

# **Learning Outside the Home Culture: An Anatomy and Ecology of Memory**

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## Introduction

IN HIS REVIEW of foreign students in comparative perspective, Philip Altbach notes that "available research remains inadequate to obtain a full understanding of the complex realities of foreign study," an experience now impacting over one million students a year who study outside of their home cultures.<sup>1</sup> The present article addresses the question of the nature of learning in another culture and, specifically, the role that memory plays in this learning. Therefore it attempts in a small way to fill some of the gap in the research literature noted by Altbach.<sup>2</sup> I argue that the process by which students learn while studying abroad is uniquely shaped by the role that memory plays in the experience. Although this point may seem obvious, it is an essential one. Further, a consideration of memory leads to a number of intriguing implications for the way in which many aspects of study abroad programs are structured.

The phrase "study abroad learning" has been used to identify this unique form of learning in which students studying abroad are engaged,<sup>3</sup> and a recent study detailing ways in which students encounter foreign cultures on study abroad programs calls for further study and analysis of this type of learning: "Given the increased emphasis that is being placed on undergraduate education abroad, it is incumbent on the academic community to develop a better understanding of the nature of this type of learning experience. To enhance the effectiveness of study abroad programs, we must acquire a greater appreciation of how students go about learning what they do while enrolled in such programs."<sup>4</sup>

There are few analyses of how the study abroad experience shapes student learning. The problem with many of the existing research studies is as Laubscher notes, that they "are primarily attempts to

assess educational outcomes of study abroad, with little attention [paid] to the processes that generated those outcomes.”<sup>5</sup> Studies have tended to focus more on how students changed rather than on analyzing the process that was responsible for such change. It is not enough to study the effect of study abroad on student grade point averages, or to describe anecdotally that they achieve a global understanding” or an “independence of mind,” phrases that are utilized a great deal in the field but ring hollow. Only by focusing on the process by which these results occur will the uniqueness of and the rationale for studying abroad be discovered and articulated.

Research on study abroad has examined the “cultural adjustment” and maturation” process in which students are engaged, and much has been made of “culture shock,”<sup>6</sup> a concept, as Altbach points out, that “has been largely discredited by later research.”<sup>7</sup> “Culture shock” continues to be presented to students as part of their pre-departure orientation, however, despite the “fact that it is very difficult to generalize about the impact of foreign study on individuals”<sup>8</sup> Another, perhaps more fruitful way of viewing culture shock and related concepts is in terms of *learning*, as natural occurrences that are instructional rather than something to be feared or “overcome.” As Torbiorn has suggested in his analysis of culture shock, “the strains reflect a normal and temporary restructuring of views and behavioral schemes that is desirable and to some extent necessary for good adjustment later on.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Peter Adler argues that “culture shock and the notion of a cross-cultural learning experience are essentially the same phenomenon, the difference being the scope of focus or view.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the psychological dimensions of the intercultural experience are not independent of learning; they are in fact primary ways in which students learn while abroad.

Recent research on memory and the college experience provides support for this view. These investigations have examined a long-neglected area of memory research: the memory of educational episodes that have a lasting impact on one's life. This research is especially germane to study abroad, an experience that students cite over and over again as “life changing.” Studies have found that educational episodes that occur at “transitional life moments” are those that are best remembered. Since study abroad is the experience of being

at a transition between cultures, this research has much to tell us about the role of memory in this experience. In particular, research on college alumni has revealed a “pronounced and consistent overrepresentation of memories at the beginning of the first academic year.”<sup>11</sup> That is, college alumni at various stages of their post-collegiate experience remember far more about the first academic year than they do about any other time of their college careers. Further, research shows “memory clustering at the beginning of the first academic year.”<sup>12</sup> This indicates, according to Pillemer et al., that “the time interval encompassing a life transition may be a 'critical period' for the encoding of vivid episodic memories.” Moreover, “these early events may be frequently revisited in memory and may continue to influence attitudes and behaviors long after the original moment of occurrence.”<sup>13</sup>

The study abroad experience, I suggest, is its own continuum of these “transitional moments,” of experiences that occur at the crossing point of cultures. And memory plays a significant role in this continuum, for it lends shape and substance to this enterprise by weaving the experiences together into an understandable narrative. This article will argue that study abroad learning should be conceived of as an organic and continuous process in which memory plays an essential role. I will focus on memory as one of the aspects of this organic process. It is a complex process, to be sure, and one that functions on many different levels. Certainly many other influences shape study abroad learning, and this article is meant as only a beginning step in sketching out what is involved when students learn abroad. My approach is of someone who has been working in the field of study abroad for nine years, five as a resident director on site and four in an American university study abroad office speaking with students about their experiences abroad.

### Memory and Study Abroad Learning

Memory is an especially important influence in study abroad, for the span of physical distance that characterizes the study abroad experience highlights not only the literal gap between one's home culture and present situation but also the temporal chasm. Students

abroad are faced with a pronounced separation between two lives, one past and one present. Like the fledgling college freshman who lives away from home, perhaps for the first time, a student abroad is faced with the wide expanse of a segmented past to inform his or her present situation. The critical way in which memory acts as a synthesizer of experience, especially "transitional experience," justifies examination of its role in this form of learning. What follows is analysis of some prominent forms that memory takes in the study abroad experience as a contributor to learning.

#### Paradigms of Memory in Study Abroad Learning: Nostalgia, Comparison, and the Memory of Place

A typical response to a new culture is homesickness. Resident directors recognize the familiar figure of the retreating student who shelters him- or herself in a cocoon of memories, effectively cutting himself or herself off from a new culture, using memory as a shield against experience. Morgan has examined American students studying in Switzerland and found clear evidence of this tendency among students whom he labeled "culture opposites," who "tended to seek closer ties with their American peers, developed intense nostalgia for home, and demonstrated a heightened degree of nationalism upon returning from the program."<sup>14</sup> These are students for whom the experience in another culture has further cemented their cultural frames of reference. There are also students who do not make it this far along, and early on in their study abroad experience choose to return home due to a nostalgia that is overwhelming.

It is significant that the origins of nostalgia as a clinical diagnosis link the illness to intercultural experience. The medical historian and psychiatrist Stanley W Jackson explains the historical roots of the symptomatic and etymological meanings of this illness through citing the work that first mentions nostalgia in a medical context, one that describes it as the experience of being apart from one's home culture:

*Johannes Hofer (1669-1752) authored the first description of this condition in the form of his medical dissertation, De*

*Nostalgia oder Heimwehe. He acknowledged the German term Heimweh, used in Switzerland to denote "the grief for the lost charm of the Native Land," and the French term maladie du pays. Then he constructed the Latin-form term nostalgia for it, noting that it was "Greek in origin and indeed composed of two sounds, the one of which is Nostos, return to the native land; the other Algos, signifies suffering or grief... the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land."*<sup>15</sup>

Hofer documented cases of homesickness and noted its appearance especially in young people who move to foreign lands and are plagued by "incessant thinking of home." He observed that these afflicted youths are unable to accustom themselves to any foreign manners and way of life ... and find pleasure only in sweet thoughts of the fatherland until the foreign country becomes repugnant to them." For Hofer, such longing for home was due to a "disordered imagination" that focuses on "lost images" of home at the exclusion of all else.<sup>16</sup> Students abroad experience this longing in varying degrees, often in the form of a debilitating depression, which itself is a pathology that has been linked to homesickness.<sup>17</sup> The eminent nineteenth-century American psychologist G. Stanley Hall viewed the human personality in terms of homesickness in which two competing forces shape one's relationship to home:

*Soon two tendencies develop: one centripetal, inclining the child to its own home of which the mother is the heart and the other centrifugal. Homesickness and the passion for other scenes and faces, illustrated, e.g., in truancy and the migrating instinct, often struggle with each other. Some children wander away, launching out into the big world, and leaving all behind them without fear or regret, while others show an equally abnormal dread of getting away from familiar faces.*<sup>18</sup>

In 1898 a student of Hall's at Clark University, L. W. Kline, further studied and described this nostalgic Posture:

*Just as the seasick patient has his center of gravity and consequently his physical plane of reference constantly eluding his bodily adjustments, so the nostalgic has his "physical plane of reference"--composed of familiar scenes, friends, sense of security and the like--rendered uncertain and bewildering, through his inability to interpret and to enter into familiar relationships with the new world about him. To get on in this new world new adjustments must be made...he must fuse with a new stratum...As we have seen, many do not try to make a "fusion" at all, do not seek a new "plane of reference," rather yield passively to their prison-world with wonder, timidity and fear.<sup>19</sup>*

Clearly, Kline is describing a severe clinical condition from which most of our students will not suffer. But the description is useful because, at the very least, it describes *moments* that students experience during their intercultural experience.

I want to suggest that such nostalgic episodes are not simply isolated, "pathological" events within students' experiences, but rather they are *learning experiences* that shape one's encounters with and knowledge about a new culture. The memory of one's home is an essential aspect of moving across cultures; and when such a memory is not present, the journey suffers from lack of meaning.<sup>20</sup> Although nostalgia can have debilitating effects on a student, it more often is an invaluable part of learning in another culture because, paradoxically, the closure of nostalgia toward a new culture is also an opening to learning, both about a new culture and about one's relationship to one's home culture.

How does this occur? The natural rhythm of memory moves one from nostalgia to comparison, and it is a movement that appears to play a part in much of study abroad learning. Memory serves as a container of past images and pre-, sent experience, both of which are judged and placed into the context of meaningful narrative. At such a juncture the construction of a personal narrative through which one's life is understood is paramount, and is achieved by what psychologists have called "autobiographical remembering."<sup>21</sup> As Barclay notes, the purposes of this type of remembering are many, and they relate well to

the context of learning outside one's home culture. For example, remembering preserves a "sense of being a coherent *person* over time, especially during times of anxiety and boredom." Another purpose "is to establish and maintain intimate relationships as we attempt to meet our need for meaningful relationships with others." In addition, "autobiographical remembering can be used to establish 'protoselves' as well as 'protocultures' . . . that convey personal perspectives and cultural values and norms." Finally, such remembering constructs and reconstructs, produces and reproduces, "history": "the story we wish to be known that justifies our being, culture, or way of life."<sup>22</sup>

This is an integrating function of memory that "fits" together disparate and often conflicting information, impressions, and feelings. Essentially, memory serves to unite the extremes of imprisoning nostalgia with the shock of encountering the "other." While nostalgia, as I have argued, plays a crucial role in the process by which students learn, it is the comparative and integrative power of memory that enacts such learning.

There is another form in which memory appears prominently in study abroad learning, and this form perhaps distinguishes it more from learning in general than do the functional forms described above. The above discussions of memory fit situations within one's home culture as well as the intercultural experience. However, the notion that memories are attached to particular *places* comes closer to characterizing the unique form of learning that occurs during study abroad.

This link between memory and place has been recently explored in Simon Schama's sweeping historical study of the relation between landscape and memory. Schama declares provocatively that the physical world embodies ancestral memories. He uncovers the continuum of mythic time that lies under the *places* of Western culture, suggesting that places are different from each other because of their unique history.<sup>23</sup> And this history, he suggests, is accessible through the physical world, the landscapes that give meaning to places:

*Neither the frontiers between the wild and the cultivated, nor those that lie between the past and the present, are so easily fixed. Whether we scramble the slopes or ramble the woods,*

*our Western sensibilities carry a bulging backpack of myth and recollection. We walk Denecourt's trail; we climb Petrarch's meandering path. We should not support this history apologetically or resentfully. For within its bag are fruitful gifts--not only things that have been taken from the land but things that we can plant upon it. And though it may sometimes seem that our impatient appetite for produce has ground the earth to thin and shifting dust, we need only poke below the subsoil of its surface to discover an obstinately rich loam of memory... The sum of our pasts, generation laid over generation, like the slow mold of the seasons, forms the compost of our future. We live off it.* <sup>24</sup>

The suggestion here is that the physical places we inhabit are teeming with the multiple memories of past events and associations that give places particular significance. E. V. Walter, who has written on the meaning of places in sketching his own theory of the human environment, notes that to inhabit a place requires active engagement in the local textures that support and give life to it. According to Walter, "A place is dead if the ... mind cannot engage with the experience located there, or if the local energy fails to evoke ideas, images, or feelings." He proclaims that "To inhabit a place physically, but to remain unaware of what it means or how it feels, is a deprivation more profound than deafness concert or blindness in an art gallery." "Humans in this condition," say, Walter, "belong nowhere."<sup>25</sup>

The next section considers a case where a student initially had sensation of being "no where," but whose situation was transformed through the memory of her home. It is a case that highlights the way in which memory assists learning in a foreign place through its nostalgic, comparative, and narrative functions.

#### Nostalgia, the Comparative Power of Memory and Study Abroad Learning: A Case Study of a Homestay in Italy

Wagner and Magistrale rightly advise a student that "Study abroad is always a study in comparisons and contrasts with what you know

from home.”<sup>26</sup> Because the tug of nostalgia is pervasive for students abroad, memory becomes a container for comparing past with present experience. Memory is an active arbiter of the present, and how students remember the past, tells us much about how they understand their present situation. The way in which students remember their past shapes their perceptions, judgments, experiences, and learning of the present. In this sense, remembering is interpretation. And this relationship between memory and encounter is reciprocal: encounters shape memory, and this is where learning takes place. When encounters are remembered, they are valued; they become attached to feelings, and they become learning experiences.

A student's encounter with a family in a homestay dramatizes this point. The setting is northern Italy. A student has been in a homestay for or month. She comes to see me and expresses her dissatisfaction with her host family. The student complains that the host family is never around; “It seems as if I hardly ever see them,” she says.<sup>27</sup> The host mother is divorced and employed full-time, while her daughter is a university student holding down a job as well. The mother, I learn, travels across northern Italy each weekend to take care of her own ailing mother in another city. The daughter and mother, says the student, seem too preoccupied to spend time with her. Moreover, she mentions that the mother and daughter count on her to look after the house when they are not there. The student has had enough; she wants a new host family.

Anyone with experience setting up and monitoring homestays knows that these are complicated situations that rarely present themselves with easy solutions. And, to be sure, there are host families that ignore their host students and students would be better off moved to a new situation. The difficulty is in knowing when it is prudent to move a student to a new homestay and when to encourage a student to remain in a homestay because one senses that it can become a valuable learning experience for the student. As a resident director, one agonizes over these decisions. In this case, despite a pre-departure orientation that alerted the student to the realities of homestays in Italy, the student had an ideal image of Italian domesticity: a “famiglia” with a “mamma” to take care of her. She also carried with her the memory of her own traditional family she left behind in the United States. But this

stereotypical family is fading fast in Italy as young people marry much later, divorce much more frequently, and have fewer children than they did years ago.

The student's displeasure with her living situation was a perfect opportunity for learning about this contemporary Italian family, an opportunity for learning through participation in a cultural *predicament*.<sup>28</sup> On my urging, the student remained with the host family, taking on the role that the family was asking her to assume. She learned through her action, becoming immersed in the role that she was asked to play- the responsible daughter who helped to (psychologically) support this contemporary single parent Italian family. This "family encounter" became a learning experience for this student when she remembered her own family comparatively rather than nostalgically. Doing so allowed her to discover the sense of loss that Italians feel over a declining birthrate and an increasingly fragmented family. Within her own memory lay the seeds for understanding her present challenge. The student recalled an episode from her past: the time her father was seriously ill and hospitalized for two months. She was called by that memory of the time in her life when she assumed a new role in her biological family. She became a support to her mother; it "was when I grew up, she said, "helping to support my family when they really needed me."

The student felt obliged to address this memory and act on it. In her trying situation in Italy the memory was refashioned, re-created to fit the present moment; it became an instructive tale that helped to form a bridge to the student's encounters with her host family for the rest of the year. This emphasis on the way students remember rather than the literal memory itself is important; remembering is as much a creative act as it is a recollection of a literal event. The *role* that the remembering plays in a student's present life is what is most essential.

Recent psychological research on memory supports this interpretation. As Fitzgerald argues, "an essential part of identity formation is A. development of a self-narrative that consists of a collection of stories and their themes that brings an understandable order to the course of a person's life."<sup>29</sup> During transitional life moments, memories of experiences become an important part of constructing a life narrative that sustains and expands a person's

identity as one seeks to fit these into a narrative whole. Interpreting the way in which one fits a remembered event into a narrative, or constructs a new narrative to fit the event, tells us much about the meaning of that event for the person.

### Considerations for Study Abroad Program Design

What are some practical ways in which the learning described in the above case study might be encouraged? Below I list suggestions for pre-departure and reentry programs, choice of textbooks, the planning of program design to encourage "secondary nostalgia," and the integration of "place" with classwork.

#### *Predeparture and Reentry*

I have suggested above that the expanse of one's past is a significant contributor to intercultural learning. *How* students remember past experience is a key to their study abroad experience, and to the success of their reentry as well. Who knows why certain events from the vast storehouse of memories at students' disposal are called up at various times? What we do know is that the role that these recovered memories play in a student's understanding of a new culture is important. Predeparture workshops rightly focus on what lies ahead for students, orienting them to the new culture in which they will live and study. I suggest that they might also emphasize the fact that students will be perpetually involved in remembering the stretch of their past, using the wealth of remembered experience both to learn about another culture and to give meaning to their lives. In this regard, it might be useful to suggest to students that they do more than review the assumptions of their own culture before studying abroad: they would do well to think of formative experiences in their own lives as well, for these, ultimately, will help to shape their encounters abroad. Focused writing exercises, small-group discussions, and journal writing help students to tap into these experiences.

Predeparture sessions and on-site orientations sometimes stress the need for students to give up their home culture and immerse themselves in a new one. However, to dismiss students' yearning for

home by urging them to "find a home" within their new environment is to miss an opportunity for learning. Learning can be enhanced if students' nostalgia for their ideal home is encouraged and not overcome immediately. What I am suggesting is to view the first few weeks of the study abroad experience as a "structured homelessness," if you will, where students are encouraged to explore their sense of being homeless. Nostalgic students learn that their new culture is radically different from their old one, and this forms an opening to genuine understanding of the new culture. This experience of nostalgia is ripe with meaning as it sets the stage for comparisons, reflections, analyses, and eventual immersion into the new culture. Interestingly, I have found that students who are too quick to dismiss the pangs of nostalgia often do not achieve as deep an understanding of the new culture because they have adopted it too quickly and unqualifiedly as "home," although certainly there are no means by which to test this impression. An explanation might be that such students do not achieve a learning that is as integrated with their past as do students who struggle with the challenge of weaving together their new experiences with the memories from their home culture.<sup>30</sup>

### *Texts*

A central motif of the literary imagination informs us about the process of intercultural encounter and learning: the literature of the journey narrative and its complement, the search for home. In Western literature there are countless examples: from Odysseus's long journeys to the folly of Don Quixote's quest to Ahab's pursuit of Moby-Dick to Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, the journey narrative has been a persistent feature of our self-understanding. As Northrop Frye has suggested, "of all fictions, the marvelous journey is the one formula that is never exhausted."<sup>31</sup> We recognize when reading this journey literature that the authors do not intend for us to understand the Journeys literally. Janis Stout observes that "it is a mistake to try to map the wanderings of Odysseus or to suppose that Homer meant us to do so." She adds that "it would be equal folly to try to chart the movements of a Raselas, a Dante, a Quixote, a Galahad."<sup>32</sup> Such literal interpretation while perhaps useful in describing the worlds that these figures inhabit, in themselves are not enough to understand the

meaning of such journeys. In a literal interpretation, Stout suggests, "the mileposts and borders simply won't tally ... for the authors had something else in mind."<sup>33</sup> The accounts better served, and the reader as well, if they are seen as forms of experience that are useful in viewing the meaning of one's own experience of life-as-journey, revealing truths about the human soul. Interpreted in this way, journey literature would seem to fit well with the study abroad curriculum.

I am suggesting that the study of journey literature that explores the very experiences that students are facing during their time abroad enhance, their learning. Yet surprisingly little emphasis is placed on this as a criteria for choosing texts on study abroad programs. Ideally, these texts would be chosen carefully so that they relate to the specific culture in which a student is learning. And, for maximum impact, they should be read and studied during the predeparture, on-site, and reentry phases of a program. A study of the intercultural journeys of Marco Polo, or the travel writings of Paul Theroux, or any number of choices from the thousands of fictional and historical examples of intercultural journeys, has several benefits when undertaken in the context of a study abroad program.<sup>34</sup> First, the richness of literary art encourages an organic view of learning because we examine thoughts, feelings, tragedies, and comedies of characters as they negotiate their way in a full range of action. In this way, students are able to understand their personal experiences within the public forum of the classroom. As Bruner and Feldman point out, "autobiographical selves" can be shared publicly and analyzed openly through viewing them in terms of such literary properties:

*One way that autobiographical selves become public by being based on narrative properties like genre and plot type that are widely shared within a culture, shared in a way that permits others to construe meaning as the narrator has. In this way private experiences (including experience of the self) are constituted meaningfully into a public and communicable form.* <sup>35</sup>

A second benefit of the study of these texts is that it affirms students' experiences as being part of a greater tradition, which gives their

individual experience greater depth and meaning. Third, it is a way for students to objectify their experiences and use them to embellish, analyze, and discuss these texts. Fourth, this kind of textual study encourages students to form a continuum with life experience, bridging classroom analysis with life experience; it encourages an organic learning similar to what Sikkema and Niyekawa describe as the goal of cross-cultural learning:

*In this design, learning how to learn another culture is a more important goal than learning the specifics of the culture, and going through this stage of facing ambiguities is considered essential in learning how to learn.... Learning to tolerate ambiguities until one knows more about the situation can have a generalizable effect, not only on learning the new culture but also on the personal development of the learner.<sup>36</sup>*

### *"Secondary Nostalgia" and Program Design*

The above analysis of memory allows us to consider making use of a structural component of study abroad programs that leads students to develop nostalgia *for the program site*. When students travel from their program site for their first significant foray into another unknown, the site very often becomes the object of their nostalgia. I became familiar with this "secondary nostalgia" while directing a semester program in Rome eight years ago.<sup>37</sup> Students on the program were required to keep a journal, which I read midway through the semester and again at the end of the term. Descriptions of secondary nostalgia were extremely common in these journals, and usually appeared at the end of a ten-day study tour of Greece that occurred after the first month of the program. The following example was typical of these entries:

*I can't wait to get back to Rome. I love Greece, but I am getting tired of the fact that I can't communicate with people as well as I can in Rome. I miss simple things like the food, especially pizza. The first thing that I am going to do is go to the Piazza Navona and hang out ... It's an odd feeling, but Rome feels like home to me now. A month ago I would not have imagined that I would feel this way.<sup>38</sup>*

To be sure, not all students develop this secondary nostalgia, yet it is an important indicator of learning to understand and function within a new culture. Students who experience a strong primary nostalgia tend not to experience the secondary variety because they remain focused on the object of their original homesickness no matter where they are. For most students the secondary nostalgia is a well-defined, memorable moment that identifies the point at which learning and living have coalesced. An example from another student's journal suggests how nostalgia frames this "lived learning:"

*I cannot even begin to express how good it is to be back in this country I mean, Vienna was wonderful, but the same thing happened coming back to Sweden this time was coming back from Berlin (that sentence doesn't exactly work, but I think you get the idea), As soon as I was back on Swedish ground, I was immediately filled with a sense of relief, of "it's so nice to be back!"*

*It's really comforting to feel that "homecoming" feeling here. I think everyone needs that sense of belonging and security, and it makes me happy that I feel it here. It makes me wonder when it began, and I think the answer is: when we got back from Berlin.*

*For the first time, I really felt that I belonged here when we landed in Malmo. I took a picture out the train window, and now have it prominently displayed on my wall. The air was Swedish, the water was Swedish, the signs were in Swedish-after feeling like such a foreigner in Berlin, I felt familiar with things again-I was on my own turf. It was great to feel that way about Sweden.*

*And that's how I felt yesterday. As soon as the plane touched the ground-Swedish ground-I didn't feel like such an outsider anymore. At least I know the subway system without an obnoxious tourist map. I can read a menu, I can buy what I need with a minimum of embarrassment.*

*I'm actually starting to feel at home here. It's not the same feeling I have when I'm really at home in the U.S. It's more of*

*an awareness of not really being home, but feeling comfortable anyway.*<sup>39</sup>

Sensory memories are entries into new cultures, and in this case they satisfy this student's longing for the familiar aspects of a place once foreign. Focusing on this moment of secondary nostalgia should be a primary concern for directors of programs abroad, for it is the epiphany of rural experience, the moment at which memory of a new culture becomes a reminiscence. These moments should be a focus for curricular and programmatic decisions. Small-group discussions, writing assignments, and journal entries should focus on these moments that students experience. To remember a new place nostalgically means that a student has learned to live in such a place and is drawn toward the remembrance of his or her life within the culture. Moreover, this nostalgia indicates that a student's memory has woven the complex of experiences together as a meaningful narrative worthy of supporting and sustaining his or her actions. For students abroad, this is an important learning achievement brought about through memory, a type of "study abroad learning" that emerges from a student's placement within a new culture.

### *Integration of Place and Classwork*

Students abroad are not tourists, nor are they natives: they are interculturalists participating within a culture with one foot outside of it. This is a privileged and precarious position, where they are at once part of the daily life of a place but always, by reason of identity, "other." Therefore, students' participation in the culture and their reflection about the culture contribute to effective learning when they are mutually supporting.

I would suggest that students maximize their learning abroad to the extent that programs abroad help them to excavate reflectively the rich soil of places. The curricular designs of study abroad programs should have as their basis, to borrow Schama's image, the rich mulch of the native environment, and these programs should encourage memorial contact with this fertile ground. The local environment should guide our selection of books, lectures, and activities. Put another way, curriculum should be guided by the memory of places in which

programs are located. After all, the *raison d'être* of study abroad is the fact that one is located in a particular place or series of places.

By way of example I think of the preparations for excursions with which I was involved while directing a program in Rome. Before the excursions, students studied related material in their courses in literature, philosophy, history, theology, and art history. Faculty coordinated their syllabi so that they covered the same topics during the same time in their individual courses. The content was chosen so that it related directly to academic excursions to sites such as Assisi, Venice, Florence, and Greece. Therefore, students had the benefit of studying and discussing during the week what they were to experience on the trips to these places. The goal was to deepen the meaning of these places through advance intellectual archaeology. To be sure, this is a highly structured program that may not work with other program models.<sup>40</sup> The benefits for learning, however, were substantial. For example, during the week before the Assisi trip, students read and studied the poetry of Saint Francis in literature class; Franciscan philosophy in philosophy class; the history, Assisi as a Roman site to modern times in history class; the meaning and influence of Franciscan theology; and the important art and architectural tradition embodied in the city and its works. These studies made the experience of Assisi more memorable because the landscape of the town charged with meaningful associations.

In short, students dug through the compost heap of memory gives Assisi meaning. The goal was to prepare students to encounter Assisi in a meaningful way, with a sense of the memories that form the city. These preparatory classes not only helped to frame students' experiences of the sites that they visited but also acted as the memorial aspect of the students' experiences of these sites. When students encountered the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre at Assisi, for example, echoes of the history they had studied in class emerged from those ruins. When viewing the cycle of frescoes by Giotto in the Basilica of Saint Francis, students remembered what they had learned in class about those frescoes. When walking up the mountain to the hermitage of Saint Francis, they remembered what they had discussed about Francis's own life journey. In this way, encounter was attached to memory as a completion of the process of learning. What I am

suggesting here is a study abroad program model that is guided by the critical role that memory plays in learning, one that helps students to embed their thoughts in real-life encounters with places.

Another way to state this is to say that through memory, spaces are turned into places. We have all encountered students for whom the study abroad experience becomes a series of movements through spaces, and where the quantity of spaces traversed becomes the primary goal of their study abroad experience. This, I think, sacrifices quality, the sustained and substantial experience of places. I suggest that memory is a key to viewing and experiencing *space* as *place*. What at first appears strange and foreign becomes meaningful when memory is used to view and understand it.

Students abroad discover the meaning of a place through encountering and participating in the "local memory" of a place, and this requires them, at the very least, to remain in it long enough. Less substantial learning occurs when they are driven to "do" the sights of a region, to travel compulsively in order to cram as much "experience" into a semester or year abroad. Students who pursue this goal, in my judgment, do not spend enough time in any one place to be able to contact the meaning of places. As a resident director, I find nothing as disappointing as hearing a student cite the list of "places" he or she has visited on a weekend (the "been there, done that" syndrome). I often wonder if these are, in fact, "places" at all for these students. To experience a site as a place requires participation, not the hurried, chaotic observations that come with spending a day in one city and the next day in another city.

Although students often insist that travel contributes to their learning, as the Study Abroad Evaluation Project notes, it is not learning of significant depth. As Laubscher points out in his review of this study, "the information for this study did not give travel as much significance as either participant observation or personal interaction in discussing its role as a learning opportunity." Clearly, travel does have learning value, but it is limited: "Based on students' observations, the value of this kind of undirected travel lay primarily in the exposure it afforded to other languages and customs, even though the brevity of that exposure made it a necessarily superficial one."<sup>41</sup> Such undirected travel does not foster participation in what I am calling the "local

memory" of a place, and, in fact, may tend to turn a student inward so that he or she focuses more on personal accomplishment rather than the meaning of one's integration with place:

*A sense of independence and self-reliance followed upon those kinds experience, as exemplified by the student who proudly proclaimed during the interview that he had spent two and a half weeks traveling by himself in Europe-"just a backpack and me and a train pass. And that was it. And I did it!"<sup>42</sup>*

## Conclusion

Memories of the study abroad experience certainly contribute to a sense of being more independent and "worldly." But perhaps the deepest lessons learned abroad come from the attachment of experience to particular places for which, appropriately, returned students will often develop an intense nostalgia. One of the most meaningful and enduring forms of study abroad learning unites ontology, topography, and epistemology. Engaging a new culture through active remembering demands the investment of one's being in a place, and the understanding of one's identity in terms of that place. This is to suggest that knowledge or learning gleaned from study abroad is tied to one's actions within a particular place. This leads to the discovery that a formerly foreign place is now home, a place in which learning has occurred in unique forms that could not have occurred in quite the same way elsewhere. This, I suggest, is why students yearn to return abroad: they have attached their identities to a place through the fabric of memory. Their sense of belongingness to a place is the challenge of making or finding a home through their encounters with and within another culture. Home, in this sense, is not a state of bliss, but an attachment to what roots one to a place through the powerful influence of memory. This is the meaning of study abroad learning as a return home.

<sup>1</sup> Philip G. Altbach, "Impact and Adjustment: Foreign Students in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Education and Social Change*, 4 (1990) 5.

- 2 This present article treats the experience of American students studying abroad, but some of what I examine and propose might apply to students of other cultures as well.
- 3 This phrase, so far as I know, was coined by Thomas Ricks of Villanova University. He develops this concept in his paper, "Encountering, Reflecting and Remembering in Study Abroad Learning: Rethinking International Education," 1996 AIEA Conference Presentation, March 1, 1996, Bandera, Texas.
- 4 Michael R. Laubscher, *Encounters with Difference: Student Perceptions of the of Out-of-Class Experiences in Education Abroad* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), xiv.
- 5 Laubscher 9.
- 6 The term "culture shock" was first used by the anthropologist K. Oberg in *Culture Shock and the Problem of Adjustment to New Cultural Environments* (Washington, DC: Department of State, Foreign service Institute, 1958).
- 7 Altbach 19.
- 8 Altbach 19.
- 9 Ingemar Torbiorn, "Dynamics of Cross-Cultural Adaptation," in *Learning Across Cultures*, ed. Gary Althen (Washington,DC:NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 1994).
- 10 Peter S. Adler, "Culture Shock and the Cross-Cultural Learning Experience," in *Reading in Intercultural Communication*, vol. II, ed. David S. Hoopes (Pittsburgh: Regional Council for International Education, 1972). Quoted in Mildred Sikkema and Agnes Niyekawa, *Design for Cross-Cultural Learning*, (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1987), 43.
- 11 David B. Pillemer et. al., "Memories of College: The Importance of Specific Educational Episodes," in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 321.
- 12 Pillemer 321.
- 13 Pillemer 321-322.
- 14 Laubscher 9.
- 15 Quoted in Stanley W, Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 373.
- 16 Quoted in Jackson 374. Jackson's source for Hofer's dissertation is Carolyn Kiser Anspach, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 2 (1934): 376-391. This article contains Anspach's translation of Hofer's dissertation, the first in English.

- <sup>17</sup> For a study of the relationship between depression and home in the context of American culture, see Brian Whalen and Robert Romanyshyn, "Depression and the American Dream: The Struggle with Home," in *Pathologies of the Modern Self*, ed., David Michael Levin (New York: New York University Press, 1987).
- <sup>18</sup> G. Stanley Hall, "Some Aspects of the Early Sense of Self," *American Journal of Psychology*, 9 (1897): 388.
- <sup>19</sup> L.W. Kline, "The Migrating Impulse vs. The Love of Home," *American Journal of Psychology*, 10 (1898): 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Kerouac's *On the Road* dramatizes this point. For the two protagonist wanderers of the novel, Sal and Dean, home is a relative term and only the movement of their journey has meaning. Their memories contain, image of home that would support their actions. Dean says, "we gotta and never stop going until we get there." But when Sal asks where they are going, Dean replies: "I don't know but we gotta go." Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* [New York: Signet, 1957], 196). The action of the novel celebrates home as everywhere and therefore essentially nowhere, as Sal expresses in song toward the end of the novel: "Home in Missoula/ Home in Truckee / Home in Opelousas / Ain't no home for me / Home, in old Medora / Home in Wounded Knee / Home in Ogallala / Home' Never Be" (Kerouac 208).
- <sup>21</sup> Craig R. Barclay, "Autobiographical Remembering: Narrative Constraints on Objectified Selves," in *Rubin* 94-125.
- <sup>22</sup> Barclay 99.
- <sup>23</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995). Schama's study does not address cultural landscapes outside of the Western world. However, his point about how places are imbued with cultural memory would, I think, hold true for non-Western cultures as well.
- <sup>24</sup> Schama 574.
- <sup>25</sup> E.V. Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 204.
- <sup>26</sup> Kenneth Wagner and Tony Magistrale, *Writing Across Culture: An Introduction to Study Abroad and the Writing Process* (New York: Peter Lan 1995), 68.
- <sup>27</sup> The example is based on an actual case study.
- <sup>28</sup> This idea of study abroad as a predicament is Michael Monahan's (Macalester College); he explores it and the themes surrounding it in his paper "Liberal Learning and Study Abroad," 1996 AIEA Conference Presentation, March 1, 1996, Bandera, Texas.

- <sup>29</sup> Joseph M. Fitzgerald, "Intersecting Meanings of Reminiscence in AI Development and Aging," in Rubin 369.
- <sup>30</sup> This is a generalization, of course. Obviously, not all students who are adept at immersing themselves quickly into a new culture can be characterized this way. I base my generalization on having been a resident director for more than one thousand students over a span of five years.
- <sup>31</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 57.
- <sup>32</sup> Janis P. Stout, *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983)16.
- <sup>33</sup> Stout 16.
- <sup>34</sup> The first assignment that I require of students in my International Educational Exchange graduate class at Lesley College is to research a fictional or historical example of an intercultural journey. This has proven to be an effective way to begin the course in part because it provides a needed distance on the topics that we cover. The exercise also engages the students' imaginations and asks them to relate to the subject matter in what is usually a personal way: students choose examples that they have studied and have significant meaning for them. Some of their examples: *Gulliver's Travels*; *Watership Down*; Twain's *Innocents Abroad*; *Winnie the Pooh*; *A Room with a View*; *The Travels of Marco Polo*; and *Star Trek*.
- <sup>35</sup> Jerome Bruner and Carol Fleisher Feldman, "Group Narrative as a Cultural Context of Autobiography," in Rubin 293.
- <sup>36</sup> Sikkema and Niyekawa 18.
- <sup>37</sup> The University of Dallas Rome Program, which enrolls 90 percent of the sophomore class for a semester of study on the University's Rome campus.
- <sup>38</sup> From a student's journal, University of Dallas Rome Program, Fall 1988.
- <sup>39</sup> Wagner and Magistrale, 96-97.
- <sup>40</sup> This particular program used home campus faculty and excursions were mandatory. Obviously, it is more difficult to structure such a program using a direct enrollment model or by hiring local adjunct faculty. However, I would suggest that the attempt is well worth the effort.
- <sup>41</sup> Laubscher 102. Laubscher here refers to the Study Abroad Evaluation Project: Jerry S. Carlson, Barbara B. Burn, John Useem, and David Yachimowicz, *Study Abroad. The Experience of American Undergraduates* (West port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).
- <sup>42</sup> Laubscher 103.