

Liquid Learning: The Case for Franklin's Academic Travel

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ABSTRACT

The article “Liquid Learning” offers an analysis of Academic Travel from within a number of contexts: the planetary, the global, the university, the classroom, travel sites and, finally the brain and the neurological processes that accompany learning. In circling inward through these increasingly smaller contexts the article explores shifting conceptualizations of what constitutes productive teaching and “useful” knowledge against the background of rapid environmental deterioration, and the social and epistemic transformations in reaction to it. How, following its central questions, do today’s universities need to change to remain relevant and to furnish students with the kind of knowledge they will need on the other side of their BAs to tackle the unpredictable challenges of a world coming apart? And how can the kind of teaching and learning enabled by the out-of-classroom experience typical for Academic Travel help create the nimbleness of mind our future generations need? Two academic travels – one to Poland, the other to Greece – serve as case studies to explore these questions; a running commentary from research assistant Grace Bacon adds perhaps the most important perspective: that of the student.

KEY WORDS

Academic Travel, Anthropocene, Experiential Learning, Neuroeducation, Jeff Wall

I. INTRODUCTION

When I was a graduate student back in the nineties planning the first lessons I was tasked to deliver to undergraduate students in Comparative Literature, I would sometimes stare at an image I had tacked above my desk. It was a copy of the 1984 photograph by Jeff Wall entitled *Milk*, which shows a man sitting in front of a brick wall, squeezing a carton of milk in one hand so that the white liquid has exploded against the hodge-podge geometry of the backdrop, the tension visible in the man's clenched fist translating into the fluid's filigree contours.¹ That, I thought at the time, was a visual translation of how I wanted reading and discussing a story to affect my students; an explosion of ideas and emotions and insights that would transport them beyond the walls of the institutional corset that held us up even as it held us back; a mixture of freedom and constraint that would ultimately lead to learning that was boundless. While I doubt those early lessons were ever that transformative, that image of a person dashing milk against a backdrop of stark lines has stayed with me as a visualization of the kind of teaching and learning to which I aspire.

Only much later did I come across the article written by Wall himself in 1989 entitled "Photography and Liquid Intelligence", in which he contemplates *Milk* while considering the changing significance of liquid as photography transitions from the analogue to the digital (Wall 2007).² I approach his commentary on *Milk* not as a scholar of photography might, but as a scholar of literature and cultural studies, and as an educator, with a question having to do with the significance I had given it in my own memory: could I salvage something of Wall's analysis for my own thinking on teaching, learning and the state of the university some two decades into the 21st century? Could I do so in a piece I had been asked to write on Franklin's Academic Travel program? Could I do so, moreover, in conversation with my research assistant Grace Bacon, whose comments in dotted boxes are in dialogue with my own writing? Here is an attempt in which I close in on Academic Travel from a number of perspectives, including a comparative reading of Wall's text on photography; the uses of universities in today's shifting contexts; approaches from neuroeducation and experiential learning; and two case studies of Academic Travel – what Grace calls the five-essays-in-one approach.³

II. LIQUIDS IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION

At universities, we pride ourselves on producing life-long learners, on imparting knowledge that carries our graduates forward into a productive life, on furnishing them with tools that help them tackle the complex problems of the world. But to what extent are we successful in this endeavor? Do the kinds of disciplinary structures still largely on offer to students today not also seal students into certain ways of learning, analysis and assessment that cut them off from other forms of knowledge? Wall's writing on photography might suggest as much: natural forms, he writes, referring to the uncontrolled splash of milk, posit "a logical relation, a relation of necessity, between the phenomenon of the movement of a liquid and the means of representation." Transposed into the realm of education, this relation between the movement of milk and its representation might be understood as the relation between the process of learning (in Wall's version the movement of a liquid) and its representation in the instruments of assessment used in a typical classroom – the exams, papers, presentations we are all familiar with (in Wall the moment

¹ Jeff Wall, *Milk*. The work today hangs in the MoMa: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/93456>; *in situ*: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/93456?installation_image_index=1 URL accessed July 2, 2022.

² See also https://photohistoryandtheory.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/wall_liquid_intelligence.pdf, URL accessed July 8, 2022.

³ I want to thank my research assistant Grace Bacon, class of 2023, for her insightful feedback and careful edits of this paper as well as for her unflappable demeanor during a year of transition. Grace Bacon graduated with a BA in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies from Franklin University Switzerland and is now studying for a Master's Degree at Columbia in Paris in the Department of Literature and History.

at which movement is captured on film). Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether the analogy of uncontrolled liquid and learning holds, Wall's observations seem to offer an answer, at least for photography: this "relation of necessity" between movement and its representation pits all natural movement against the "whole construct, the apparatus and institution of photography", resulting in a tension which he sees as "a confrontation of what you might call the 'liquid intelligence' of nature with the glassed-in and relatively 'dry' character of the institution of photography." To him, water symbolically "represents an archaism in photography, one that is admitted into the process but also excluded, contained or channeled by its hydraulics" (Wall 2007, 109).

To translate this observation to the classroom, we might ask then how natural processes of learning are pitted against the "hydraulics" of the university. For a university also "excludes, contains and channels" different sorts of learning on a number of levels: in admission procedures; through the kinds of structures, pedagogies and disciplines on offer; in the hierarchies among disciplines often expressed in the distribution of funds; through the culturally contingent and privileged forms of learning that include normative expectations of abilities; through ideas of economically and ideologically useful knowledge; and, finally, in the educational politics of any country that define both the economic possibilities of higher learning as well as who has access to education and who does not, thereby defining culture-specific ideas of the elite. Wall observes further that in its technical displacement from the analogue to the digital, photography has lost most of the liquid properties it had once possessed, and that were necessary for processing film – its "bleaching, washing, dissolving" properties, as he puts it (2007, 109). The modern photographic vision we are left with today is usually identified with the objective, technological, "cool" intelligence of digital image-making – the lenses, the calibrators, the shutters – a vision which no longer contains "the sense of immersion in the incalculable which I associate with liquid intelligence."

Why is this important? Because, as Wall points out, referring to the burgeoning climate change in the late 80s, the incalculable appears "with a vengeance in the remote consequences of even the most controlled releases of energy; the ecological crisis is the form in which these remote consequences appear to us most strikingly today" (2007, 110). Finally, the banishment of liquid from photography as it has migrated to the realm of the technological not only refers to the entirely digitalized processes we are today familiar with, but also, to Wall's mind, alters the very historical consciousness of photography itself. "This expansion of the dry part of photography," Wall writes, "I see metaphorically as a kind of hubris of the orthodox technological intelligence which, secured behind a barrier of perfectly engineered glass, surveys natural form in its famously cool manner" (2007, 110).

A comparative move might render this question thus within the context of education: have we in our classrooms moved to a place of hubris where what we teach and how we teach invites disaster even as we claim the opposite? This may seem a bit dramatic, but let us consider where we are today, some four decades now since Wall created *Milk* and wrote his piece. We know now that as a global community we have largely disregarded the science about climate change – what Wall calls "the incalculable" – at our own sweltering peril. The question is, have we done so because, as Wall claims for photography, we have banished a kind of learning that is equivalent to Wall's "liquid intelligence"? If so, what could it mean for education and our educational institutions to promote a kind of learning that is less hubristic?⁴ A kind of a liquid learning that equips us better for the future? One possible response for institutions and educators, I will argue here, lies in the kind of teaching and learning enabled by Franklin's liberal arts perspective, in particular its Academic Travel program. It anticipates, at least to a certain degree, the emerging learning environment which requires both theoretical and practical prowess, even as it understands the impact of both representation and fact on human response, this latter swiftly gaining in importance

⁴ See, for an interesting discussion of the two antagonistic views, Serrano del Pozo and Kreber (2015).

as generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT and their exponential development question what it is to know and to be intelligent.

In the following I will write across a number of scales and contexts – the planetary, the institutional, the classroom and the individual students – to sketch what this emerging learning environment might look like. These overlapping contexts in turn pose expectations on what and how we learn and teach in our universities and classrooms. On the level of the classroom, I will use two of my Academic Travels as case studies to zoom in on ways in which we might engage students with collaborative, experiential pedagogy. Returning to the idea of liquid learning I will argue that, as in photography, learning and teaching have liquid components, but ones that are not relegated to the past like water is in digital photography, but rather reside on an elemental level in the brain processes of our students, and our own. An awareness of these processes is being advanced in fields such as neuro-education to help us design curricula that support effective and resilient learning. This is important because what and how students learn, what we collectively teach and how we teach it, affects not only the future lives of our graduates, but also the *raison d'être* of the university, indeed the health of the planet itself.

III. FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE PLANETARY

The world has changed since the late 80s when Wall wrote his text on *Milk*. The interrelationship Wall set up between liquid intelligence and technological intelligence some forty years ago was astoundingly prescient, given that we live in a world today in which human intelligence is both creating, and confronting, technologies that have poised artificial intelligence to overtake human intelligence with revolutionary algorithms, and an almost complete access to, and surveillance of, our (freely given) data. The historian Yuval Harari (2017) takes this confrontation between human and artificial intelligence one startling step further in his dystopian visions of the hackable and dispensable human, of privileged elites in control of data colonies, and of the inevitable evolution of digital dictators.⁵ Meanwhile, generative AI systems have made their unnerving entrance in the form of ChatGPT and the like, which only four months after it first became available in November of 2022 improved its score on the LSAT from somewhere in the 40th percentile to 88th percentile in the spring of 2023. While lots of schools are responding by rather helplessly re-writing their plagiarism policies, this technology is developing faster than the wings of a hummingbird beat, and it is doing so exponentially, rendering more than just this metaphor questionable. From this perspective Harari's disposable human seems less sci-fi and more reality TV. It is hard not to make the jump from the disposable human to the disposable university.

With his diagnosis of the move from analogue to digital photography, it would seem that Wall anticipated the epistemological shift from humanism to posthumanism we are seeing today.⁶

⁵ See also his speech in Davos at the World Economic Forum (2020) in which he advanced the insights in his book. See also for reviews of Harari's presentation at the World Economic Forum for example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lbsbusinessstrategyreview/2020/01/29/why-sustainability-was-the-star-at-davos-2020/?sh=5856203376a3>, accessed July 17, 2022.

⁶ The Oxford dictionary (2021) defines posthumanism as follows: "Posthumanism is a philosophical perspective on how change is enacted in the world. As a conceptualization and historicization of both agency and 'the human', it is different from humanism. Whereas a humanist perspective frequently assumes the human is autonomous, conscious, intentional, and exceptional in acts of change, a posthumanist perspective assumes agency is distributed through dynamic forces in which the human participates, but which it does not completely intend or control. Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as: (a) physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment; (b) moved to action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and (c) possessing no attribute that is uniquely human, but instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem. There is little consensus in posthumanist scholarship about the degree to which a conscious human subject can actively create change, but the human does participate in change."

Analogous to the evolution of the photographic consciousness identified by Wall, we are today confronting an evolution in how we conceptualize human consciousness and intelligence: a shift in how we humans collaborate with one another, shape relations with the machines we have created, and understand the palpably destructive interactions we have with the planet we inhabit. This rethinking takes us from the epistemes of humanism to those of posthumanism, which in turn ushers in a shift in how we think the human subject. We have, in other words, entered what many scientists and scholars call the Anthropocene, a geochronological epoch in which humans are thought to influence biodiversity, ecosystems, climatic processes, and interdependent environments. Living with the phenomena of the Anthropocene also requires us to re-think the scales we have been using to define educational objectives, from the national to the global and on to the planetary.⁷ Each of these scales asks basic questions of us ranging from what it means to shape and belong to, or be excluded from, a nation; what it means to be part of the global, and act as global citizens; how this differs from being part of the planetary and acting as a planetary citizen; and what, finally, it means to confront today's ecological and social challenges, and effectively and proactively regulate the earth's systems. Re-framing what we are responsible for as a species, how we might re-think our relationship with other beings, and what affects us as humans, also adjusts the scales of what we consider collectively as thinkable, doable, and teachable. Adjusting to this new scale, and hence re-thinking and possibly re-casting the responsibility of a university is our challenge as educators and as stewards of institutions of higher learning.

Formidable this challenge is, especially considering the generational divide between many professors and students. While scientists are still debating about when precisely the Anthropocene began and whether to write it with a capital A,⁸ human impact on the earth has begun to manifest in phenomena such as melting glaciers, unpredictable weather patterns, droughts and floods, all-engulfing forest fires and rising sea levels, deforestation and plastic oceans – changes professors can see and feel as novel and frequently remark upon as catastrophic, but that for many of our students born in the early 2000s is simply the world they were born into, the pandemic just another amplifier among others of teenage angst. While many professors consciously entered both the decline of the planet and the digital revolution, with a sense that there were distinct before and afters, the two phenomena are norms that are baked into the consciousness of today's students. The spread of social media and closed news bubbles in turn have introduced a crisis of fact: what constitutes truth and evidence when it has become a matter of negotiation among warring groups; and in any case any information – whether true or false – seems to students we think of as digital

Grace Bacon:

“In part, it can be too simple to hide disconnects between students and professors behind a ‘generational divide,’ because while I completely agree that there are divides between generations (even among professors and students themselves), this fails to acknowledge that students were raised amidst the anxieties and trepidations of our parents’ generations. Meaning students were born into these issues not only as they relate to our lives but also the discourses surrounding them. When it comes to defining issues like climate change or the digital revolution, professors can seem stuck in the zeitgeists of when they came of age intellectually, or they are preoccupied with the *emergence* of these issues rather than handling them as unequivocal *realities*. I believe this comes less from the generation to which we all belong. What causes a distance between professors and students is when we limit ourselves to our generations rather than engaging with those of other generations whose realities have been shaped by entirely different worlds.”

⁷ Planetaryity has become a complex trope, beginning perhaps most controversially with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 2003 proposals in *Death of a Discipline*. For a concise review of different definitions of planetary thinking, see McVicker (2016).

⁸ For a flavor of the stakes involved in accepting and dating the new epoch, see Robinson Meyer (2019).

natives only a click away and is considered to have rendered obsolete long lectures on just about anything. Never mind that the concept of digital natives is itself something of a myth, and that the real challenge is not finding the fact itself but assessing its status and understanding its significance within any given context – something technological prowess alone cannot teach you. Most students, in other words, are coming of intellectual age in an entirely different ecological, digital, and epistemological world than many of their professors, for whom concerns about big tech, AI, climate change, and truth writ small hovered somewhere at the periphery during their disciplinary training before the millennial turn. This means we need to adjust what we teach and how we teach it.

How do we bridge these differences? How do we re-define what needs to be learned and how? One of the things we should strive for as educators in the world we live in is to prepare our students to be able to deal with the unexpected, the messy, the unpredictable, and – to use Wall’s word – the incalculable, little of which follows the neat contours of disciplinary learning and much of which will depend on the ability to react, listen, distinguish, theorize, assess, reflect, re-think, empathize, analyze, create, translate, and implement. These are fundamental mental and emotional operations that involve the kind of cognition, differentiation, and deliberation an effective education should impart. In North America, the liberal arts model offers a productive framework to foster the interplay of interpretive, creative and quantitative disciplines, while in many European countries this admixture of disciplinary thinking takes place a bit earlier for those headed for a university education.⁹ However, this interdisciplinary structure alone does not yet ensure the kind of learning that promotes synthetic thinking: it is also on the level of classroom teaching that this is achieved, and it is from this perspective I would like to discuss the collaborative and experiential learning that occurs on Academic Travel.

IV. CHASING MEMORIES AND TRACING FLIGHT: THE CASE OF TWO ACADEMIC TRAVELS

Academic Travel at Franklin is, in essence, a three-credit course with a travel component of ten days to two weeks in the middle of the semester. During the Travel period a class visits a specific location or locations, taking the theoretical learning of the course out of the classroom and onto the road. The Academic Travel requirement over a student’s university career is constructed as a layered experience of at least four and up to eight Academic Travel classes that together run like a red thread throughout Franklin’s curriculum; many students choose to go well beyond the requirement to enroll in an Academic Travel class twice a year throughout their four-year studies at Franklin. The two-week travel period occurs once the knowledge foundations of the course have been laid, the historical and theoretical texts have been read, presented, reflected upon, debated, and tested for validity. All the while relationships in the class have ideally begun to settle into effective peer partnerships, or even deepened into friendships, and students feel like they have just about figured out their profs, while the profs have just about figured out everyone’s names. It

⁹ However, the liberal arts itself is becoming more one-sided: many liberal arts colleges, even the more elite, are decreasing the majors they offer in disciplines such as history, literature, art history and philosophy, to name just some of the most traditional pillars in the liberal arts, and majors in humanities overall have been decreasing in the States since the economic turn of 2008. While a superficial read of this shift might indicate that students are, perhaps rightly, fleeing majors with poor job and salary prospects, historian Benjamin Schmidt (2018) points to an important caveat: “students aren’t fleeing degrees with poor job prospects”, he argues, “they’re fleeing humanities and related fields specifically because they think they have poor job prospects.” Aside from those studying economics, in fact, the differences in earning and employability among the typical majors seems to be trivial. That said, maintaining a careful balance between the social sciences, natural sciences, humanities and professional degrees is not trivial. Students, I would maintain, need the agility of mind that is created precisely in this balance of disciplines to tackle their professional futures. Some of the best universities understand this.

is at this point of the semester, when ordinary courses are half-way done, the mid-term period more or less successfully navigated with a faint glimmer just appearing at the end of the tunnel, that Academic Travel comes to life. Everything up until that point has been preparation for what happens next.

So, what does happen? That depends on the course, the professor, and the group. The two Academic Travel courses I want to discuss here – one on the memory of the Holocaust, titled *Inventing the Past: The Uses of Memory in a Changing World*, the other on the politics of forced migration in the EU, titled *On Refugees: Representations, Politics and Realities of Forced Migration* – were taught in the context of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies; the Academic Travel course on forced migration was also cross-listed with the Social Justice and Sustainability Program. I have taught *Inventing the Past* eight times during my career at Franklin with different destinations including Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, and Paris. The latest iteration went to Warsaw, Lodz and Krakow in the fall of 2019.¹⁰ Its building blocks are theoretical texts on cultural and collective memory, memorials, novels, museums, art and films, and a general history of the Holocaust, with supplemental texts that focus on the country, cities and people we visit during the Travel section of the course.¹¹

Course Description for CLCS 220T *Inventing the Past: The Uses of Memory in a Changing World (Poland)*

We live in an epoch obsessed with memory: its specter haunts an array of activities – intellectual, creative, and political; its processes shadow our individual and collective lives. And yet, despite this ubiquity, the idea of memory remains elusive and forever mutable, for depending on the context in which it is invoked and the purpose for which it is intended it can take on a range of forms and be thought from a range of disciplines. The context in which we will study the workings of memory is Poland – a place which over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries has served as one of the most important backdrops to the murderous history of the Holocaust. Our intellectual pursuit will range across several disciplines including history, literature, cultural studies, urban studies, sociology and visual cultures and the focus will be on the history and memory of the Holocaust.

The overall questions guiding our inquiry into the often-conflicted postwar politics of memory in Poland are the following: how does a nation deploy memory to create what it considers a positive identity? How does this change from administration to administration? How do public representations work to elide, confirm or undermine the constantly shifting historical discourses? To what extent are minorities or “the other” included in, or excluded from, the business of inventing national identity? In what ways do the representational accounts contradict or confirm one another? And finally, how is contemporary memory culture in Poland used to attract tourists, and how does this influence the way the past is represented?

Once in Poland we will visit memorials, historical sites, museums, exhibitions, and architectural structures in the towns of Warsaw, Lodz, and Krakow, in an attempt to chart the often-tortured process by which a nation comes to terms with its past, and projects itself into the future. Using some of the rich scholarly literature on memory that has been produced in the wake of the Holocaust, we will examine a variety of sites in Poland for a cultural comparison of how our core questions are inflected by different sets of political circumstances and cultural pressures.

¹⁰ This Travel is a riff on an early book of mine that focuses on the ways the Holocaust is remembered in various European countries. See Wiedmer (1999).

¹¹ Assignments for the course include a creative final portfolio consisting of four to five tasks such as a letter back in time to one of the characters the students encountered in their readings or during the numerous visits to museums and sites of remembrance; a series of “memory” photographs or a video of the places we went that in some way capture remembrance; a cartography of the memory landscape or a journal I ask them to keep during travel; and a design of a memorial – each of the assignments accompanied by a reflective two-page paper. While the individual assignments change, the goal of the portfolio is to blend the experience on the road with the theoretical and historical learning in a creative way that matches up productively with the students’ own learning histories. A recent twist on the creative portfolio is that students may, if they wish, grade their own portfolios, provided they do the work required and come up with their own grading rubrics – i.e., they come up with their own standards of performance – and discuss how they decided on the rubrics and why they feel they either did or did not reach their learning goals. My

The second Academic Travel, *On Refugees: Representations, Politics and Realities of Forced Migration*, I have taught only once so far as an Academic Travel, in the fall of 2018, and it was designated a service travel. It took us to Athens to study *in situ* responses to the refugee situation that was unfolding at the time at the edge of Europe. This Academic Travel to Athens asks a great deal of students: before the Travel portion they delve into the difficult politics surrounding forced migration in Europe as well the EU's response to it. This in turn requires them to understand and reflect upon the development of the somewhat controversial concept of forced migration since the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and the difference between climate refugees, political refugees and economic refugees. It asks them to understand and assess the different responses of an array of projects and organizations we encounter in Athens and encourages them to develop and reflect upon their own position on a vexing global problem, which gets worse each year as increasing numbers of people flee combinations of war, famine, economic insecurity, persecution and the results of climate change. It also requires them to think themselves into the motivations, frustrations, and often very limited prospects of the refugees they meet, both on paper and in person: in fact, this encounter extended into the classroom as well, as one of their classmates at the time was a recipient of Franklin's Scholarships Without Borders program and had taken the very paths of flight across the Mediterranean that we were studying.¹²

Course Description for CLCS 253T *On Refugees: Representations, Politics and Realities of Forced Migration*

This travel course will focus on forced migration and asylum regimes in Europe, with a travel component that takes the class to Athens, Greece, one of the major European nodes of the current refugee "crisis." The course offers an interdisciplinary approach to the political, social and cultural contexts of forced migration and is coupled with the study of a number of imaginative responses that help to shape attitudes and positions towards refugees. Throughout this course, students will study ideas of human rights as they relate to refugees, political and theoretical concepts that help to think through notions of belonging, sovereignty, welcome, and a range of cultural narratives, including films, public art, theatre and literature, that bring their own critical interventions to bear on the emergent discourses surrounding refugees. Our time in Greece will be spent speaking to refugees themselves, as well as organizations, including the American College of Athens, and foundations in Greece involved in the funding, assisting and sheltering of refugees in different ways, and a number of NGOs and organizations that have formulated their own responses to the emerging situation. This is a service travel which means you will have the opportunity to work with some of the organizations that work with refugee families and children.

The topics of these two Travel courses connect to questions on the national, the global and the planetary levels, though clearly the one on forced migration grapples more immediately with ongoing symptoms of some of the chasms our civilization is currently experiencing. Both classes use insights from a variety of disciplines including art, literature, film, economics, history and politics, and they both present an array of often contradictory responses to the issues we study in places that have been impacted directly. Both classes afford the students an opportunity to speak to actors and stakeholders who have engaged with the topics from a variety of perspectives, and they are encouraged to articulate their own response, or – in the case of *Inventing the Past* – to apply the phenomena we study to our own time and place in the class assignments. This helps them process their experiences and apply them in a way that is relevant to them. Their learning on the road is interdisciplinary, scaled, spatial, social, interpersonal, sensory, conceptual, and self-reflective. And, at times, it is overwhelming.

role in this is as a coach, to give the students feedback on the standards they created for themselves, on the grading rubrics, and on their reflections on how well they reach their stated goals based on the work they submitted; I also occasionally improve a grade I feel was all too critical because it turns out that students overall are far harsher graders than I tend to be.

¹² <https://www.acg.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/admission-process/all-other-countries/education-unites/>

Challenges can occur on a number of levels on Academic Travel; it is by no means always logistically perfect or easy to navigate for any of the participants. That can start with day-to-day irritations such as cancelled flights, late trains and obsolete visas or, courtesy of our recent pandemic, COVID certificates that do not work as they should, regulations that can turn on a dime and students who get sick and need to be quarantined (both of the travels I discuss here just predated COVID-19). Then events on location are not entirely predictable or controllable, ranging from tardy tour guides to operas that are cancelled at the last minute, from lost subway tickets, and stolen passports (in one instance happily re-found in a grungy Greek police station in Thessaloniki) to restaurants that have nothing on the menu that caters to the lactose-, wheat-, or meat-averse. Then, as Grace notes in her comment, there are different forms of privilege that need to be considered: the differences in financial might among the students, the roles of other forms of privilege that play among the students

Grace Bacon:

“Academic Travel moves students and professors beyond the normative classroom-based roles we expect for one another as over Travel the entire group is asked to share their lives with each another through exhilaration and exhaustion as we truly encounter everything together. I say this, because for me, I am always most struck by how equalizing travel can be. In my opinion, the most meaningful Travels are those where we ostensibly spend two weeks living together (both in a physical and intellectual sense as we eat, sleep, discuss, disagree, excite and fatigue together). The duration and intensity of Travel is crucial in understanding just how dynamic Travel is. A vehicle for learning, not to be overlooked.

At the best *and* worst times, Travel tests the agility of your humanity.”

and that have an impact on the subject studies and the relationship with the stakeholders we encounter. In the interpersonal realm, sometimes the groups do not gel; some students do not get along with the professor; sometimes the budget does not allow for the amount of spending money the students hope to have, and of course the impact of this too has to do with relative privilege among students in the class. Likewise, expectations of a destination may be frustrated by the activities required by the topic of the course; professors’ expectations, in turn, may be frustrated by a perceived lack of interest, and yet more so by the simple arithmetic of Murphy’s law rendered exponentially more irritating in an unfamiliar place. And finally, Academic Travel can be exhausting, both for the students and for the professors: it asks of both groups to largely forego the iconic spring or fall breaks enjoyed by their U.S. American and European counterparts; it requires that students leave both the comforts of their student home, and their intellectual comfort zones; it requires of the course leader a gamut of skills, ranging from the careful and creative handling of a budget, over close encounters with various forms of anxieties, to the occasional trip to police stations, clinics, pharmacies, or the hotel manager’s back office to discuss the details of the previous night’s party gone off the rails. Did I mention the exhaustion?

However, it is perhaps exactly these frustrations and unexpected occurrences, and the compressed learning phases in novel surroundings that allow learning to flow, that inspire mental agility and flexibility, and that bring about lasting insights. The intellectual nimbleness and poise which many Franklin students possess when they graduate also translates into self-confidence and tolerance and bondedness throughout the institution: it shapes the overall curriculum, creating a culture of cumulative learning that carves language patterns, seasonal rhythms, and a sense of institutional belonging; it enriches the relationships among staff, professors, and students; and it sculpts the identities and memories of everyone involved with Franklin. It is not despite, but because of all the challenging aspects of Academic Travel, that it tends to be one of the most memorable features of a Franklin education, a fact brought home in the many stories swapped long after graduation at alumni gatherings. It is this pervasiveness of the experience, and the fact that it flies in the face of more traditional classroom teaching that prompts us to think past the

present institution to ways we might imagine futures of teaching and learning that adjust to the sorts of knowledge we will need in the decades to come.

V. EDUCATION, NEUROSCIENCE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Situating the tiny context of Academic Travel within the immense context of the planetary forces us not only to try to understand what students should learn, but perhaps more importantly in the case of Academic Travel, how and where learning takes place; what hinders and what promotes it; and how students can be engaged and supported with a curricular design that takes into account how the brain works. The concept of “experiential learning” has over the last decade become something of a catch-all phrase for a form of education offered by institutions of higher learning as an index of their innovation and progressiveness.¹³ It is usually a time-intensive mode of pedagogy, which does well in relatively small classes and thrives on the ability to provide out-of-classroom experiences as part of a learning unit. Experiential learning also requires a willingness to largely abandon professor-centered, top-down teaching for more student-centered methodologies, such as place- and problem-based learning, flipped classrooms, and hands-on, sensory experiences. Assignments in this sort of classroom emphasize student experience, analysis, creativity, reflection, and the opportunity to apply the theoretical content of the course to real-life problems; in other words, learning environments much like those provided by Franklin’s Academic Travel program.

The concept of experiential learning has been around for almost forty years. The educational theorist David A. Kolb first published his then-revolutionary theory on experiential learning in 1984, the same year Wall snapped *Milk*; both pioneers recognizing and responding to changes in their respective fields. In 1984, however, much of the brain-based educational knowledge we have today was not yet available. In the intervening years, a great deal of research and literature has been produced on the nexus of cognition, education, and neuroscience, by scientists and scholars working in a new interdisciplinary field variously called neuroeducation, educational neuroscience, or, as it is known in the US, “Mind, Brain, and Education.” This new field is based on research that began in the 1960s, but really only took off in the 1990s with the help of brain imaging technologies, such as positron emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) that can track how the cellular functioning of the brain supports memory, cognition and emotion by measuring blood flow (PET) and oxygen levels of blood (MRI) at the sites of brain activity (Hartel and Buckner 2006). So as in photography, there is a decidedly fluid component to education and learning, only it is now slowly coming to light in education rather than vanishing as is the case for fluid in the transition to digital photography. As cognitive neuroscientist Michael Thomas describes it, the field is an emerging dialogue between

¹³ Kolb posits a learning loop in four stages, which privileges experience, reflection, abstraction and application. He then maps these onto four different learning styles. The four different types of learners Kolb posits are the diverger (can look at things from different perspectives, prefers watching to doing, is good at generating ideas), the accommodator (hands-on learner who relies on intuition and other people’s information rather than their own analysis), the assimilator (good at concise, logical approaches, less focused on people and more on broad abstract ideas) and the converger (problem solver, good at finding practical use for theories and ideas). While Kolb’s ideas of the learning loop continue to make sense, albeit in a fairly simplistic way, the notion that students have learning styles, and that a professor’s input should be geared towards these learning styles, has since been roundly debunked, but not before the broad dissemination of educational products, such as the VARK questionnaire, designed by Neil Fleming and Coleen Mills in 1992, which slices students into visual, aural, read/write and kinesthetic learners. See also the URL <https://vark-learn.com/introduction-to-vark/the-vark-modalities/>, accessed June 21, 2021. In fact, chances are some of the professors or students in any given university classroom today will have taken the questionnaire at some point in their career and believe themselves to belong to one of the learning categories tested. While most people might like to be given information in visual form, this does not, as it turns out, really help them retain the information any better than if it had been presented to them in written form.

psychology, neuroscience and education that focuses on ways to engage students beyond the professor-centered, lecture-style learning of the past. It incorporates insights into how the brain changes while we learn, i.e. its plasticity, the roles emotions and stress play in learning, how the brain responds to novelty, how a student's personal experience affects motivation, how the brain determines what is salient, how it sorts out information that is not salient, and how much information can be processed at any given time (Thomas 2022, 14:30 to 19:30).¹⁴ In short, this research shows the brain to be much more dynamic, and the learning process much more fluid, than seemed evident in the mid-1980s.

But while the fields of education and neuroscience are no strangers to one another, the bridge from observable neuronal activity, as students learn, to classroom application is still quite a wobbly one. This is in part because the objectives of the related disciplines are rather different from one another: while neuroscientists aim to understand how the brain works, how it is different from the architecture of the mind, and how the two map on to one another, the field of education is interested in developing pedagogy that serves particular learning goals, a remit that often goes beyond the goals of neuroscience (Devonshire and Dommatt 2010). At the same time, the hope of educators, that neuroeducation can somehow offer a magic bullet to transform classroom teaching, has produced what scholars refer to as a string of "neuromyths", characterized as boiled-down neuroscientific "insights" which are mixed with a heavy dose of

Grace Bacon:

"The phrase 'experiential learning' seems to be everywhere, but I do not know if the phrase is used as intentionally as it needs to be. To join *experience* and *learning*, there must be a deep and learned rationale for how and why pedagogy can become (or involve) *experience*. To assume that any subject can and should be *experienced* by those privileged enough to encounter the subject from an academic (or primarily intellectual) position is something that needs to be interrogated. What right do we, as students or professors, have to *experience* something for the sake of *learning*? This does not mean so-called 'experiential learning' is bad or too problematic to participate in (as is often the easier choice when thinking about potentially confronting situations). Still, there needs to be a consideration of ethical ways of engaging with lived experience as *learning*. Franklin's Academic Travel is no exception to this negotiation. In fact, precisely because of our diverse international community and emphasis on *Travel*, we need to be acutely aware of how our privileged position relates to our 'experiential learning' pedagogy. Of course, when this comes to practically being integrated into courses, it's a spectrum ranging from those that weave this awareness into the core of the course to others that treat it as an aside. The success of this critical thought also depends on the participation of everyone involved in the course, which can never be guaranteed. 'Experiential learning' can be hypocritical when there is no consideration of privilege, *and* actively acknowledging this privilege can redefine how and why we learn."

pseudoscience from education and psychology to be marketed and sold as classroom tools.¹⁵ Newer conceptions of how we might translate neuro-educational insight into effective curricula posit learning, in the words of education theorists Jeb Schenck and Jessie Cruikshank (2015), as "embodied, enculturated, contextual, conscious as well as nonconscious, developmentally dependent, and dynamic." Furthermore, they understand learning as embedded in relationships "between all parties in the room, the individual's relationship with themselves, the environment, with the context of learning, and relationships with the content" (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 76). Students, in other words, are understood as holistic, and the learning process is based on a number of concurrent dynamics, all of which can be leveraged for a good learning outcome

¹⁴ Salience, the ability to prioritize what you concentrate on, is very important because, as Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) have shown, student performance drops when they are asked to concentrate both on the "what" of the problem and the "how" of problem-solving: this is crucial information for how we design and orchestrate an experiential learning unit.

¹⁵ See for instance products such as Brain Gym or CogniFit.

(Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 93).¹⁶ Based on these insights, Schenck and Cruikshank have proposed a learning model they call the Co-constructed Developmental Teaching Theory (CDTT), which blends ideas of experiential learning with neuroscience.

Like Kolb's diagram of experiential learning, the CDTT diagram proposes staged learning cycles that are re-iterative at different scales, producing a fractal spiral that represents increasing complexity in learning over time and an infinite cycle that takes into account both the experience with which students enter the classroom, and their paths forward as they carry their insights from one class to another and on into their lives (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 86).

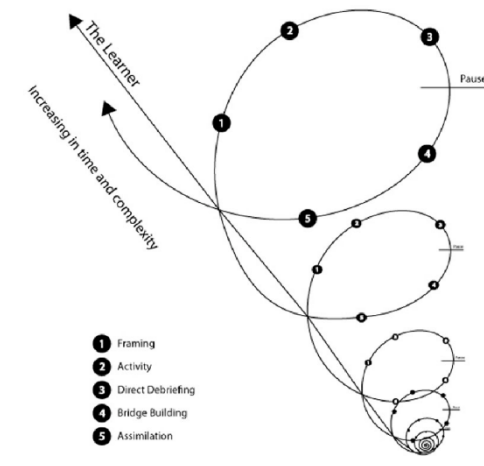


Figure 1: Diagram of Schenck and Cruikshank's Co-constructed Developmental Teaching Theory (CDTT, Schenck and Cruikshank (2015))

Each learning cycle proposed by Schenck and Cruikshank begins with a phase they call *framing*, in which non-conscious and psychological processes are initiated, and the learning event is primed. This phase acknowledges that students come from a variety of backgrounds, have different needs, strengths, motivations, attention spans and emotional states. By stewarding these unconscious processes, the professor sets the stage for the more difficult conscious learning by tapping into the brain's orientation towards reaching a goal (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 85). Because learning typically stops once a goal has been reached, the trick here is to find a clear learning goal calibrated to the amount of time the students are given to complete it. The next sequence in the CDTT learning cycle is an *activity*, which begins by re-iterating the main points made in the framing session, paying attention to social-emotional skills, and then moves to the actual lesson of the class. The task of the teacher here is to find the right amount of stress – not too much, or learners are overwhelmed or intimidated, but also not too little, lest learners get bored: in both cases they stop learning effectively. The activity should consist of short, clear, attainable goals, so students do not lose motivation, followed by feedback, both for the students and the instructor, so the system remains dynamic and can be adapted. The third of Schenck and Cruikshank's four phases they call *direct debriefing*, which initiates the actual learning stage after an activity: it ascertains what students have taken away from the activity so far and asks after the salience of the content for each learner. In experiential learning this phase is often broken down into "What? So what? Now what?" segments, so as to initiate reflection (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 94). This is also where the learning process itself is discussed: What does this mean to each person individually? How is this salience determined by background, interest and learning environment? This debriefing session is followed by a *pause*, which can mean a recess, or, more likely on travel, a meal, or a good night's sleep. The last two phases of CDTT are *bridge-building*

¹⁶ See also Mareschal et al. (2007).

and *assimilation*. They are at once the most difficult and the most crucial in terms of learning. *Bridge-building* occurs when concepts and abstract ideas from the course content are reviewed and extended to new situations; it also provides a space for students to recognize how patterns from their past experience connect with the new knowledge they have gained, giving them a new perspective that is really a new memory network (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 93). As students reflect, discuss, and explore, and begin to use this new understanding, they become on the one hand more self-confident in their new knowledge and on the other, more self-directed in the way they use it. *Assimilation* is the final stage. At this point, the learner has been through the phases of initial framing, activities, debriefing, bridge building, and application of the new knowledge, and they begin to own what they have learned as it is synthesized and stabilized (Schenck and Cruikshank 2015, 94).

Let's see how this works in a real-life classroom. I interpret the expression "learning event" as one single three-hour class, and when I map students' very first learning cycle – the tiniest at the beginning of the upward fractal – onto the first meeting of my *Inventing the Past* travel class. I usually frame the first three-hour class by using a typical element from the experiential learning playbook, namely the prompt to associate the topic – Holocaust remembrance – with the students' own cultural and personal inventory. I do so by asking them to think about how memory of the Holocaust is relevant, or salient, to their own lives, experiences, and cultural contexts, to compare these to those of a classmate, to co-write a paragraph or two, and then to share their insights with another group of two, and then in a round of reflection, or direct debriefing, with the entire class. I call this layered sharing. This exercise helps the students establish a relationship with the topic, then gradually with each other, and finally with me and the class as a whole. It is designed to get students talking in progressively more open forums. It also helps me get to know my students and their backgrounds, and hence their various comfort levels speaking in public, and with the topic itself. This debriefing helps everyone ease into the class – check each other out, get that first sentence out, define their stake in the class, and establish their geographic areas of expertise, all while finding their own sweet spot between goal attainment and stress management.

In a typical Franklin classroom this might mean that a student from Russia, a student from Germany, a student from China, a student from Saudi Arabia, and a student from the United States can all voice their assumptions about, and experiences of, their country's relative involvement and response to the Holocaust. Usually this ends with the students from countries where Holocaust remembrance is less culturally embedded taking a bit of a back-seat, but offering up their own national memories of foundational events, while students from countries that were shaped directly both by the period and its remembrance are either very vocal or very quiet, and some from previously allied countries debate who liberated Auschwitz (the majority of the class tends to lose this one). Everyone understands at the end of this first assignment that topics such as the Holocaust mean very different things to, and in, different countries, that memory is contingent and constructed by the communities which shape it, that there are often different takes within countries depending on which sub-community one belongs to, and that memory is always more of a commentary on the present, and on visions of the future, than on the past. It helps in this way to distinguish between personal and collective memory, and clarifies the individual's positioning within the collective memory of her nation.

The key insights I want to impart in this very first meeting of the class are that memory itself is malleable, and that each country invents its own collective memory strategy to exhibit different histories, different urgencies, different politics, different aesthetics, and different goals as regards national identity. The historical background to the Holocaust, the history of Poland in particular, and theoretical work on memory all come later. But they all build on these first insights. The first meeting also usually demonstrates that the Holocaust is a topic privileged in certain countries and not in others: while students from Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, and the States can easily come up with something to say, their counterparts from Middle Eastern and Asian countries tend to have less of a relationship to the Holocaust (unless of course their great-

grandparents happened to flee to Shanghai during the war, one of the last cities to accept Jewish refugees, as was the case for one of my students recently); the relative privileging of knowledge in different countries then becomes a phenomenon we can reflect upon as a group. Above all, this first class acknowledges that learning is a deeply social process, and that learning outcomes are correlated both with the salience of the topic to an individual, and with the trust they can feel towards all participants in a learning environment – all important information for students who have just embarked on a semester-long voyage together (and whose window to drop the course slammed shut several weeks prior to that first meeting).

Moreover, the students are made to understand that in our learning environment we acknowledge that learning is also a deeply spatial process which always also involves a level of meta-reflection on how ideas about learning translate from place to place, and how our students, who come from classrooms all over the world, will bring with them a variety of practices and assumptions about the processes of learning. When we reflect on this, we also discuss how various practices manifest themselves in classroom design; in short, we ask how students are affected by the places they come from and the places they learn in. This means reflecting on the fact that Franklin privileges not only the English language, but also US education. And it means that the discourse we use to describe what it means to be educated – for instance global citizenry, leadership, experiential learning, excellence – has often originated in countries influenced by the English model of market-driven liberalism and carries with it specific notions of competition and meritocracy that at times sit uneasily with other, equally strong values we have as an institution, such as inclusion, diversity and equity. The way we answer questions of sociality and spatiality thus steers salience, stress levels, emotions, and novelty: all factors that change the brain and shape the mind as we try to reach our learning outcomes. And that's before we even had our second class.

VI. ON THE ROAD: TOWARDS LIQUID LEARNING

Once we hit the road, spatiality and sociality of the course become central, not only our own but critically that of the people we meet. On the service travel to Athens, *On Refugees: Representations, Politics and Realities of Forced Migration*, for instance, the class visited, talked to, and worked with a number of government-sponsored organizations, NGOs, an activist squat, a prominent foundation, and the American College of Greece – all of which were involved in different ways with the evolving refugee situation in Greece in 2018 and took varying political and ideological stances on what needed to be done. We also spoke and worked with various groups of displaced persons, many of whom had initially arrived at one of the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, and Chios, and had since 2016 been gradually moving to the mainland, leaving behind the large and notorious camps on the islands.¹⁷ The various groups in Athens helped those refugees who had been able to make the first step off the Islands and into the capital, before many of them moved on in a quest for Northern Europe.

As I mentioned before, this Travel was designated as a service travel which means that students are supposed to help in one way or another, and as such it asked a tremendous amount of the students.¹⁸ The description in the box below will give an impression of the breadth of the experience, the differences in scale of economic might and political standpoint involved in the various groupings, but also of the high level of emotional flexibility required of the students as we spoke to individuals who ran the various organizations, and to displaced persons who were, for the most part, living in unpredictable and precarious situations. While those who welcomed us

¹⁷ Moria, on the island Lesbos, was one of the largest camps in Europe, and one of the most infamous before its almost total destruction after a fire ripped through it in 2020. For safety reasons we did not venture as far as the islands.

¹⁸ It goes beyond the reach of this paper to discuss the difficult and nuanced concept of service travel; let's just say the concept is as attractive as it is problematic.

were on time, well prepared, and extremely gracious, it was clear that they were doing us a favor, and not the other way around, as is the fantasy fueling the idea of service travel. Moreover, the refugee situation in 2018 in Athens was, and remains to this day, a chaotic and desperate one: this could be felt in the overall tension of those who were trying to help, the travel group, and in the stories of the displaced persons we spoke to.

This travel, more than any other, immersed students in unexpected situations, and some of these situations challenged their assumptions: preparing food with ingredients they did not know or found less than appetizing, cleaning kitchens, planning and doing crafts with children who really just wanted to play with stickers (to the students' credit, they got that before I did and arrived at Melissa's with tons of them) teaching yoga to women who were not prepared to learn from men, and unpacking and distributing dozens of boxes of clothes which turned out to be far from the hand-me-downs we tend to stuff into plastic bags back in Lugano for re-use, but rather boxes and boxes of brand-new clothes from Zara's last season. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the students were asked to understand, and to tolerate, the often contradictory beliefs and points of view that coalesce around a topic that is politically and ideologically fraught and that presents an emergent planetary problem with no clear solutions.

Given all of these factors, the students were hardworking, creative, and empathetic, but some were also overtaxed, finding the Travel too unsettling, their budgets too tight, and the overall experience certainly not what they had expected of a trip to Greece. Others, meanwhile, went on to write their theses on one of the aspects of the Travel. These intellectual, financial and expectational splits, however, meant that there was no consensus

Examples of Organizations Visited During the Travel Course on *Forced Migration*:

The organizations we worked with on the Forced Migration class included the Melissa Network, a network and community building platform for migrant and refugee women and their children founded in September of 2014, to provide a space where multipliers and community leaders meet to share skills, knowledge, and information. Our students were invited into their sharing economy to lead art classes for children, yoga classes for all ages, and literacy classes in English to those who were interested. They also were invited to a newly established home for undocumented teenage girls in a separate part of the city. While doing this, they had the chance to speak with the women and children who went in and out there. Another NGO we spoke to was METAdrasi, an organization founded in 2009 to help with the education and integration of migrants and refugees; we specifically visited unaccompanied minors. There we were given a tour of their facilities, a lecture on the organization, and the opportunity to speak to some of the refugees taking classes there. A third organization the students could work with was Praksis, an NGO founded in 2004, partly by volunteer lawyers, with the somewhat broader mandate of eradicating "the social and economic exclusion of vulnerable social groups and the defense of their personal and social rights." Their main clientele at the time of our visit were newly arrived refugees, but it was not exclusive to them. One of the prominent services Praksis had built up over the years was the distribution of medical supplies and clothes to those in need. Our students were invited to work with them for several afternoons to unpack – much to their surprise – the hundreds of boxes from the Spanish fast-fashion company Zara containing last year's fashion, which had just arrived that week, and to begin handing them out to people who dropped by while they worked there. Finally, we met with Alison Terry-Evans, the founder of the NGO Dirty Girls, an organization based on Lesbos, whose main purpose was to wash, recycle, and redistribute the tens of thousands of blankets refugees were given upon arrival by the Red Cross, and which, until Dirty Girls had begun to collect them, were simply discarded as people moved on, to rot in landfills together with mounds of colorful life vests. Three final places we visited were City Plaza, a hotel abandoned in 2010 amid the general economic collapse and government austerity in Greece. It was situated in the Exarchia district, which squatter activists had turned into a refugee shelter for hundreds of families at the height of the refugee influx into Greece in 2016, calling it the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza. At the City Plaza students helped cook and clean; they saw what it meant to make three hundred meals a day on a two-euro-a-person budget, as well-trained volunteers used food deposited in front of the hotel by supermarkets, restaurants or individuals. We also visited the American College of Greece, where we met the directors of their refugee program and some of the displaced students who studied there, and spoke to representatives of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, one of the leading global philanthropic organizations headquartered in Athens, about their involvement with the refugee efforts.

among the students about the value of what they were learning, and that the class did not gel as one group of learners, but rather into about three peer groups. Looking at it through the lens of neuroeducation, it seems clear in hindsight that there were issues with salience and clarity: in other words, I had not managed to convey to everyone how migration and the responses to migration we were witnessing in Athens were relevant to us all, nor had I defined learning goals which were equally clear and manageable to second- and fourth-year students alike, so that instead of expending brain energy on learning, some students were using that energy wondering what they were supposed to do next and why; along these same lines, learning means using your working memory, and if there are too many distractions to keep you from prioritizing – frustration with the service work, resentment about the difference in privilege among the students and the amount of money they received from the travel budget, tiredness, the discrepancy between Athens-as-a-nodal-point-for-refugees versus Athens-as-a-tourist-destination – the working memory cannot focus on the thing it is supposed to. Finally, given that there was no clear path from learning about forced migration to applying and assimilating this learning as the learning cycles would have it, we needed more moments of rest, debriefing, and meta-reflection on the processes of learning to offset the sometimes contradictory positions we were learning, especially when the students' experience working directly with organizations and displaced people did not always lead to the expected outcomes, for instance gratitude. In other words, learning for some turned out not to be fluid, but stressful and even boring. For me, in any case, this travel offered a lesson in learning about learning, and about teaching.

Grace Bacon:

“Not all Academic Travels are created equal. As such, the tensions between *Academic Travels* and *academic trips* are central to untangling how and why some students react to these Travels as they do. Sometimes students just want a break from school, so Travel serves as the perfect time to forego critical thinking for a vacation mindset. Sometimes it is the professor who wants a break, so their Travels consist of considerably more downtime or relaxation than academic activities. Of course, these just are the extremes. More often than not, the destination drives student interest in a Travel. Because we are all, at the very least, also tourists during Travel, the expectations of the course's destination can be central to how a group reacts to a place on Travel. Courses with so-called 'exotic' destinations (which tend to be those outside of Europe, Iceland withstanding) are sometimes hailed as superior Travels, while courses moving around Switzerland are dismissed by older students as banal or rudimentary (a been-there-done-that attitude).

These expectations usually have nothing to do with the content of the course but with a potential Orientalist view of the destination, meaning students often choose the *place* over the topic. Because tourism is the closest experience most students have to Travel before actually being on Travel, they still need to learn how to be an academic tourist while traveling. Many professors are wary of first-year-student-heavy travels as the tone and expectations of respectful Travel behavior are yet to be set. Similarly, during these first travels, students often have yet to consider how impactful their presence on Travel is to wherever they are. Some students, because of the curricula of their first Travels, are cognizant of their impact, while others never participate in Travels that critically consider the course's tourist footprint. Acknowledging oneself as a tourist is a must, but then professors and students must take it a step further and critically engage with the privilege that entails.”

By contrast, *Inventing the Past:*

Memory of the Holocaust in Poland, the travel class that takes us to Warsaw, Lodz, and Krakow to study Holocaust remembrance, typically poses far fewer obstacles to learning. For one thing, the travel portion that involves visits to museums, memorials, and people whose lives were affected by the Holocaust, including children of survivors, architects, curators, memorial builders, city planners, historians, and politicians, has the benefit of temporal distance and mediation. The goal is to understand how public space is shaped by the past, how this shaping is part of an ongoing negotiation among politicians, architects, artists, authors and filmmakers, historians, museum

curators, politicians, and citizens, all of whom participate in a constantly evolving cultural discourse on how the past shapes the future, and how the present invents the past. Aside from Germany itself, Poland played one of the most central roles in the Holocaust, and today it offers up a rich memory landscape that includes Auschwitz, the Holocaust's most iconic and most often visited, and thus commodified, place of remembrance. Poland's present-day right-wing Law-and-Justice-led government furthermore furnishes a rich case study in how collective memory in the form of laws, memorials and narratives can be shaped to serve revisionist ends.¹⁹ And the tourist industry that has arisen around Auschwitz is an illustration of a marketing strategy that slices it close to the limits of ethics and a bonding experience for all. But most importantly, the Holocaust itself lies in the past, safely tucked away in history under layers of mainly consensual discourse and requires no immediate action. Moreover, it has lessons to teach us about how to live in a democratic, inclusive and equitable society, and how not – all subject positions many students are proud to slip into. In that sense it is empowering to students: a class that uses emotions, salience, novelty and stress in just the right proportions to allow the brain to absorb its lessons. By contrast the refugee situation in Athens takes students into the very heart of the incalculable, messy, and unpredictable present that demands complex and, in many ways, impossible solutions. While this makes the class no less important, in fact the opposite, it does pose more challenges both for the students and the professor.

VII. LIQUID LEARNING

As I think of the kinds of diagrams I have presented above, I understand how impossible it is to describe precisely what happens in the brains and minds of individual students on Academic Travel, not to mention the effects several of these trips have stacked on top of one another in a student's career at Franklin. Does Schenck and Cruikshank's diagram of a spiraling fractal do this kind of learning representational justice? Does a spray of milk? Does it help if I pick out a sample day from the travel portion of the trip to Athens?

The kind of learning we experience on Travel, pressed into one day, cannot in the end be represented by a diagram of orderly learning phases, fractal or not. The best we can do is suggest schematics at this point of neuro-educational research. While we know from the research that exploring novel environments, and indeed unexpectedness itself, has a beneficial impact on memory, and thus on learning, because of the release of dopamine by the hippocampus,²⁰ much more research is needed to really chart such compressed and novel experiences in the brain and onto the mind and from there into the classroom and beyond. Of course, we know from anecdotes that our travel program stands out in the memories of our students long after they have forgotten

A Day in Athens

In the morning we met with a representative of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in their gleaming conference room, had a discussion with the director and some of the students of the refugee program at the American College of Greece, and then went on to do some volunteer work at the City Plaza Hotel that was coming apart at the seams. Just in terms of trying to assess a slice of the economy of the refugee response in Athens, this day required incredible mental agility from the students. They had to listen attentively to a presentation about how the foundation had arrived at the distribution key for hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to several aid organizations in Greece to understand how a portion of these funds were used by one of the recipients, the American College of Greece, and what it meant to its students, and finally to do service work in a squat alongside refugees and other volunteers whose organization had refused any funds whatsoever to prepare food that was entirely donated by private citizens for over 300 individuals per day over more than three years before later de-briefing in a group over gyros.

¹⁹ See for instance Masha Gessen's 2021 article on ways in which the Polish government is attempting to exonerate Poland of any involvement in the murder of three million Jews on its soil during WWII.

²⁰ See for instance Schomaker (2019).

many of the carefully prepared lectures in other classes. But we don't know exactly what impact it has on people's understanding of the world, and on their careers, much less on the architecture of their minds. Nor can we quantify what it means to have a sizeable portion of their education take place on the road. What we do know so far about the properties of salience, novelty, sociability, creativity and spatiality from the neuro-educational perspective can help us design better curricula and better learning environments.

Was I able then to salvage something from Wall's reading of *Milk* for my own experience as an educator? I still sometimes return to that image that once inspired me, and the unboundedness and force of the spray of milk against that austere background in Wall's image remind me of the moments of learning I have witnessed on travel that felt transformational; moments which, through some inscrutable alchemy of the mind, personal history, abstract thought, and sensory experience manifest as bolts of insight or swells of understanding, such as when I have witnessed the same excitement in students we all feel when we begin to own a new field and think along new paths: what Schenck and Cruikshank call "assimilation." This is the kind of learning that spills over tightly organized daily outings and schedules, that thrives on moments of programmatic uncertainty and uncharted paths, that sparks an intellectual commitment or a sudden moment of empathy with one of the people we learn about or meet, that occasionally will have an entire group of students debating the meaning of something that happened during the day without prompt; learning that forgets about discipline – in both senses of the word – that is motivated not by grades or credit points or rules, but by the burgeoning confidence of an emerging intellectual identity. This is the kind of learning that merges touch, smell, taste, and sight, with hard work, movement and insight; that opens the curtain onto a stage that turns out to be so much broader than initially imagined, and that breaches hierarchies as a group grapples with hard truths, unexpected emotion, and the pragmatics of finding the way through tangles of Greek or Polish streets; learning that is no longer contained by the hydraulics of academe, but indeed become its hydraulics: learning I think of as *liquid*.

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