

Beyond Reciprocal Anthropology: A Critical Proposal

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It is a great honor for me to address you and offer you some brief considerations about my participation and vision of the nature of *Transcultura* during the past few years and to reflect upon its possible role in the future. I am confident that, with everyone's cooperation, we shall be in a better position to outline the contours of the coming millennium that is now knocking at our door.

I

I attended, by invitation of the President, my first *Transcultura* meeting in 1987. Since then, I have had the privilege of participating in a six more conferences as well as three important meetings. I remember several of them with pleasure since they afforded me an occasion to deal in depth with themes that connect to my speciality of Anthropology. To be more exact: my early membership in *Transcultura* prompted me to explore theoretical approaches relating to an understanding of the Other, the alien, and the stranger. Several of my recently published papers owe their origin directly to *Transcultura*.

At these conferences, I have had the pleasure and satisfaction of listening to scholars and anthropologists of the first rank; besides enjoying their company, I have learned much from them. Furthermore, these reunions have stimulated and guided my interest in looking to persons from the past who intuited a need to communicate with, as well as depend on the Other, all of them outstanding personalities who knew how to value the cultural wealth of the Other. Let me mention my fellow countryman Pedro Alfonso, author of the *Disciplina clericalis*, whose life bridges the close of the eleventh century and the start of the twelfth. A scholar, a doctor and a Jew, enjoying a position of rank and prestige within his religion, he lived among the Moslem Arabs whose language he spoke and whose culture he studied; later he converted to the Catholic faith. He spoke Spanish and wrote in Latin. He traveled through France and England and introduced stories from the East into medieval literature in Spain. A man of three cultures, he felt at home in all three of them without discrimination or rejection. He was open to all that is human.

So also was Francisco Xavier who in the Autumn of 1545 asked Jorge Alvarez,

then preparing his ship in Malacca to sail to Japan, to write down all that he had observed there. Xavier wanted to know about this other culture. In this way, he obtained the first description of Japan to be made by a European. In it we read that the Japanese "are very eager to learn all about our lands," and were "very eager to come and visit." In 1548, Xavier sets about himself to write about the Japanese: they are "people of sound reasoning," and "they only govern themselves by reason." And in January, 1549 he writes: "from all the information that I have about Japan... [they are] a people anxious to learn and to know about new things...I have decided to go to this land." He sent Ignatius of Loyola the Japanese alphabet and promised: "once I have some experience of what is happening there, I will write to you very frequently." Alterity beckons and fascinates him. And what is more, he goes determined to adapt himself to the Japanese way of life: "we have decided to eat their diet all the time," that is, to eat the same as them. The premeditated, conscious and planned way the Jesuits adapted to the Japanese way of life in the sixteenth century is unique in the history of culture. I am devoting a monograph to its study.

The Spanish Jesuit Jose de Acosta went to Peru in the sixteenth century and confirmed at once what he had already heard in Spain; that before converting the Indians, one had to understand them, and to understand them one had to live with them, speak their language and study their ways. He himself learnt *quechua* and wrote '*De procuranda indorum salute*.'

De Acosta was also attracted to the Chinese. He read with avid interest and studied and compared their writing system as it was sent back by the Jesuits fathers, and took every opportunity to get information directly from missionaries in the area.

Bernardino de Sahagun, a Franciscan missionary, is the author of the best accounts we have for several centuries of the Mexican people and the country of Mexico. Once he was familiar with the indigenous culture through his prolonged stay, through his direct encounters, and through his interest in understanding, and hence to writing about these things, he drew up an elaborate questionnaire and searched diligently for natives best qualified to discuss it, study it, and return their opinions. He conversed with Mexicans for two years about every aspect of their culture, checked the veracity and objectivity of the material collected, and compiled his findings into twelve volumes, one column per page in Spanish, as well as another column in the local language, to which was added yet a third column with semantic explanations of the indigenous vocabulary as well as paintings "which at the time was the writing form they most used." For many years Sahagun dedicated himself to capturing "the essence of these Mexican peoples," as he himself remarks, what we would regard today as their 'culture.' His success in description comes from an insistence that the native people

speak about themselves in their own words, or express themselves through their paintings, that they represent themselves. Sahagun gives a voice to the 'Other.' All of which goes to say that *Transcultura* has antecedents of long standing in its positive approach to the 'Other,' because in reality *Transcultura* strikes a radically human chord.

At *Transcultura* conferences, I have had the occasion to meet and get to know people from seven different cultures, to hear and appreciate their different points of view. I have been prompted to think and imagine. I think these experiences have helped me to become a little more human. *Transcultura*, like art, poetry, and music, has no frontier. On the contrary, it considers political boundaries, social barriers and cultural limits as dynamic meeting points, that is to say, for *Transcultura* the frontier serves as the point of contact, the place of inter-subjectivity. The image of the frontier is a positive one for *Transcultura* because it incites us to overcome it while, at the same time, to respect it. This is not an easy task, but it is possible.

II

What is the rationale that, as I see it, has presided over both the initial theoretical orientation and the activity of *Transcultura*? Though not in any way doing it justice, I think I can summarize as follows:

1) If one sincerely desires to make imaginative use of human reason, then one can live within a multicultural totality without eliminating local specificity. Differences and alterity are compatible with the brio and energy of native tradition, as well as with distinctive local cultural legacies. There is no reason for rejecting different human cultural experiences; there is no reason for us to mutilate and belittle ourselves.

2) We need cultural interiority and diversity. Just as we need a specific and defined cultural identity, we must balance this with those global aims that most befit the human spirit and its panhuman responsibilities. In *Transcultura* we believe that it is possible to integrate cultural creativity, autochthonous genius and independence, the *esprit* of a people with a generalizing mental activity, and with universal forms of understanding.

3) In *Transcultura* we believe that, as human beings, we search for recognition not only as private individuals but also as people, as a culture and, in the final instance, as beings who live on a spiritual and transcendental plane above and independent of restrictive local conditions, as beings trying to reach full potential through rationality, myth and symbol.

4) Our leitmotiv is one world, one individual, but one that is defined by real vocabularies and cultures.

5) Although not everything is possible nor equally valid or relative, we believe that no people or State or Nation or Culture enjoys, as has often been said, an exclusive monopoly of reason, right, value or truth. With regard to the principal, fundamental human problem, we in *Transcultura* think that humanity can find answers, different certainly, but reasonable and enriching to all cultures. Repeated attempts, adjustments, compromises and ceaseless efforts guarantee, at least at a pragmatic level, a minimum grade of harmonious co-existence among peoples. These are not my own ideas, far from it; they carry the weight of being generally accepted, and publicly upheld from the outset by some of the finest minds who have ever set out to study culture.

6) It is my belief that *Transcultura* has labored with real tenacity toward the above aims since its early founding days, and that it has done so with the best sense of goodwill and hope for the future. And this is what we hope to continue doing; correcting errors, rethinking both the road we have traveled to date, and that which we must yet walk. *Transcultura* has blossomed forth in diverse ways throughout these years, and can renew itself with your assistance, to move on from a splendid flowering, to an era of plentiful bounty.

III

Does *Transcultura* need rejuvenating? Can it transform itself? Can we go further than intellectual reciprocity? If we can, should we? If we should, to what degree? How? We have begun with a basis in our institutional respect for each and every culture, and we admire the fruits such difference brings. We have proceeded from theoretical presuppositions, from our un-renounced and universal scientific knowledge that breaks down frontiers and rises above specific cultural difference. Put in another way, we have set out from universal and objective norms for a respectful interchange with other cultures. If this is so, then what value do we give first to Culture with a capital letter, and secondly to the concrete epistemic situation of each particular culture? I am not talking about States nor am I referring to nations, groups or ethnic groups, but rather to cultures, the rights of cultures, about the dignity of human variations as regards homoculturality, a sense of which prevails because we believe that there can be no people without culture. Culture with a capital C, a generic and ubiquitous form of the general, does not present a problem. An ensuing problem, however, results from a disjunction in tension. In a word, we set out from a basis that each culture must speak with its own voice, offer its own representations from within, and through those who share the same experience, to present itself from the outside in, as well as from the inside out. Nonetheless, we cannot undervalue the fact that not all

cultures find themselves in the same conditions of reflexive self-determination, especially from an historical perspective. As a result, we must descend from general principles to face substantive and distinct problems in our encounter with a variety of 'Other' cultures. There is no common pattern in this venture. Yet there is something else more complex: can we conjugate the radical, valorative and moral oppositions between cultures with a universal Culture, that is, with an egalitarian and universal morality? Is it possible to link intractable valorative oppositions in this intercultural encounter with cruder moral contradictions within a universal Culture that is part and parcel of an objective, scientific platform, without frontiers and under a minimum paradigm of a common, egalitarian, universal morality without barriers?

Yet more can be said: although truth is not relative to perspective, it is certain that what is true cannot be expressed through a single vocabulary, and that what is frequently taken as true, and accepted as such, is most certainly cultural. We have many examples of this. Yet on the other hand, our culture maintains, at least many of us do, that there are real facts, that there is sufficient evidence, and that there is a reliable method by which to suggest something more than relative truth or the vagaries of changing points of view. *Transcultura's* model of truth is based on logical principles of identity, non-contradiction and the *fundamentum divisionis* A -A, among others, which creates constituent relations, complementary and/or mutually exclusive among its member cultures, and which acquires the status of a universal claim. Only from this perspective can we see if the 'Other' offers intrinsically and rationally justifiable strategies, decisions, values and opinions. If this is so, which I do not doubt, we should ask ourselves this when faced with apparent contradictory moral codes: since they are not always compatible and may even be incommensurable, which ones then do we opt for? Would it be right for us to approve or be condescending to other peoples' self-understanding, beliefs, and actions, even if we find them morally repugnant? What criteria do we use to argue our choice? Are the actions and beliefs under review justified by evidence and supported by reason and evidence independent of those actions, beliefs and values? Moral judgments are, some of us think in *Transcultura*, more than expressions of cultural attitudes; the truth, we believe, is also independent of those attitudes. Murder and cruelty cause genuine pain. I propose, then, a difficult imaginative exploration for *Transcultura* that goes beyond reciprocity in its dialogue with other cultures. We have to look for some reductive common standard.

Certainly, reciprocity is an essential concept in our intellectual work, but we can go beyond this to carry out a greater depth of investigation, which begins from other categorical concepts. In *Transcultura*, we must think in moral terms. As a principle we respect the cultural legacy of each people, but by this, do we mean to say, for example,

that education ought to be differentiated according to groups and cultures and thus grounded in its predominant self-estimation and self-expressive character? How can we balance various models of differential knowledge values, with necessary plural forms of belonging and solidarity in circles that are ever more embracing? How far does reciprocity extend? What degree of suggestion, or even, in extreme cases, of external intervention is permissible? The clash, at times head-on, of aggressive values does not allow comfortable alternatives.

How do our decisions and actions affect the 'Other'? Can we proceed with action in accordance with ways that may be unjustifiable according to an 'Other' point of view? What rights and demands has the 'Other' over us? Must we adapt ourselves to them? Entirely? To what degree? We set forth, without doubt, from a convincing, pressing, irresistible principle, that of a general, universal principle of human cooperation, a principle which obliges us to rethink values such as just and unjust, good and bad, in a word, a principle of moral motivation. If there is a primitive and pressing sense of what is just and good, at least in practice, we hold that certain actions are universally just, correct and good and because they are, they are justifiable and not the reverse. This can lead us to re-think certain extreme practices in other cultures, a re-thinking that does not stem precisely from a point of view of reciprocity. Just and moral intercultural cooperation can present us with problems on how, in what manner and to what measure, to treat the epistemic cultural diversity and conceptual extremes concerning practices, beliefs and values. This is the specific duty of *Transcultura*. I repeat, these are very complex and difficult problems for which I have no solution, but which can promote, within this audience, in-depth investigation and then attractive and thought-provoking answers.

I have only to express, in closing, my warmest wishes for the success of the imaginative enterprise that all of us are undertaking in this marvelous city of Kyoto.