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The Bridwell Quill. Issue 3: It Takes a Global Village

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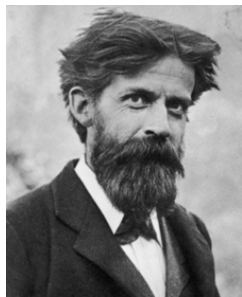
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November 1, 2018

Issue 3: *It Takes a Global Village*

Most of us have likely heard the phrase “think globally, act locally,” or some variation thereof. The expression was bandied about in the 1970s and 1980s, and its attribution debated ever since. Some claimed that it had come from groups within the environmental movement, while others asserted it originated with scholars, technologists, or artists. One of the earliest attributions is to a Scottish town planner named Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), who among other things, studied sociological and biological elements of culture, in



Patrick Geddes

order to better understand the ways that places and spaces worked optimally with their inhabitants. He was, notably, also very interested in the wisdom of Asian philosophical writings, and how the nature of such thought worked organically in explaining aspects of not just patterns of thought and feeling, but also how architecture, design, and human populations worked in very integrated ways. As we look at individuals like Geddes, even from the 19th century, and in fields as wide-ranging as geography, town-planning, architecture, design, environmental studies, library science, and museum studies, we recognize that the idea of “think globally, act locally,” no matter where its origin, is a perennial expression that emphasizes the truest nature of our world: that we are *in fact* a world of diverse and engaging people. I say this, because (the “flat-earthers” notwithstanding) what I have seen over many years of travel is that many of us project our understandings of the world into categories of states and nations—a fairly new Westphalian idea. And yet, for the majority of history, people have lived and moved and roamed and migrated all

over the world. It makes us consider, then, what “global” and “local” really mean in those contexts.

For us today and this month, I want to think about what global and local mean in our own contexts, especially at Bridwell and Perkins. This was dramatically clear in a tragic event that happened last month, when one of our newest international students, Yan Judy He, passed away unexpectedly on Oct. 5th. Yan was a stellar student with big dreams and ambitious hopes about her studies, travels, and experiences in America. Though I had only met her a few times briefly, I could tell that she had the energy, drive, and spiritual presence to



Yan “Judy” He

succeed at whatever endeavors she sought to undertake. Yan demonstrated that “global” and “local” spirit, being from Hangzhou, China and now living here in Dallas, Texas. During the month of October, many in the Perkins community got to know Yan He’s sister and mother. Our community rallied, as students, faculty, staff, and others, demonstrated their role as both neighbors and global citizens, coming together and supporting the family and each other in a time of need. In some ways, we might look to the organization *Médecins Sans Frontières* (or, “Doctors without Borders”). This concept can be applied to many other areas of work and expertise—including students without borders, faculty and staff without borders, or simply communities without borders. Our sense of what constitutes a border is complex, and in some countries today these terms are highly charged and political. But today we know that whether we speak of our friends and students and colleagues from China or Congo, there really are no borders to global partnerships. At Perkins, we have forged ahead under great leadership, and continue to work constructively to not just speak about the global and local but have been working assiduously to embody it. The work



especially of Dr. Robert Hunt and Global Theological Education is yet another one of the central components that makes our institution the successful place it is today.

Bridwell Library employs many students, and this year we have an exceptional group of international students from various and culturally rich backgrounds, including India, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, among the other countries represented on campus.¹ The present world that we live in is something that is expressed often in terms of divisions and borders, difference and separation, antithesis and conflict. These things *do* exist, but do not necessarily need to be the objects of focus and fascination to the point of monomania. Our world is one of great diversity and rich cultures, and that is seen every day in our students, colleagues, and friends, even if we ourselves don't know the details of these distinct cultures, or traditions and practices.

One of the great myths of global history is the functionality and purpose for building the "Great Wall" of China, which in Chinese isn't even called that—rather it is called the "Long Wall" or "City



An impressionistic view of the Great Wall of China.

Wall," depending on the interpretation. Curiously, for those technophiles among us, the term has been appropriated to describe China's clamp down on internet access, so you might come across the term "The Great Fire

Wall" of China to describe this idea. But the myths of the original "Great Wall" still abound. The wall—actually *walls*—were not built to repel the Mongol invasions, and the present-day wall, especially at Badaling (some 40 miles outside of Beijing) that we see today, is not a 2,000-year-old wall, but rather a wall built in the Ming Dynasty—after the Mongols were long gone. But the point of bringing up the question of the wall's utility and purpose has to do with what we assume walls actually do. The Great

Wall did serve some purposes, but for those historians of Chinese borderlands, it is known that along the Great Wall were villages and towns on either side, which grew up and developed economies of trade and commerce. Different ethnicities within the Ming dynasty flourished and relied upon each other to support and cultivate their communities, and this was all part of a highly organic expression of societies and culture that proved greatly beneficial.

As we consider what the world is organically, in contrast to the lines drawn or the walls built, I think back to the work of groundbreaking scientists like Rachel Carson (1907-1964), whose research drew upon the visionary preservation work of women



like Marjory Stoneman Douglas (1890-1998), the pioneering conservationist of the Everglades, and namesake of the Parkland High School in Florida. Carson's work was in many ways far reaching and influential. It spoke to the

holistic nature of the world and how everything from pesticides to household trash affect both the environment and our bodies. Her narrative was well-crafted and compelling, while also controversial to the establishment. And like her predecessor Stoneman Douglas, her voice was a clarion call to protect what we had—nature, the environment, and our societies—before it was too late.

Now nearly sixty years later, the caveats about the environment from Rachel Carson still ring true, but don't always bode well. The concerns of the last century still push us toward collective conversations about our duties and obligations as citizens of the world—both local and global citizen. As we sit here today, reading about the many happenings around this precious earth, I cannot help but think about the recent calamitous fires in California, which of late have been more intense and deadly, much because of climate issues. The town of Paradise, CA was nearly completely wiped

¹ I have learned a few examples of how the word "library" is expressed in the languages of our students and their peers: Raibhurari (Shona in Zimbabwe); Tūshū guǎn (Mandarin in China); Maktaba (Swahili in Kenya); Bibliothèque (French in

West Africa); Bibliotek (Lingala in Congo); Pustakaalay (Hindi in India). How do you say library in your native language?



out. When trying to find information about the local public library, it was not clear if the library building itself had burned, but the library’s website had posted general information about assistance to



local citizens. Fires in nature are profound and destructive and have ravaged communities and cultures alike. In antiquity, there was the supposed burning of the library of Alexandria by Julius Caesar’s forces in ca. 48BCE. This, though, was not a natural fire, but one that was caused through the acts of political and military confrontations. But the notion of disasters can be both a global and local issue—the Camp Fire in California has burned so vigorously that its smoke has traveled thousands of miles through the Gulf Stream, now reaching Europe. If we look at global fire maps—yes, they exist—one can see that some of the areas that have the highest fire rates are in similar climates. In fact, earlier this year, the Chinese news outlet *XinhuaNet* reported that there were over 4,000 people battling fires in the northern part of China near Inner Mongolia—not



far from the Great Wall. Perhaps that’s what it should have been protecting against! Fire is but one of many possible disasters that require emergency management. In the last few months, we have been working at the SMU libraries to bring together key people in the areas of collections and facilities management, in order to work through how best to plan for emergency communications and response. We will be convening this university-wide emergency management working group at Bridwell Library in mid-December to open the conversation among the multiple units and divisions of the university, where physical collections, artifacts, and works of art, along with shelving, walls, and structures that house and support them must be understood holistically as being subject to the environment.

Our attunement of the global and the local has been influenced by many things—our students, colleagues, teachers, friends, and partners, but also our environments. We might also understand the nature of global and local from our excavations of history, even pre-history. Scientists have been able

to help historians write histories of pre-written history from analyses of ancient caves, forest dwellings, and even remnants of pre-historic burn sites through techniques detecting *paleo-fire*. Paleo-being the Greek root for “ancient.” We seek the meanings of our places, both in our own localities, that which is near to us, and that which we think may be universal. Yet, the past, especially the ancient past, as it is gradually illuminated through groundbreaking research, brings us in our world into contact with that ancient place and establishes a new sense of meaning and truth for us. Last week I’d been having a conversation with my colleague Dr. Steuermagel, and orthodoxy came up. We bantered about different types of orthodoxies, including the curiously termed *paleo-orthodoxy* and we had a few tussles about it. It made me think that even in theology, the desire to draw the remotest



past, as perhaps some place of pristine origins, into our present spaces, was a tool of validation. The local meets the global, but also many times the *paleo*. This now brings me to yet another curiosity of the intrusion of the paleo: locally sourced foods, with global appeal, but attempts at recreating the nibblings of cavepersons: the paleo-diet. I will confess that I discovered it recently in Dallas—coconut milk yogurt, edible flower petals, natural grains and bananas. Quite the Neander-menu. Apparently, “paleo” clearly has some serious cachet in many aspects of culture. Nonetheless, whether it’s people, theologies, or foods, we shall continue to think and act within the expanses of local, global, and perhaps even the *paleo*. But good planning and strategy should also be our partners for hope in the future.

Pax vobiscum! ~ AJE

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