from the office of the Provost in 1999. In my religious tradition children are welcomed to the full world of Jewish observance and action at thirteen when they become “B’nei Mitzvah,” that is, young people who are no longer too young to accept the obligations of the Covenant.

Harvey Krueger C’51, Law ‘54 has given the CSSR a “Bar Mitzvah” present of a spectacular sort. He and his family have established the Krueger Family Fund in Science and Religion in the Arts and Sciences here at Columbia. Mr. Krueger has chosen to allow us to place this gift in an A&S quasi-endowment, so that we may invade its principal, while leaving the remainder to grow in step with the University Endowment.

With the cooperation of the office of the Vice President of Arts and Sciences including the enthusiastic endorsement of Vice President Nicholas Dirks, we now are in the process of establishing a precedent that will benefit the CSSR, the Arts and Sciences, and the Earth Institute. This large gift will enable the CSSR to continue as a Center of the Earth Institute, while also being able to grow into a full Center of the Arts and Sciences.

CSSR in the Arts and Sciences

In AY13 we expect to see outreach, educational and research links opening between other EI Centers, and those A&S Centers whose work is relevant to EI but which to this day have not engaged in collaborate work with EI Centers. We will certainly use these coming years of endowed support to attempt to raise further gifts and endowments, as well. To begin with, for many years I have been a Professor of Biological Sciences and an adjunct member of the Department of Environmental, Evolutionary and Ecological Biology (EEEB) in the Arts and Sciences, as well as a member of the Earth Institute Faculty.

We expect CSSR to build on this initial overlap and to play a larger role over time in expanding the links between A&S and EI. The first impact the Krueger gift will have on CSSR beyond assuring its survival and allowing us to ask for further funding from foundations and friends as a viable Center, will be on our role in curriculum development.

For example, in AY11 the CSSR-sponsored senior seminar EEEB W4321 Human Identity was accepted as a course in the Human Biology track of the EEEB major. Working with Dr. Jill Shapiro of EEEB, the instructors (Marya Pollack, Cynthia Peabody, Marcia Sells and Bob Pollack) have offered the course four times, and will teach it in each semester of AY12. With this gift in hand, we expect to see many more CSSR co-sponsored courses in the Arts and Sciences, as well as at Union Theological Seminary.

I’ll close this brief report by thanking everyone who has sent us a gift in support of our programs in the past year. These checks from friends add up to a sum that each year has had a significant impact on many students, and also on the many members of our community with whom they work. All gifts are appreciated of course, and now – with our Endowment – they are more, not less, important, because they now have a better chance of serving our future as well as our present programs. If you have read this far and think this makes sense, please consider joining the growing membership of the Friends of the CSSR.
The Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center

From their website, www.tcchcc.org:

Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center is a 729-bed continuing care facility with a multitude of special care units, as well as two large outpatient clinics.

As a member of the Catholic Health Care System, we are committed to the belief that life is sacred and worthy of appropriate medical support and rehabilitative services. We provide unique approaches to the care and treatment of our residents and patients, and serve the elderly, people with developmental disabilities, and those who live with chronic illness; people of all races, creeds, economic means and ethnic backgrounds.

Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center’s staff respects the dignity of every human being and recognizes each individual’s potential to live as independently as possible.
Putting Columbia Students “At Your Service” for the Elderly & Infirm
Ashley Shaw

My name is Ashley Shaw, and I am currently a senior studying Biology and Art History at Columbia College. I joined the CSSR as a sophomore in Summer 2011 as a CSSR intern studying palliative and end-of-life care at ArchCare at Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center (TCC), a large skilled nursing facility on E. 106th St. and Fifth Avenue operated by the Archdiocese of New York which cares for a largely underserved elderly and infirm population. I was so captivated by the people I met there and so engrossed in learning about palliative care that I stayed on through the 2011-2012 academic year. In May 2012, I received two generous grants from the Columbia University Center for Career Education under the Columbia College Alumni & Parent Fund and Work Exemption Program to lay the foundations for a new volunteer program at TCC that would place Columbia University students directly at the service of TCC’s frailest long-term residents.

During the summer, I worked directly with administrators and staff at TCC to create a strong volunteer program that would directly address the current needs of TCC’s staff, patients, and long-term residents. I received invaluable support and advice throughout the project from Dr. Anthony Lechich, Medical Director, Jeannine Abruzzo, Senior Director of Quality of Life, and Thomas McDonald, Director of Volunteer Services & Therapeutic Recreation as well as from the 2012-2013 CSSR-TCC interns, Eileen Young and Rachel Schenkel. In addition, I also worked closely with the Presidents of TCC’s Resident Council and Family & Friends Council to determine the most impacting use of volunteers. On August 8th, 2012, I was granted approval from TCC’s Executive Director to begin the recruitment process for the new volunteer program. There are currently twenty-three enthusiastic, passionate students from Columbia University who are completing TCC’s Volunteer Orientation process and who will begin serving the patients and staff at TCC on Saturday, October 13th.

As part of this new volunteer program, titled “At Your Service,” Columbia University students will work in a complex clinical setting alongside TCC’s interdisciplinary care team consisting of physicians, nurses, social workers, therapists, and chaplains to directly impact and improve the experiences of our patients, long-term residents, and their family members. Students will have the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with members of our diverse patient and resident population and shadow TCC staff members in all disciplines.

“At Your Service” student volunteers commit to performing four hours of service each week. During their first two-hour weekly shift, volunteers will assist the staff, patients, and family members of TCC’s Subacute Transitional Care program, which serves elderly and frail patients gently recovering from hospitalizations for major surgeries addressing cardiac attacks, strokes, joint replacements, pulmonary disease, and chemotherapy, among other conditions. Volunteers will assist the TCC staff in responding to call bells, greeting family, friends, and other visitors to the floor, and maintaining high morale among patients through both individualized interactions and Therapeutic Recreation activities such as Bingo, Arts & Crafts, and Volleyball. During their second two-hour weekly shift, volunteers will serve as long-term companions for an individual long-term resident who, based on observations from TCC staff, could benefit from heightened attention because he or she rarely receives visitors. Volunteers will plan activities to do with their matched resident during their weekly two-hour based on their mutual shared interests, whether that means reading a book together, playing a game of chess, or enjoying a trip to TCC’s beauty salon together. Most importantly, the “At Your Service” student volunteers serve as advocates—the attentive eyes and the ears—for the psychosocial well-being of TCC’s patients and residents.
The “At Your Service” program also incorporates an element of service learning inherent in the CSSR-TCC internship program. Students are asked to submit a 300-word reflection piece on their experiences at TCC every month. They are asked to struggle with the following questions: How does it feel to accompany a severely ill patient on their journey towards the end-of-life? How can institutions such as TCC better address the palliative care needs of those for whom they shelter? What are the challenges facing nursing homes in today’s chaotic healthcare environment? How do we identify and address a patient's spiritual, psychosocial, and/or existential pain? What are the institutional and social barriers that prevent the effective use of advance directives and palliative care? How do we sufficiently attend to a dying person’s spiritual and religious identity at the same time as we tend to the ailments and ills of their body? Most importantly, how do we as a society achieve a peaceful, dignified death for each human being in the healthcare institutions in which a majority of us will die? What does it mean to truly care for a person at the end of life?

These are the fundamental questions that I have grappled with as a student of the CSSR during my time at TCC and that I wish to bring to the larger Columbia University through the “At Your Service” program. We at TCC and the CSSR hope and expect that the pilot endeavor of the “At Your Service” volunteer program will blossom into a long-term collaboration between Columbia University and TCC. The “At Your Service” program will also be the first service program open to Columbia University undergraduate students that directly serves the elderly. I have been happily overwhelmed by the response to the program, not only from Columbia University students of all ages and interests eager to serve as volunteers but also from ArchCare and Columbia University affiliates who foresee possibilities for the program to be both a model of service learning and also an effective strategy to combat the harsh effects of falling Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements upon patient care in those nursing homes across the country that care for our society’s most vulnerable elderly patients.

In the end, all of this started with the conviction—bestowed upon me by the nurses, doctors, chaplains, social workers, family members, patients, and long-term residents who shared their lives with me at TCC—that as an aspiring physician I have the duty to care deeply and passionately for alleviating human suffering, with all of the spiritual, religious, and social components that are so deeply intertwined with a patient’s medical condition. For the realization of this guiding conviction, I am deeply, humbly indebted to my teachers and mentors at the Center for the Study of Science and Religion.

If you are interested in learning more about the progress of the “At Your Service” program, please contact me at ays2111@columbia.edu.
Reflections of TCC Interns

Huili Zhu

There are 729 beds in Terence Cardinal Cooke (TCC) Health Care Center, and each resident who lives there have come to call TCC home. After 10 weeks of close interaction with doctors, nurses, administrative workers, social workers, and more importantly, the residents, I felt at ease and at home in TCC. My internship this past summer with the Columbia Earth Institute’s Center for the Study of Science and Religion, along with my partner Ashley Shaw, taught me more than just the field of palliative care; it taught me a side of life that is often neglected by most people. There is a lot of emphasis on beginnings of life and the glorious process; however, there are often many taboos and stigmas associated with the end of life. Through my internship, I learned that palliative and end-of-life care provide relief and comfort for residents of TCC and their family members. Thus, we should not be scared or uncertain of the end. By learning about the details of palliative care, I was better prepared for the daily occurrences at the nursing home.

By visiting and spending time with various residents daily, I had a chance to interact with them and listen to their stories. Everyone at TCC had a unique personality. Their experiences, travels, environments, and backgrounds have culminated in the people they are today. I am very fortunate to have had the chance of meeting these amazing individuals and listen to the stories they share. One doctor who works at TCC once said, “If there are 100 families in this nursing home, there are at least 101 different dynamics”. Indeed, this is very true. Not only did I become friends with several residents, I met and saw the diverse family dynamics. Whether in beliefs, religious practices, languages spoken, or wealth, every family was different. It was very important to recognize these differences amongst the families because they determined how a particular resident’s palliative care was to carry out. Because many families do not fully understand the details of end-of-life care procedures, as an intern, I attempted to improve the system by enlisting a new method of family education of palliative care.

Learning about palliative care is really only the surface of this internship. I learned more about myself. I discovered hidden emotions and feelings. I challenged myself in the face of death. I, a resident on Columbia campus, was able to make new friends with residents of TCC nursing home. I am very thankful for the opportunity to become a member of the TCC community. And with confidence I can say I left TCC having left a lasting impact.

Raphy Rosen

One of the difficulties faced by an undergraduate premedical student is that there are very few valuable learning opportunities in a clinical setting for the simple reason that an undergraduate cannot meaningfully contribute in any clinical way. Or so I thought.

The TCC-CSSR fellowship gave me an opportunity to have deeply moving and deeply impactful interactions every day with every type of patient in the hospital. I spoke with and learned from residents suffering from HIV/AIDS, Huntington’s Disease, kidney failure, stroke and other chronic ailments. The focus of my research was on the role of a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) in providing care to palliative patients. We looked at whether the amount of knowledge that a CNA possessed about the residents affected the way that he or she cared about the patients. I was also exposed to outstanding physicians, particularly Dr. Anthony Lechich, whom I hope to emulate as I progress in my medical career.
This summer, due to the generous support of the CSSR, Eileen Yung and I had the privilege of interning at Terence Cardinal Cooke Healthcare Center, a skilled nursing facility in East Harlem. I cannot say that I anticipated the ways my experiences working at TCC would ultimately contribute to my view of the world and to my development as a person. This experience forced me to look in the face things that our society tries to ignore: old age, suffering and death. At times the repeated reminders of these realities was overwhelming, but the tangible presence of these painful truths also created opportunities for me to see beautiful aspects of the human experience that we similarly rarely encounter: namely, unconditional love and care as well as deep and profound peace in the face of fearful situations.

During our time at TCC Eileen and I had the opportunity to experience nearly every aspect of the services that Terence Cardinal Cooke Healthcare Center provides. We worked with the team of priests and ministers who comprise the pastoral care team to provide love and support to patients who were nearing the end of their lives. We facilitated discussions about overcoming addiction in association with the Substance Abuse Recovery Program. We interviewed CNAs, nurses, and doctors about the challenges they face in attempting to optimize quality of life in both the Huntington’s Disease Unit and the HIV/AIDS Unit. However the most valuable experiences were the moments we spent simply cultivating relationships with the patients.

As interns we were free to take the time to simply get to know the residents in a way in which doctors rarely have opportunity. Similarly inspiring was our work directly alongside the Medical Director of TCC, Dr. Anthony Lechich, who patiently guided us through the process of compiling our final papers and graciously allowed us to run alongside him through the halls of the facility as he checked on the most urgent cases of the over five hundred residents he oversees—nearly all of whom he knows by name.

I emerge from this life-changing experience unable to fully express the admiration I have for the individuals who devote their lives to the patients residing at TCC. It was truly an honor to witness their examples of selflessness and self-sacrifice. I can only hope that when I join the ranks of health care providers I will be able to contribute with their level of skill and patience not only to the health, but also to the quality of life of my patients.

http://thecssr.wordpress.com/
Classes

Evolution, DNA and the Soul
Robert Pollack and Cynthia Peabody
Weeklong Seminar: January 7 to January 10, 2013

Ecology and Faith
Cynthia Peabody, Larry Troster and Robert Pollack
Spring Semester, 2013

Human Identity
Marya Pollack, Marcia Sells, Cynthia Peabody and Robert Pollack
Fall Semester and Spring Semester, 2012-2013

Independent Clinical Research
Robert Pollack, Advisor
Fall Semester and Spring Semester, 2012-2013
Thursday, September 27

“Unlimited Love as Ultimate Reality: Is There Any Even Somewhat Plausible Rapprochement Between Mysticism and Physics?”

Stephen Post

Director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University

Wednesday, November 14

“The Deadly Link between Slavery and Environmental Destruction”

Kevin Bales

Co-founder and President, Free the Slaves

*Union Theological Seminary, James Chapel
121st Street and Broadway

Tuesday, December 11

“Unfinished Thoughts: Religion, a Relevant Life and Contradictions Along the Way”

Joseph Gerson

Director of Programs, American Friends Service Committee, New England
The Deadly Link between Slavery and Environmental Destruction

A presentation by

Kevin Bales

Wednesday, November 14th
6:00 – 7:30 pm

James Chapel, Union Theological Seminary
121st Street and Broadway

Please RSVP at cssr.ei.columbia.edu/?id=rsvp

Kevin Bales is co-founder of Free the Slaves, a nonprofit organization that frees slaves, helps former slaves stay free, advocates to governments and corporations for policy change, and carries out research. He holds an MSc in economic history and PhD in social sciences from the London School of Economics, and is currently Professor of Contemporary Slavery at University of Hull. He is currently writing a book on the relationship of slavery and environmental destruction.

Co-Sponsored by: Center for the Study of Science and Religion ● Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice ● Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility ● International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution ● Rabbis for Human Rights North America ● Sisters of St. Joseph Earth Center ● Union Theological Seminary ● We Act for Environmental Justice
Teaching an Ethic of Just and Sustainable Development
Cynthia Reville Peabody

Recently the Center for the Study of Science and Religion (CSSR) was asked to design a graduate level course on the ethics of sustainable development. Having just completed an undergraduate course on the same topic we knew this was no easy task. The ethics of sustainable development are just beginning to be considered, with a great variety of opinions across disciplines and communities. Over the course of eight months I interviewed students, activists, scholars, community organizers and artists, all of whom were doing work I greatly admired. I asked them all the same question “How do you effectively teach an ethic of sustainable development?” I was so intrigued by their thoughtful answers that I invited them to New York City for two days of conversation. This essay is concerned with the Roundtable’s conclusions about the “what, who and how” of teaching an ethic of sustainable development. What exactly are we teaching? Who are we teaching; and who is teaching us? How do we teach effectively in classroom and community? Not surprisingly the answers to all three questions call for an honest, inter-disciplinary, inter-community, and multi-cultural assessment of the present state of our planet; and a willingness to apply “predictive wisdom” and the lens of global justice to future plans for global development.

The eminent scientist, and, as of late, activist Dr. James Hansen opened our conference with a provocative lecture in which he elegantly wove his personal experience, with both the present misuses of U.S. climate change policies, and humanity’s collective, global obligation to secure a just and sustainable future for coming generations. In recognizing the undeniable inter-relationships between past, present, and future; personal, national, and universal Dr. Hansen demonstrated the type of integrated, creative thinking that an ethic of sustainable development must be born of. He concluded that given what we know for sure about the state of our planet we can no longer tolerate heads hidden in the sand or arrogant theorizing– we must act; even if it means, as it did for him, getting arrested in front of the White House.

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Professor of Environmental Studies at Seattle University in Seattle, led our roundtable in a discussion on what exactly is this “ethic of sustainable development” we say we are teaching. Dr. Moe-Lobeda challenged everyone in the room to consider seriously the “is” of our planet before prescribing the “ought”. Our inclination, particularly within the academy, is to jump straight to teaching how the world “ought” to be ordered, without honestly considering the messy, complicated, uncomfortable “is” of our planet. Ignoring the tangled reality of the state of our planet and opting instead to focus on “should, would, could” fosters a complacency that is far from ethical.

The present state of sustainable development includes some very uncomfortable realities. Environmental and economic racism, classism, and sexism are the stuff of what “is”. And yet, as many people attending our conference were quick to point out, all too often academics, politicians, and religious leaders would rather ponder, Hume, Leopold, and Rawles than actively collaborate with The Green Belt Movement, Via Campesina, or West Harlem Environmental Action. We are loathe to admit that “eco-apartheid” is alive and well throughout the world; and yet, to ignore it is to be complicit in gross injustices.
Our group admitted that to honestly assess the needs of the Earth and her people those of us who teach need to talk less and listen more. We can never understand the realities of those people who are most marginalized by climate change, environmental degradation and distributive injustice until we listen attentively and respectfully to their concerns. Respectful listening means that we have to employ some humility and admit that perhaps our prescriptions for what “ought to be” might not be appropriate to someone else’s reality.

So too, we need to teach our students to be astute listeners. The undergraduate students attending the conference felt that learning in classrooms from models, projections, and cold data did not prepare them to be caring, engaged, global citizens. They wanted more inter-disciplinary, intra-community, experiential learning. We are teaching well when we teach our students to listen and learn from each other and from the Earth. The great theologian Nelle Morton once said that it is our moral obligation to “listen each other into being.” Finally, our group agreed that teaching what “is” need not be an exercise in sowing seeds of hopelessness and despair.

Indeed, it would be unethical to teach only gloom and doom. Real and present change is afoot; grassroots efforts across the globe are facing down agents of environmental degradation, food insecurity, and public health hazards. Innovative and lasting solutions to soil erosion, deforestation, food insecurity, and water pollution are being put into effect on local, national, and global levels. Our students must listen to learn; hope and inspiration will follow.

We’ve already established that learning is not unidirectional, it doesn’t emanate out from the podium alone. Real learning requires collaboration, humility, and creativity. We learn best from a robust combination of sights, sounds, and stories. It is impossible to teach an ethic of sustainable development without rolling up your sleeves and getting outside the hallowed halls.

After two days of intense, exciting, respectful discussion the group resolved that:

If - as we had all agreed earlier:
- We must teach what “is” before we can hazard “what ought to be”
- Racism, sexism, and classism are harsh realities that must be included in any discussion of the ethics of sustainable development. But – not to the point of sucking hope and resolve from students.
- The days of 55 minute uninterrupted lectures are over. Effective teaching must be inter-active, inter-disciplinary, and experiential.

Then - responsibly teaching an ethic of sustainable development means including the voices of those most marginalized, as well as artists, service learners, community organizers, and faith leaders. Respectful and trusting collaboration centered on justice is the most effective teaching tool we have.
Throughout the two year build-up to the election of Barack Obama I worked with a group of elementary school children in a program that brings psychotherapy to the inner city. It was a strange time, and in retrospect, a perfect place from which to observe this historic election.

The children I have worked with attend a school that is a warm and friendly place where the arts are prized, teachers are communicative, and families are actively encouraged to participate in their children’s education. Given the various traumas suffered by many of the children I work with, I was and continue to be profoundly grateful for the supportive environment provided by their school. Indeed, this exceptional forward-thinking public school seemed to me a remarkable place. In psychoanalytic terms, I thought of it—and still do—as a “holding environment,” a place where children feel protected from the larger world. In this way, they are given a space in which they can relax into being, unfettered by the endless distractions and perils of the larger world.

The children I see come from all social locations. Attending this school are children—black, white, Asian, and Latino—of art historians and physicists who live on the upper west side of Manhattan. So too, there are very poor students who live in the projects across the street, many of whom have incarcerated and/or drug-addicted parents. Together they attend a school where they work with a professional story teller and take hatha yoga. As far as NYC public schools go, it’s a dream.

And yet, like all dreams, there is complexity lurking in the shadows. I wish to be clear, however, that these shadows are not restricted to their school. They are so pervasive that they become hard to discern, like the chronic toxins in our air and water—bad enough to make us sick, but not so bad we that we stop breathing our polluted air or drinking our tap water that is a chemical stew. The problem is more insidious, and therefore, more dangerous. As far as I can tell, the shadows I speak of cast a gloomy hue over the entire expanse of contemporary American society. This is the shadow of unconscious racism.

As a clinician working with very young children, I was not initially on the look out for socially constructed suffering. Perhaps I brought a certain naivete to my work, imagining that the most pressing issues for a five year old girl with an incarcerated mother was not the prejudiced world she would eventually confront. There were more immediate concerns: how to help her develop a basic feeling of trust, to use her voice and expect to be heard, and to look people in the eye so they would take her seriously. It took me a few more years to understand that the prejudiced world that had proceeded her young life, had everything to do with her diminished self-esteem, and her impaired trust in ever being heard.

This particular child suffered from “selective mutism,” a condition that causes children to go mute in certain environments. She was fully verbal at home and with some of her peers. Yet with her teacher and other authority figures, this little girl was steadfastly silent. With increasing alarm, their was talk of having her tested for special education. In our initial sessions, it was immediately clear that she in no way suffered from cognitive delays. She was sharp-witted—expressing a clever and unique sense of humor in her play (granted, silent play in those first few months). Her personality loomed large in our small play therapy room, with eyes the size of moons, and her adorable efforts to unsuccessfully reign in erupting smiles and guffaws when I broke into spontaneous song.

This child was born to a mother with AIDS, a highly intelligent woman who had suffered from chronic drug addiction since her early adulthood. With this addiction came intermittent homelessness and incarceration. She was unable to assume custody of her daughter, and left her in the care of her grandmother, a 70 year old African-American woman with breast cancer and the sole care provider for two additional grandchildren, one of whom is a 25 year old man with special needs.

But this is not the story of just one child. I see many such children, similarly loveable and gifted, with dreams of professional and personal success. Today they are a little older—10 and 11 years old. They are getting ready to complete their elementary school education and move on to middle school. We talk about their goals, their wish to attend famous universities and become physicians and attorneys, maybe even the U.S. president. They are old enough to have been influenced by Obama’s election. On the day after his
election, a special assembly was held where the children were encouraged to imagine themselves reaching for such professional heights. They were the same age as Malia Obama—old enough to instant message, to have the first inklings of conscious romantic feeling, and to recognize that their own personal longings and ambitions might be derailed. Ultimately, it might not matter that they had goals they wished dearly to fulfill.

It was another child who spelled this out for me. An extremely verbal and intelligent young boy, he was quick to engage in nuanced conversations about his dreams, his love of music and art, and his burgeoning thoughts on racism.

“Sorry is cheap,” he’d say, keeping his gaze on the ornate flowers he liked to draw. “White people love to say sorry after they have treated a black or Puerto Rican person unfairly. But it doesn’t mean anything.” I’d listen with rapt attention, mildly unnerved, and hoping that I’d say just enough to let him know I genuinely wished to hear more. “The truth is, we come from black people. That first family—I learned this on a show—was from Africa. So, I don’t really get why white people think they’re so much better. But they do. I can tell. And let me tell you, Pilar, sorry is really cheap. It just doesn’t cut it.”

This little boy also has an incarcerated father whom he is close to and sees every two weeks. His father is a visual artist who has been teaching him to paint and tie-dye t-shirts. They have talked about opening a t-shirt business together one day. This child has been a delight to spend time with. Yet he was referred to me because of his “attitude problem.” He had an off-putting tendency to get “righteous” with his third-grade teacher, talking about his “rights” at inopportune times. For his well-meaning teacher, these power struggles had grown wearisome throughout the year.

But I wonder why it is that throughout his five years at this school no one has asked him about his “rights.” Does this ten year old boy believe it is his “right” to see his father more often, and outside the confines of a prison? Does he believe it is his “right” to simply enjoy his many intellectual and artistic gifts without the chronic fear that he too might end up incarcerated for no good reason, but simply because a white person who doesn’t even know they dislike people of color decided he should be sent away? Does he believe it is his “right” to be angry about a certain hypocrisy he has begun to experience?

He wants to attend Columbia University and then become an attorney so that he will know “all the laws” so no one can “lie to him about what is true and what is legal.” But the tricky thing, as I see it, is that the very people who encourage him to carry on pursuing these goals, tend to be white progressives whose identity is predicated upon an illusory notion of being beyond a capacity for prejudice. Thus, when this little boy gets “righteous,” as if he’s “going up against the system,” there’s no chance of addressing the possibility that he is indeed up against the system—a system that seems unwilling to acknowledge the reality of racism in its most covert and unconscious forms.

In her commentary on Neil Altman’s “Black and White Thinking,” Janice Gump refers to the “empathic lesion” that leads to racial prejudice (Psychoanalytic Dialogues 2000, 629). When dominant groups fail to recognize that personal pain and struggle is also culturally constructed and reinforced, the reality of racism and its many insidious repercussions are too easily dismissed. The children I see are indeed coping with the particularities of their unique family systems, and their personal response to trauma. Yet these traumas are informed by generations of societal empathic failure, a failure that has led to untold numbers of incarcerated parents who remain a mere ghostly presence in the social lives of their children.

In her commentary on Neil Altman’s “Black and White Thinking,” Janice Gump refers to the “empathic lesion” that leads to racial prejudice (Psychoanalytic Dialogues 2000, 629). When dominant groups fail to recognize that personal pain and struggle is also culturally constructed and reinforced, the reality of racism and its many insidious repercussions are too easily dismissed. The children I see are indeed coping with the particularities of their unique family systems, and their personal response to trauma. Yet these traumas are informed by generations of societal empathic failure, a failure that has led to untold numbers of incarcerated parents who remain a mere ghostly presence in the social lives of their children.

It is no accident that the children I see most need to work through a feeling of hypocrisy that has infected their world. They attend a school and live in a forward-thinking society that professes an unshakable commitment to its children regardless of their social location, racial and ethnic identities, or the status of their parents. But I believe that it is fair and reasonable to suggest that they are not awarded the “presumption of sameness” (Gump 2000, 630) from their educators that might better preserve the children’s sense of authentic humanity and their basic human right to complexity. By nature of having disenfranchised parents with a criminal past, these children have come to feel that the truth and fullness of their stories can not be told. Even within the confines of their progressive school, they have ingested a feeling of foundational difference that precludes full membership to the human family.

In entering into their world for the previous five years, I have come to feel and trust that their humanity is fully intact. They are right to feel angry at a society that proffers contradictory messages. They have been told that they can do anything, be anything they want to be—an astronaut, a teacher, a United States president. But this has not been true for the people they love most. Is this reality so off-putting to white liberals (like myself) that we cannot address it directly? Is it easier for us to send such children to schools where they learn to play the didgeridoo, than to sit down and ask them how their parents are doing in jail? Children need adults to show them how to tolerate reality. Left to their own devices, they will take refuge in fantasy. And if they happen to live in a society that encourages this defensive use of fantasy, it will become a life-long coping mechanism. But it will not make them happy. It will only affirm what they already sense—that their reality is too much to handle.
During the mid-70’s, I directed a project at Columbia University that tried to teach Nim, an infant chimpanzee, to use American Sign Language (ASL). Project Nim, a documentary currently running nationally, loosely describes the project.

It shows scenes of Nim interacting with his teachers after he was flown to New York from his birthplace at the Primate Institute in Norman, Oklahoma, when he was two weeks old. Viewers would have to close their eyes not to appreciate Nim’s loveable personality and endearing antics, but they would be hard pressed to see the science on which the project was based.

That’s because the documentary pointedly avoids that topic, which is a shame because the research provided groundbreaking scientific insights into what chimpanzees can tell us about the evolution of language.

The project’s goal was to determine whether a non-human primate could learn the essence of human language: the use of grammatical rules to create particular meanings. Positive evidence would confirm the then popular claim of a continuum between chimp communication and human language. Negative evidence would require us to ask why chimpanzees are unable to learn a grammatical language.

By the time Nim was almost five, I had collected enough data on his multi-sign combinations to determine the extent of his grammatical knowledge. In September 1977, I ended the project’s research and charted a plane to return Nim to his birthplace. At five, he would also benefit from being with other chimpanzees because of his size. If he had continued to live with his teachers, it was likely that one of them would be seriously injured because of his innate aggressiveness. Despite Nim’s generally benign disposition his destructive capacity could be invoked by the slightest provocation.

When I returned to New York, I began to analyze the signs that Nim had ostensibly learned during a period of 27 months in which his teachers recorded more than 20,000 multi-sign sequences. While analyzing those sequences I obtained quantitative evidence that Nim could indeed create grammatical sentences that provided the most powerful evidence to date that a chimpanzee could construct particular meanings by using a grammatical rule. This would have been exciting news by any standard.

But while preparing my findings for publication, the research took a decidedly different turn. After reviewing a video I’d seen at least a dozen times previously, I noticed that a simple artifact was responsible for the positive results that I obtained from Nim. Nim’s teachers signed what he signed but a quarter of a second earlier. This meant that Nim’s signs were mainly imitative and not spontaneous. How had other scientists and I missed these prompts while watching the video previously? I realized that when I observed Nim sign producing signs, either in person or on videotape, my attention was always riveted on his hands because I thought they were making history and I didn’t want to miss a second of it. While viewing other tapes of Nim and movies of other apes (e.g., Washoe and Koko) that had purportedly learned ASL, I saw the same symbiotic relationship.

This analysis made me wonder why Nim signed at all. The answer was immediately obvious -- to obtain rewards that he couldn’t obtain otherwise. Equally important, I noticed that Nim never signed to start a conversation. He only signed with the expectation of obtaining a reward -- e.g., food, candy, drinks and nothing more. Like a child, Nim learned, what I refer to as Language 1. What Nim never learned was Language 2, the ability to converse with someone to convey information that was not about her basic needs, e.g., I just saw Mary or I’m going to the library tomorrow. Language 1 consists of unidirectional imperative statements; Language 2, of bi-directional declarative statements between a speaker and listener. By revealing the true nature of Nim’s signing, the research confirmed the efficacy of unbiased scientific inquiry.

I published my “negative” results, at that time contrarian, in the journal Science and in a book entitled Nim. My conclusions about Nim’s signing have withstood the test of time. But in the film Project Nim, my findings are very briefly described as a failure without explaining why and what failure meant. Apparently the director didn’t understand the difference...
between negative results and a failure. More important, my results were disparagingly cited as the reason I had returned Nim to Oklahoma, even though I hadn’t discovered the true nature of Nim’s signing until a year after he had been returned to his birthplace.

For me, the omission of the scientific validity of the actual project diminishes the film’s credibility. Also, the director clearly missed an opportunity to educate the public about the science involved in the actual research with Nim. The project proved once again the importance of negative results that they can inspire questions that can lead to significantly positive results, as was the case with the discovery that space wasn’t filled with ether and that inanimate matter did not give rise to animate matter.

A few years after I returned Nim to the Primate Institute, it went bankrupt and he was sold for medical research. But thanks to Nim’s signing ability, I was able, with the pro bono assistance of a lawyer, Henry Herrmann, and Bob Ingersoll, a graduate student, to rescue him and placed him in an animal sanctuary run by philanthropist Cleveland Amory. Nim lived there with a mate named Sally and three playmates, Midge, Kitty and LuLu, until he died from a heart attack at age 27.

In the end, Nim’s inability to learn a language deepened our understanding of the basic difference between the minds of humans and apes. Most important, apes lack a “theory of mind”, the ability to perceive what another ape is thinking. Without that ability, it is impossible for their signing to rise above the level of begging to conversation, the essence of human language.

As charming as Nim was, he was not human and to anthropomorphize him as such is not only bad science but also dangerous sociology, e.g., chimpanzees are fully capable of maiming and killing humans. Nim himself hurt several people as he matured. Nonetheless, he was clearly special. He was a remarkable creature from the living tree of evolution, as are his threatened relatives, and he should be greatly respected for sharing himself and his abilities in the pursuit of what it means to be human.
Education and Change in South Africa:
Notes from Johannesburg

Annie Tickell

Over the past year I have spent about 5 months in South Africa, and for the majority of this time I was in Durban, the largest port in Africa and one of South Africa’s main cities. I returned to South Africa this summer – two weeks in Durban followed by one in Johannesburg – to conduct thesis research on teachers unions and education. The following is a short essay on education in South Africa, written at the beginning of this most recent trip.

Over these past six days I’ve visited public schools, attended a horse race, walked throughout the local neighborhood, experienced the nightlife, and worked for hours on end in front of this bright laptop screen. Although each of these actions was fairly simple on it’s own, it became difficult to deny the complexity of the society in which they were enacted. Take, for example, my walks to and from the local stores. Glenwood, where I’m living, can be defined by 3 characteristics: white, well off (although these first two are pretty much interchangeable in South Africa), and fairly safe. However, as I walked to and from Davenport Center in the bright sunshine of the early afternoon, I was acutely aware of my incongruity. For starters, I walk too fast, but that’s probably a result of my past three years in New York more than anything else. The main difference is that I was one of the very few white people who voluntarily walked further than the 10 feet between the front gate and the car. South Africa has its own unique kind of car culture. Public transportation is pretty much nonexistent, so the majority of the population travels around in minibuses while those who can afford it drive cars. It is safe to say that in South Africa, race dictates class. Therefore, as owning a car is a luxury reserved for the middle and upper classes, the majority of drivers are white, with some Indians and blacks also behind the wheel. Because of this, and numerous other deeply seated cultural reasons, it is very uncommon to see white people walking to their destinations.

So what, exactly, does this have to do with education? Over the past two decades the policies of racial segregation that comprised the system of apartheid have been replaced by a new constitution and a new government, but the realities of the apartheid era remain. Little in South Africa is truly “fair”. Public education is open for all, but resources are lacking and the government has yet to find a national curriculum that instills a passion for learning, let alone a strong enough system to retain students through high school. Success in South African schools is determined by “matric” rates, or the percentage of students who passed their matriculation exams at the end of high school. Most schools hope for 50%, while those that achieve 80-100% are newsworthy. Those who can pay to attend private schools, where students enjoy a wealth of resources and highly trained teachers, enjoy the benefits of first-class education. These were the only schools that were actually successful under the now-defunct curriculum known as Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) due to their small classroom sizes and resources.

At the heart of the education problem is the legacy of an apartheid schooling system that, with the Bantu Education Act, established a curriculum for the majority of the population (read: non-white) based on preparing students for menial labor. Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, famously stated that:

“There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live.”

Bantu Education was basically meant to train the majority of citizens how and where to stamp their timesheets. Although the policies are now gone and the anniversary of liberation is closing in on two decades, there are still generations of people alive today who were not given the opportunities to pursue their own personal and professional advancement. The same question is posed time and time again: how long will it take to undo the legacy of apartheid? The answer: longer than 18 years.

The goal of my research is to dissect education in South Africa in an attempt to more clearly understand the social and political conditions that led to its current state. Unions are notorious roadblocks to good education, as teachers take more time to participate in union activities than they spend in the classroom. More importantly they support a system of “skills” education that trains students to enter industry and de-emphasizes the importance of the humanities and, ironically, teaching. Thus, they are making themselves - and good education - redundant. However, in a country with strong race and class identities, the discourse of worker’s rights has a legitimate place in society. The interaction of these factors creates a complex and, at times, contradictory educational system that is at once the hope and burden of the nation.

These contradictions lead me to a conclusion that is not my own. Near the end of a recent discussion with a prominent South African academic I explained the general outline of my thesis. Upon hearing my outline she paused, as if mulling over a question, then looked at me and said: “I think you’ll find that you’re left with more questions than answers.” This was not a call for caution, but rather a necessary reality check. Education in South Africa is ever evolving, and the ability to post more questions signals its advancement. Thus, we should accept that progress includes certain steps to the back and side, if for no other reason than to strengthen the eventual steps forward.
Remember being five years old. Remember the feeling of being awake in bed just as the lights are turned off. Everything that was once familiar is dark and foreign. Your eyes take ages to adjust to the now foreign room. Is that shadow cast by a monster or a tree? Is that creak imagined, or perhaps a footstep? Was that toy always there? Maybe it's time to take a look.

Welcome to the world of Haruki Murakami’s 1Q84 (Knopf). Murakami’s latest and largest novel begins with Aomame, a lonely personal trainer, descending a staircase and entering a subtly alternate universe. She calls the world 1Q84—the “Q” standing for both “question,” and the Japanese number nine (pronounced “kyu” or “Q”). The distance between these two worlds is almost imperceptible, yet beneath the surface, the differences are immense. Though Tokyo, the book’s main city, looks the same in this new universe, the actions of an insidious cult have changed its history dramatically. Aomame attempts to stay afloat in this new world, where the monster may actually be the source of the shadow. Meanwhile Tengo, a math teacher and aspiring writer, finally breaks into the literary world by ghostwriting a mysterious young girl’s short story. In doing so, he unknowingly enters the same shadowy world of 1Q84.

1Q84 is a mystery, not only in plot, but also in its overwhelming allusions. Murakami was inspired by and references pop fiction, pulp fiction, jazz music, Japanese epics, obscure classical music (Janacek’s Sinfonietta), obscure literary works (Anton Chekhov’s A Journey to Sakhalin), and hard-boiled detectives, to name a few. In fact, it seems there is very little Murakami was not inspired by. This referential overload is initially shocking, but it quickly becomes essential to the experience of the book. A mystery novel, by definition, begins with a disordering of the world. The protagonist then must acquire facts, determine which are relevant, and discard those that are not to create a new, ordered narrative. Murakami, through his overwhelming references, displays how difficult, and ultimately fictive, that new narrative is. Because we do not know what allusions are important or what facts are relevant, the experience of reading 1Q84 is like Aomame and Tengo’s experience of being in in 1Q84. This aesthetic isn’t restricted to the pages of the book—After I finished 1Q84 I found myself challenging the impulse to create a narrative in my every day life. How does one decipher the important from the unimportant, the clues from the junk? How do we understand the world around us given how little we know?

Murakami never answers the questions he raises, nor (spoiler alert) does he offer solutions to the book’s many mysteries. This could be insanely annoying to some readers, especially those who were upset at the end of Lost. I, however, found it quite refreshing. Murakami understands that the gap between truth and understanding is like the distance between zero and one—tantalizingly close, yet infinitely distant. Instead, of finding truth, Murakami’s characters find meaning in a farfetched yet beautiful relationship. This connection between two lonely people shifts both the course and genre of the book—the mystery fades away as a search for a long lost love begins.

Should we, then, understand a strain of anti-intellectualism in 1Q84? If the gap between truth and understanding cannot be bridged, why try? I do not think this is Murakami’s message. The page turning mystery plot, along with the sheer amount of referential breadcrumbs, encourages the reader to attempt to understand and decipher. Instead, I think Murakami’s 1Q84 serves as a powerful and essential reminder that sometimes knowing why the world turns doesn’t mean anything unless you have someone there to rock it.
The mixed media collage presents four external images of burial headstones photographed by the artist at the Shiloh Cemetery in Notasulga, Alabama, where many African American male human subject participants of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study are buried. In the internal image representation, faces of four male farmers who were participants in the Study are displayed. Two males are shown with the hands of two public health officials drawing blood from the men in order to eventually test them for syphilis. The faces of the two farmers are darkened in order to emphasize how they represent all the male participants in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. The hands of the public health workers are shown without their corresponding faces in order to place greater emphasis on the African American male participants of the Study. In the background representation, the white ancient Celtic cross emphasizes that all the men who participated in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study served as martyrs who essentially sacrificed their lives for “the common good of medicine.”

Images of men provided by the National Archives and Records Administration, Southeast Region, Morrow, Georgia.
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No other world
But this one:
Willows and the river
And the factory
With its black smokestacks.

No other shore, only this bank
On which the living gather.

No meaning but what we find here.
No purpose but what we make.

That, and the beloved’s clear instructions:
Turn me into song; sing me awake.

Gregory Orr
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