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CC:   Melinda Barnard, Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs
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RE:  Sabbatical for Academic Year, 2012—13

First, I want to express my thanks for having been granted a sabbatical for the 2012—13 academic year. I am grateful for your support of my academic activities, which allowed me to increase my contribution to the work of the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies and to Sonoma State University as well.

As per my proposal, I spent part of my sabbatical year at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETHZ) in Zurich. At ETHZ, I worked with Dr. Margaret Hugentobler on issues of architecture and housing in Third World countries. We focused more specifically on sub-Saharan Africa, looking at the transition in forms and structures from traditional to colonial modernity, with an eye toward identifying trends and factors that could help ease the housing crisis. Our findings will be used to train architects to include African social, cultural and ecological needs and sensibilities in development projects rather than rely on strictly western notions of the use of space.

To consolidate our findings, I wrote a draft of a paper, with the working title African Architectural Wisdom in Traditional and Modern Building Practices, which looks at building materials, forms and methods from a variety of areas across the continent. The editing has been delayed for medical reasons, but I plan to present it at ETHZ this Summer or Fall and will then submit the paper for publication. I will also be incorporating our findings into my LIBS 320B Ecology and Culture Hutchins core class to be offered in the Fall 2014 semester.

The main topic of this paper is how a return to the use of traditional African housing materials, forms and methods may help deal with current housing problems in African cities. Scholars of African architecture and urban development have concluded after years of study that the problems of African building forms and urbanization today have to do with the facts that:

1. there is not enough use of local materials;
2. very little thought is paid to the issues of ecological and economic sustainability;
3. the buildings are not affordable for the local population; and
4. urban planning does not address the sociocultural needs of African people.
In this paper, I discuss the fact that the modern architecture for African housing that was introduced in colonial times is based on western standards of rectangular buildings with peaked roofs, usually made of cement and metal. These buildings may not serve local needs, are not adapted to local conditions, and can be quite expensive to build. In contrast, traditional materials such as mud are cheap and available and do not require special tools or equipment to build with.

Modern western architecture also does not address the sociocultural needs of African people. For example, in South Africa, black townships are located on the periphery of white cities. Houses are like matchboxes, with a lot of single-sex migrant worker hostels. These houses are designed to be isolated, private spaces. Suburbs are gated, offices are fenced off, interactions are limited to public areas such as transportation. There are limited access points to these townships, and the street layout was designed to restrict and regulate movement. This type of urban layout is in opposition to the African culture, which is based on human interaction with a welcoming space between public and private spaces.

It is also the case that architectural education in Africa is narrowly focused, and the students tend to be male and white. The Western hegemony in this field does not provide a complex cultural and ecological perspective to the future architects. There is also a lack of investment in this area, along with the importation of foreign conceptual tools and construction techniques, along with large amounts of materials such as steel, glass, cement, and bricks. These foreign materials use a lot of non-renewable energy for their manufacture and transportation. As a result, African architecture today does not incorporate the lessons of traditional African architecture.

Modern African architecture is not sustainable ecologically, economically, or culturally. It is also not economically affordable for local African people and often it goes against local cultural traditions. It does not allow for the realization of African meanings of the built space. Generally speaking, modern African architecture does not put the local African people, with their varied meanings, symbols, economy, and politics, at the center of the production of the built form. Many architects working on the continent have varied educational backgrounds and an ideology that makes them believe that modernity is universal.
In addition to my time in Zurich, in June 2012 I organized a weeklong workshop at the University of Florence with my colleague, Alessandro Mariani, the Dean of the Department of Pedagogy. This workshop focused on pedagogy and Italian political thought and included both faculty and graduate students. As moderator, I introduced the sessions and also made a presentation on interdisciplinary and cross-cultural issues in modern and postmodern teaching. My presentation centered on how it has become important to look at the definition of what constitutes education and the ways in which the curriculum and pedagogies are designed. This requires a critical look at how colonial studies of indigenous communities may have imposed on them categories of thought and ways of thinking that may limit local intellectual development.

To explore further the issues I addressed in my presentation, I wrote the first draft of a paper, *The Invention of Childhood: Postmodernist and Poststructuralist Perspectives on the Psychological, Social, and Anthropological Study of Childhood in Colonized Communities*. This paper focuses on cross-cultural issues in the study of childhood, and questions the extent to which western norms and developmental benchmarks are universal and can be applied to children of other societies. Again, the editing is still in process due to health concerns, but I plan to present it at the University of Florence in June at our next workshop at the Department of Pedagogy. I will also share this paper with Wendy Ostroff and other colleagues in the Hutchins School who are involved in teacher preparation and pedagogy.

This paper has the following sections:

1. Introduction: the establishment of western social sciences and their hegemony over other ways of knowing;
2. A Critique of Western Social Science
3. The Myth of Objectivity
4. The Myth of Universality
5. The Naturalization of Dominant Ideologies
6. Social Theory and the Construction of Social Reality
7. The Weaving of a Postcolonial Identity
8. A Survey of Childhood as Expressed in Works of Literature by Colonized Authors
9. Conclusion: economic and political factors; the effect of violence; the educational experience; and family structures as they affect colonized peoples.

The paper raises many questions, first about the applicability of physical science to the social sciences. It exposes some of the ways in which the social sciences may encounter some challenges and limitations as they try to develop a scientific discourse about peoples colonized by the west. What difficulties are posed by using western psychological and anthropological categories to describe the psychological and cultural realities of people from colonized communities? Do the revelations of the social sciences belong to the world of the society where the science originates, with its inculcation of theories and methods, and with the hidden and not-so-hidden interests of its ruling class? Should we not rather think of the world that this science reveals as a creative work that says much more about its maker and its society than about its independence from it?

This assertion is borne out when we consider the cross-cultural studies of young African-American children, which often emphasize their differences from other races and classes to explain and justify their subordination. The same can be said when we look at the academic scholarship of whole cultures around the world (Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands). Local values and practices are commonly assessed by western standards, and differences are described in terms of deficit.
But, perhaps even more telling is when those human objects of imperially-designed studies counterpunctually write back. Their descriptions of their childhoods demonstrate that their cultural and psychological identities were carved as a complex mosaic of colonial oppression and local traditional resistance which does not fit into the neat categories imposed by the western social sciences. In these self-studies, the authors challenge the dangerous dream of the objectivity and universality of western science.

I also explore how the western political system decides what issues are worthwhile to study; how the educational system equips western scholars with the theories, methodological approaches and their corresponding statistical, technical, and analytic skills to investigate these issues; and how the economic system rewards only certain directions of research. And, if the social sciences purportedly work for the truth, why are hermeneutical and epistemological questions only suggested, and in many cases, are avoided or put aside quickly? Dodging these important questions, the grand panorama of the political and economic interests of the powerful which drive the system as a whole is almost completely invisible. My paper strives to bring these influences into the light.

I appreciate the opportunities afforded in my sabbatical to collaborate with faculty at other institutions and to enhance the application of global and cross-cultural understandings at Sonoma State, ETHZ, and the University of Florence.