

# What is a line?<sup>1</sup>

## On paradoxes about allegories of identity and alterity

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**Abstract.** **What is a line? On paradoxes about allegories of identity and alterity.** What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line bring to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic *rappports* between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down, past and present, today and tomorrow, etc. Looked at, from this awareness, one may then move toward what the directionality of the line implies, both the idea of separation and distinction of parts it creates. Our physical geography, the whole domain of our culture, including mental configurations and our relations to nature, are topographies structured by lines. It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us in confrontation.

**Key words.** line, representations, path, reality, metaphor, directionality, culture, practice of everyday life, allegories, dialogue, confrontation.

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*Nonlinearity*: The term ‘linear,’ in connection with equations, theories, and physical interactions, is *not* meant to describe straight lines. Rather it means in some broad sense that things can be added. (Glossary to: S.W. Hawking, K.S. Thorne, I. Novikov, T. Ferris, A. Lightman, R. Price, *The Future of Spacetime*, Norton, 2002.)

Life cheats reason and reason cheats life. Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy fabricated in the interest of life, a teleologic-evolutionist system, rational in appearance, which might serve as a support for our vital longing. This philosophy (...) was, in its essence, merely a trick on the part of life to force reason to lend it its support. But reason supported it with such pressure that it ended by pulverizing it. (Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, Dover Publications, 1954: 116)

Que estoy soñando y que quiero  
obrar hacer bien, pues no se pierde  
el hacer bien aun en sueños.

I am dreaming and I wish to act  
rightly for good deeds are not lost,  
though they be wrought in dreams

(Pedro Calderón, *La Vida es Sueño*, II, 4.)

*To my Latin American students,  
inscribed bodies,  
who have been teaching me how to read absurd lines in compact economies  
of signs.*

## 1.

What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line brings to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic *rappports* between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down,

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It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us in confrontation.

Using my own cultural wanderings, and understanding allegory, after Walter Benjamin, in the sense of a cultural attitude (*Anschauung*), and as a manner of visualizing something (*Anschauungsweise*), in other words a *habitus*, I would like to consider some of the paradoxes we are facing *à propos* identity and alterity in our contemporary global culture. Thus, not from grand theories on the order of things, but instead from the subjective experience of an African-born American teacher, in many senses a structural minority committed to tasks transcending time and geographies, this meditation on an intransitive Greek verb Θαυμάζω (*thaumatsô*), ‘I marvel, I wonder’, in the positive and in the negative. Thus the concept, unexpectedly, may sometimes transmute itself into that of τρημα (*trêma*), the substantive for perforation. Its English equivalent, trauma, stands for a shock initiating a lasting psychological damage that possibly can lead to a neurosis. One would say, therefore, from the simplicity of the semantics of a line, there is not much to worry about a rendering of such a procession. In effect, does not its signification belong to the banality of our daily existence, precisely the management of our activity and the stress it produces when correlated to healthy alignments? There are, in principle, available to anyone, skills and techniques for mastering the demands of today’s life. That is correct: fine arts relaxation therapies and mindset stress monitoring have become popular disciplines for ‘approaching and

creating harmony and wholeness in a chaotic world.’ As a matter of fact, the last phrase has simply transplanted the sub-title of *Living in Balance* (Conari Press, 1998), a commanding self-help textbook by Joel Levey and Michelle Levey, two well-known specialists in ‘life work balance’ and founders of the Seattle-based Inner Work Technologies Inc. Dignified by the moral authority of the Dalai Lama who introduces it with a foreword, the book prescribes an agenda outlined by three main axes: one, an inside-out approach to balance and wholeness; two, mind-body-spirit harmonics between energy and spirit; three, ways of expanding the circle of balance, or embracing the whole, from home to the world, through play and work. Yes, indeed, the perspective of this ‘cutting edge research in peak human performance’ *donne à penser*; at any rate, it stimulates the linear orientation I have accented so far, slightly twisting the measure of a line as a continuous one-straight-direction point, by emphasizing its sometimes circular and curve aspect, already alluded to à propos its contiguity with the idea of shape. With reference to this value, one might represent a line as a deviation from straightness, as signifying a smooth bend, an angle deflecting a plane and reorganizing in this fashion the morphology of a figure.

Prescriptions in all domains, particularly about cultural lines, are always intimidating. On the other hand, in agreement or disagreement with the type of programs inventing and promoting lines for healthy identities in our time, would it make sense, reappraising his 1935 Vienna lecture, to reformulate Husserl’s hesitations about the lines of ‘our surrounding world which is a spiritual structure in us and in our historical life’? In sum, how to apprehend them with a profound respect for the subjective validity of the particular, in their conjunction with the unconditionally universal? And from such a frame of reference, how to evaluate lines of narratives that set off and connect figures of a praxis in its double dimension, a negation of a negation, and an opening up to the unexpected? For me, these figures display, in their own ways, commitments lived everyday in translation, through three linguistic codes, those of English, French, and Spanish. In a sense, these codes accomplish the imaginary world I inhabit, and that is circumscribed by three questions, all of

them dynamic, yet basically unstable in their relation to the very confusing idea of line with which they identify: in communication, what does it mean to qualify a row of declarations, or a series of images, as my line of expression, of my visualization? in work, what does it mean to qualify my interventions from the line of my activity? in judgment, what does it mean to qualify an orientation from the line of my belief?

All foundational arguments, positive moral paradigms and their alternatives, cultural choices and their strategies, in our constructed worlds of natural and social constraints, stand in relation to a fundamental line, the one articulated by an original sin. Jean-Paul Sartre expressed it well in *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press, 1956). Existing in a world in which, individually or collectively, we are superfluous; and, in which, by positing ourselves as subjects, we alienate others; and, in return, these others cannot but alienate us, since they are subjects in their own right. And the French philosopher adds:

‘this [is] the meaning of the famous line from Scripture: ‘They knew that they were naked’ (...). Thus, original sin is my upsurge in a world where there are others; and whatever may be my further relations with others, these relations will be only variations on the original theme of my guilt’ (op. cit: 531).

Such is the locus from which a social identity can be thematized. It is a self-concept, borne with a progressively increasing sense of belonging to already constructed in-groups (a race, a gender, a religion), and gradually accessing to its being, as a freedom. In its affirmation in ‘we-nesses,’ and facing out-groups, a social identity outgrows its genesis, asserts itself in a project, as that which, in concrete relations with others and in reference to itself, can identify with its own capacity, along those of others, in the travail of becoming a transcendence. This utopian vision does compensate for the original sin, but it does not erase it, cannot even negate it. Guilty, right, I am; and, at the same time, I know for sure that this form of guilt cannot be limited to anyone individually. With Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, from their dialogue on terror (in Giovanna Borradori ed., *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003)), I believe also that the main reason resides in a transparent evidence, namely that our identities are so interwoven, interdependent, that in the

incalculable multiplicity of their narratives, they overrun all our boundaries (gender, race, systems of beliefs, etc.) They force us to live simultaneously, at once and again, in multiple territories. Moreover, nowadays, each one of us is, by this very fact, split into numerous strands of experiences to the point that we should admit that everybody is, really, a community with, structurally, more or less autonomous components.

These remarks are aimed at a perspective: to face some alienating effects in our global world through procedures determining social identities; and for the sake of human dignity, to emphasize the uniqueness of its identity as what it should be, an autonomous project in cultural topologies clearly defined from a theoretical landscape with its interconnected lines. These should contribute to the grounding of a sound representation and its features. To define a topology, an English dictionary often adds two metaphoric extensions to its first meaning, the topographic study of a given place: from a medical lexicon, the anatomical structure of a specific area, or part of the body; and from mathematics, the study of the properties of geometric figures. These two metaphors allow me a delineation of interpretive charts with which I have been living the last few years, though their lines are, for sure, inscribed in the passion of a life and its singularity. In this retrodiction, rightly or wrongly, there are more lines converging toward the same challenge, the invention of identities, and accommodating its anti-essentialist perspective. The basic structure of the argument unveils an anxiety concerning the interassociation of three competing reasons—the economic, the political as fused with the cultural, and the ethical—; how they function in complex systems, and how these systems explicitly manipulate the technical and cultural notion of diversity; and, indeed, what the concepts of identity and alterity become within configurations mapped by morally unstable lines. Perceiving and analyzing an issue such as this, even when using credible sources as references, is one thing; another, to ascertain that one, at least partially, has not been conceptually blinded; and, about such a hesitation, surges a new problem, and it addresses the identity of the seer in its interferences with semantic lines of a verb, *verstehen*, an activity correlating perception (*Einsicht*, *Wahrnehmung*) and understanding (*Einsicht*, *Verständnis*).

## 2.

Thanks to *An Anthropologist on Mars. Seven Paradoxical Tales* (Knopf, 1995) by Oliver Sacks, a professor of neurology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, in New York, I knew of correlations between physiological blindness and psychic blindness, in technical parlance the ‘Anton’s syndrome,’ that is acting blind. To use Sacks’ rendering, it consists in moderating the instability of one’s own visual system and visual identity to the point that, even for the therapist, it becomes ‘very difficult, at times, to know what [is] going on, to distinguish between the ‘physiological’ and ‘psychological’”(op. cit: 138) Sack’s references in hand, it was possible to specify the paradox by exploring three main axes: a first one, suggested in critical analyses of the Oxford *Companion to the Mind* (2005) edited by Richard L. Gregory, and the Blackwell *Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (2001) edited by the Balliol College, Oxford, philosophy professor William H. Newton-Smith; a second axis, was represented by two markers: *ad montem*, Denis Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749); and *ad uallem*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945); finally, the last axis, an analogical line, represented by Ivan P. Pavlov’s classical treatise, in the translation of W. Horsley Gantt, *Lectures on Conditioned Reflexes. Twenty-Five Years of Objective Study of the Higher Nervous Activity Behavior of Animals* (International Publishers, 1980). In brief, the paradoxical neuropsychological disorder comes down to an attitude, that can be qualified through two conceptual entries. The first is the definition of Oliver Sacks:

perceptual-cognitive processes, while physiological, are also personal—it is not a world that one perceives or constructs but *one’s* own world—and they lead to, are linked to, a perceptual self, with a will, an orientation, and a style of its own. This perceptual self may itself collapse with the collapse of perceptual systems, altering the orientation and the very identity of the individual. (op. cit: 136)

The second entry involves the interaction between the physiological and the psychological, that is the Anton’s syndrome; or the possible process of moving from one site of blindness to another, a two way switch between the physiological and the psychological. This would account, con-

cretely, for such a phenomenon as the case of *L'Aveugle qui refuse de voir* (1771). And, as proposed by Sacks', it can also be compared to animals' self-defense mechanism of a sudden shut down; in Pavlov's language, a 'transmarginal inhibition consequent upon supramaximal stimulation' which, in an analogical transfer, led him to posit human psychosis as a conditioned statement against unpleasant stimuli.

Considered as a metaphor, the Anton's syndrome—reconfiguration of, or withdrawal from a visual space—could be connected to allusions from an ancient maxim: 'they have eyes, and they do not see'. As a matter of fact, the proverb has an extension, 'they have ears and do not listen', thus extending the meaning of a possible lesson: modalities of two sensory functions, seeing and hearing, confer them a general capability for perceiving and understanding. This, then, might explain attitudes, in any case practices for ways of inscribing oneself in the world. The process dissociates a paradigm from its particular effects.

The process also affirms the subject as the originator. S/He might choose whether to see, whether to hear, and how. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this, noting that in the relation between the perceiver and the perceived, it is the perceiving subject who, apprehending aspects of things, represents them as properties of totalities which are the things. This is to say that the capacity to see and recognize things relates the seen and the subject's awareness of seeing; and, in this measure, the identity of the subject expresses itself as an *expérience corporelle*, a bodily experience. In this sense, a subject-object relation organizes the world founding a cultural representation. It is from such a primacy, the 'primacy of perception' to refer to another title by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that one may understand the rather unexpected statement of Jean-Paul Sartre when he writes in *The War Diaries* (Pantheon 1984: 15): 'I think with my eyes.' The metaphor brings to the fore the very foundation of the Cartesian science, the *ego cogito* expresses itself in the *ego percipio*. In this 'I see' the world, surges an 'I am the one seen', identical with the direct object produced in my own self-affirmation.

Let me accent, about the Anton's syndrome, only the metaphoric

line and, as a reference, formulate in paradoxes some of the figures that might overflow, from stating that Denis Diderot's *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751) 'listens' and 'speaks' to his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), and the latter was essentially about 'seeing' from the experience of blindness. In this exercise, from Diderot's main thesis on the miracle that a competent education can achieve, I am indeed implying that a deaf-mute can hear and speak, and that a sightless person can see, on the condition that, as Wittgenstein put it in *Philosophical Investigations* (209), 'we accept the everyday language-game', and acknowledge that 'the concept of 'seeing' (or 'hearing' and 'speaking') makes a tangled impression(...) There is not one genuine proper case of (what is seen, what is heard, what is spoken), the rest being just vague, something which awaits clarification.' It is precisely such a paradoxical challenge that Martin Jay addresses in 'the ethics of blindness and the postmodern,' a chapter devoted to Levinas and Lyotard in his *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1993). As he puts it, 'postmodernism may be understood as the culminating chapter in a story of the (enucleated) eye. Or rather, it may paradoxically be at once the hypertrophy of the visual, at least in one of its modes, and its denigration' (op. cit.: 546).

Denis Diderot was impressed by the perceptual capacity of Nicholas Saunderson, a blind man who, early in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, of all disciplines one can imagine, was a professor of optics at Oxford. Oliver Sacks who, thanks to his *An Anthropologist on Mars* (op. cit.), orientated me to this, has in the same book the intriguing case of Jonathan I., a 'colorblind painter'. After a car accident in 1986, Jonathan I. discovers that 'My brown dog is dark grey. Tomato juice is black. Color TV is a hodgepodge.' (op. cit: 3) In fact, says the neurologist, Jonathan 'did not lose just his perception of color, but imagery, and even dreaming in color. Finally, he seemed to lose even his memory of color, so that it ceased to be a part of his mental knowledge, his mind (...) And

'as his former color world (became) fainter and died inside him a whole new world of seeing, of imagination, of sensibility, was born.' (op. cit: 40)

The economy of seeing espouses that of listening, and is related to

the authority of speaking. In this sense, one can generalize, without hesitation, Lacan's position which, reappraising a Freudian linear model on subject-formation, emphasizes a clinical evidence, and affirms in *Ecrits* (Norton, 1977) that what matters 'in psychoanalytic anamnesis, is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech, (=that of rendering a perception, an understanding), is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present.'(op. cit.: 48). Exerting this passage and, in his *On Being Normal and Other Disorders* (Other Press, 2004), relating it to the rapport between a subject and the outside world, that is modalities under which an identity constitutes itself as 'a chain of signifiers through which both the subject and the other gain content, along with the specific character of their relation'(op. cit.: 211), the Belgian psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe rightly insists that 'this has very important repercussions for the aim of the treatment. The aim of psychoanalysis is not to arrive at an accurate reconstruction of the past, nor to explain (let alone justify) the present based on the history of the subject. The aim is to create possibilities for change.'(op. cit.: 211)

In such a dynamic process, a child's progressive inscription in the world or an adult's therapeutic direction, it is possible to apprehend both the centrality of 'seeing', 'listening' and 'speaking,' and the distinction of traits singularizing one's self-formation. *Verstehen* means a way of mastering the perceived, the verbalized, the understood; and the perceived is transmuted into a knowledge. *Ich verstehe die Situation so, daß(...)*: my understanding of the situation is that (...). The proposition puts the subject boldly forward, asserting clearly his or her responsibility in an explicit effort to make known a personal opinion; and, this will be received as an idea, a thought, a view (*Gedanke, Idee, Standpunkt*), an interpretation (*Deuten*), or as a process in knowing (*Können*).

Hence, the metaphor in 'a sightless individual can see' becomes understandable. In order to accentuate its reliability, let me go back briefly to Diderot's text which, not only supports its soundness, but extols the blind's high quality capability for abstract representations.

But if the imagination of the blind man be no more than the faculty of calling to mind and combining sensations of palpable points; and of a sighted man, the faculty of combining and calling to mind visible or coloured points, the person born blind consequently perceives things in a much more abstract manner than we; and in questions purely speculative, he is perhaps less liable to be deceived. For abstraction consists in separating in thought the perceptible qualities of a body, either from one another, or from the body itself in which they are inherent; and error arises where this separation is done in a wrong way or at a wrong time—in a wrong way in metaphysical questions, or at a wrong time in applied mathematics. There is perhaps one certain method of falling into error in metaphysics, and that is, not sufficiently to simplify the subject under investigation; and an infallible secret for obtaining incorrect results in applied mathematics is to suppose objects less compounded than they usually are. (op. cit., The Open Court edition, 1916 : 87-88)

Shift in perspective is not necessary in order to distinguish positive from negative attitudes proving the reality of perceptual blindness: yesterday, the slave refusing his liberation; still today, women freely inscribing themselves in harems; and striking, the vitality of transcultural variations of depressed easy-to-use self-destruction formats. In fact, why not indicate here that education, because of its structural symbolic violence—as used to say Pierre Bourdieu—, explains and justifies perceptual blindness; and, nowadays, authoritative arguments in trendy courses celebrate what the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda deemed an ‘impure philosophy’ for the fabrication of social identities devoted to death values.

To these examples of structuring an abstract space within or without the a priori experience of a visual field, and those of creating an affirmative, or negative new configuration of seeing, let me add an axis deduced from Diderot’s quotation, that of color mis-apprehension; and thus, accent some theoretical issues about perceptual identities and their relation to constructed spaces. These are *Metaphors We Live By*, to use the excellent title of the well-known book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1980 and 2003). Not being, at least to my knowledge, colorblind, I trust my representation of slit images and can, almost without thinking, distinguish, from the white light, the distinctive qualities that everyday language qualifies as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet; and their absence, as black. I doubt that I could, instinctively, discriminate without hesitation incandescence or thermal radiation from luminescence, the so-called ‘cold light’ suscitated by a

chemical action; the bioluminescence of fireflies, from the fluorescence of some rocks etc. In any case, all these terms with their endings in *-e/-iscence* are reducible, in my imaginary, to the 'glow-in-the-dark' concept. From such a basic frame of organizing the prism spectrum, it goes without saying that the knowledge of any professional in color and light reflection and refraction cannot but be impressive. Vis-à-vis my visual identity, it witnesses a more complex code and, as a consequence, the professional's own particular perceptual identity. Thus, for example, should I decide to get my house painted, the professional's highly elaborated capacity for both constructing a richer variety of color interplays, and his skill in deconstructing processes of codifying slit variations, will be ringing against my partial blindness with regard to structures of light breaks, or their images interferences. My predicament could translate deliberative anxieties that the following questions might introduce: à propos the living room, do I see and understand the distinction the painter makes between ivory cotton, white cotton and white linen? À propos, the guest room, did I hear well and understand the comparative merits of a fuchsia pink vis-à-vis salmon pink and pulsar pink? À propos the study, did I visualize correctly and tell the painter about my poor understanding of the difference between cadmium yellow, cardstock and goldenrod, in order to explain my rejection of some tones?

Propaedeutic to a deliberation on how to transcend an empirical incapacity due to objective limitations of my perceptual identity, itself relative to degrees of my insertion in a culture, my apparently innocuous questions of a possibly everyday life minor puzzle might turn into baffling classical issues of epistemology. There are, firstly, questions of translation, and its relation to coherence theories. A possible exit from perplexity would be, in my case, a move to the more familiar conceptual configuration of a Romance language; consult with, say, a French or Spanish speaking friend, and wonder about how to measure the validity of my translation; and moreover, from which system of systems to evaluate both the degree of coherence and justification of our two judgments on what shall be sorted out? Secondly, there are questions of semantics, and these concern a concept, *Verstehen*, circumscribed by implicit corre-

lations associating statements such as ‘I see’, ‘I hear’, ‘I understand’, ‘I visualize’, and how they are signified in the subjective activity of a perceptual identity. It follows that, from the singularity of our shared experiential authority, we could decide on how to connect our interpretation to general principles of explanation. Thirdly, a metaphor, the partial blindness of my perceptual identity, in so far as the complex economy of wavelengths of the visible spectrum is concerned, could be called, according to the philosophical tradition, a simple figure of speech; or, as suggested by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s treatise on metaphor (op. cit.), the rendering of a concept structuring my existential experience, and cohering it through ‘multidimensional gestalts’. At any rate, there is little doubt that commonsense in fact, always and without big words, calls attention to the singularity of a social identity. It, reasonably, describes a perceptual behavior and its effects in relation to the values it does, or does not, actualize and their rapport to a socio-cultural situatedness.

Indeed, color perception, and its relation to a cultural catalogue, is probably one of the most overused illustrations to exemplify relativist or universalist stand in theory of knowledge. Qualifying a singular capacity, the poverty of my English lexicon, rather than invoking my relation to an idea deducible from an ontological question—what is pinkness? what is whiteness?—states a contingent cultural stammering. In this sense, a judgment might tend to valorize an interpretation induced from a response to an epistemological intention, namely: how does he differentiate something as this sort of pink, or that type of yellow? A discussion about my color lines competence could thus be reduced to an old philosophical debate on abstract general ideas forms without consequence in my real predicament. It may also lead to a concrete evaluation of how my limited capacity impacts both my social identity in everyday life, and the measure of its constitution in social intercourse transactions. One could then begin to suspect that the banality of my case opens up very concrete issues about identity formation, negotiation, flux. It becomes possible to invoke, for instance, the practicality of Eric Berne’s unified system of individual and social psychiatry: on the one hand, exploiting *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (Grove, 1961), focus on my game as a notion and norm

determining definite attitudes; on the other hand, with *Games People Play. The Psychology of Human Relationships* (Grove, 1964), hypothesize about my personality and style of knowing from my insertion in matrix areas—(1) rituals, (2) pastimes, (3) games, (4) intimacy, (5) activity—; evaluate effects of, and reactions to cultural programming of social operations, organized transactions, and their patterns, as well as the possible extension of their formulas in my lifestyle.

Let me combine colors mastery, gift offering in a culture of flowers—say, in a Latin American setting, in Colombia for example—, and the reality of a social identity, as the latter is constituted in negotiated conjunctions between social requirements and one's virtuosity in integrating socio-cultural procedures. In practical terms, to use Eric Berne's language, one may pinpoint the following requisites for a visiting academic to Colombia: on the one hand, a stabilization in a professional corresponding role; and, on the other hand, a sense of conduct appropriateness, and good taste in adapting to the local cultural mores, including how, when and to whom one has to present flowers. Technically speaking, this is a serious 'game' in both constructing and actualizing expected lines of one's social identity.

Now this. After some twenty years of frequent research sojourns and visiting professorships in Latin America, I had the following conversation with a colleague:

—Do you know how you are called? he asked me.

—Called? Not by my name?

—Indeed, we know your name. But for everybody, you are 'the one who, when invited, always brings books or wine; never flowers.'

This descriptive definition has reduced me to a voluntarily chosen behavior, itself an effect of a double cultural lack: poverty of my colors visual identity, and poverty of a comparative correspondence grid classifying types of flowers, and matching them with emotions to which they are culturally associated. Consider two ordinary flowers, carnation and poppy, and a popular gift plant, the geranium. My code would present association sequences like these:

- |               |   |           |  |
|---------------|---|-----------|--|
| 1. carnation: | red, admiration;<br>pink, rare love;<br>white, sweet and lovely;<br>yellow, disappointment,<br>rejection. | 2. poppy: | red, consolation, sorrow;<br>white, forgetfulness;<br>yellow, success, wealth. |
| 3. geranium:  | red, melancholy;<br>pink, ingenuity;<br>scarlet, comforting;<br>white, true friendship.                   |           |  |

Question: in offering-flower transactions, should one take for granted an automatic translation of the English symbolic value-code, thus risking transgressions; or review it, each time, according to non-English cultural contexts, thus risking also mistranslation? Any option seems a daunting task, even à propos the English reference table itself, when one takes into account popular culture's aesthetic representations. How to assure, for certain, a universal normativity?

In social intercultural games involving colors and flowers, a legality expresses itself in intersubjective precepts. It is *stricto sensu* to a language that one submits a performance. The qualification 'the one who never offers flowers' translates effects of my subjective negotiations concerning my identity images in a Latin American environment. One of its axes concerns my sociological consciousness as it is related to different procedures of individuation in Bogota, Mexico, my hometown in the United States, or elsewhere in the world. This axis is to be reconfigured each time by new cultural expectations for an intelligible social identity, and these expectations may appear as more and more demanding, depending on geographic, or simply spiritual and intellectual remoteness from my usual locality. The summons for an 'inculturation', should one wish to theorize, coincide with a hermeneutical task for a reformulation of one's identity in order to avoid misunderstandings, and accord oneself to different socio-cultural lines. From this principle, another axis would stipulate concerns about the construction of such an orientation as a way of existing in a foreign anticipation of meanings in which, among many symbolic languages, an economy of flowers and their color expresses a

system of aesthetic and moral values. To the knowledge required by a singular alien *Lebenswelt*, and the science of its operative value grids, reasonably one tends to choose strategies of partial or total withdrawal from certain lines, say those defining rulings à propos flowers, thus acknowledging a de facto partial psychological blindness in that field; and transfer one's obedience to the public foreign consciousness, through a substitution system and its theory, making sure that the operation still translates adequately the gift-exchange socio-cultural standards and symbolic sets. Hence, to the case in point, books or wine, with more or less the equivalent symbolic value of socially expected flowers, would possibly confirm a convergence in both understanding and compliance to a cultural horizon. Such a self-surrendering procedure exemplifies and magnifies how a social identity, any identity, is always a process, a constant invention of oneself as inscribed in a particular project.

The Anton's syndrome, with its dynamics of going into and out of blindness, serves us well as an image for consciously or unconsciously acting, and behaving blind. In its adaptations as a metaphor, it contributes to the clarification of the idea of a perceptual identity. We can, then, choose to emphasize the fact of cultural determinants that could account, at least partially, for its occasional poverty. In so doing, we are defining any perceptual identity as a reflection of a social identity, a given alterity, in contextual spaces in which it apprehends itself vis-à-vis others in a variety of symmetrical lines; and, moreover, it can be observed as intransitive through determinations qualifying its uniqueness.

Conscious or unconscious, the exercise of a partial psychic blindness is a total activity expressing a social identity affirming an alterity in the making. It expresses itself as an overflow caused by effects of subordination to constraining lines of a global sociological context. Illustrations are easy. For instance: in the economic space, the opposition between front and back, in mixed economies of third world regions; as well as the alternative of manufacturing versus service industries, and its impact on local employment; in the political space, the opposition between up and down, in sub-Saharan countries, as it is manifested in the centrally inefficient but inflexible government policies of luxury imports,

and its repercussion on the conditions of life in the rural areas; in the cultural space, from the opposition between near and far, the U.S. media's remarkable caring for the health of pets in its backyard, and the generosity of its 'compassion fatigue', versus the ambiguity of its reflexes about catastrophic socio-economic relations of production elsewhere.

In these abstract references, I have moved from individual to collective reflexes, implying, as a matter of fact, that cultures may witness to the Anton's syndrome. Three succinct notes will suffice in clarifying this point.

One, in the domain of ideas, the already mentioned study by Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, is a magnificent example: between the visible and the invisible, how to see and read the traces of the Enlightenment in the XX<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy? In interconnections of ocular permeation of language and a dynamic visual activity of understanding the priority of the everydayness, what Jay observes are mainly contrivances inherited through a stubborn yet exhausted faithfulness to a Cartesian perspective and its will to truth. Thus, for instance: with Surrealists, 'the disenchantment of the eye'; with a Sartre and a Merleau-Ponty, 'a search for a new ontology of sight'; in the psychoanalysis of Lacan, 'a specular subject of ideology' etc. In sum, all these endeavors would qualify as somehow testimonies in the dark. Bringing to light anything seems to signify concealing it, and in most of the explorations chosen, Jay delivers the same paradox, a doubt about knowing clearly how, and in which sense, consciousness may modify the configuration of its conditions of possibility, and how to act upon the world. Despite what he describes as a vivid hostility, Jay declares however, that the power of the visual, that sign of a critical reason, a light, not only survives; but 'can still provide us mere mortals with insights and perspectives, speculations and observations, enlightenments and illuminations, that even a god might envy.' (op. cit.: 594). This is a major issue that goes beyond the particularity of the French cultural space. Let me compensate Jay's optimistic stance by quoting a passage from *The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment* (University of California Press, 1999) by David Michael Levin, a Northwestern University philosopher:

Whereas the philosophers of the Enlightenment could see only simplicity, unity, clarity, and systematic totality; whereas they could assume complete control over meaning, and hence totally determinate, totally transparent meaning; whereas they could confidently ignore adumbrations of the marginal, the peripheral, and the implicit, we of today are obliged to give a more critical thought to these assumptions, cannot ignore intricacies, complexities, ambiguities, conflicts of interpretation, the breaches and caesurae in supposedly closed systems, and cannot overlook what philosophers of earlier times could comfortably overlook. We of today, heirs responsible for the present future of the Enlightenment project, are obliged to be allegorical thinkers, finding adumbrations of our destined roles among its cast of shadows. (op. cit.: 417)

Two, in the domain of political ideology, the case of National Socialism in Hitler's Germany is conceivably the best illustration. It clearly indicates that, conscious or unconscious, psychic blindness is not value neutral, and it brings about issues relating ethics to individual and collective responsibility.

Three, in history, this illustration with its own ethical problems. It concerns the European discovery of the world, scientific taxonomies of connections between geography, cultural diversity, and a shifting chromatic perceptual consensus, from a bicolor repartition of racial metaphors (white versus non-white, in the XV<sup>th</sup> and XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries) to the quadricolor model of Carl Linnaeus' 1735 *Systema Naturae* (*Europaeus albus*, 'white European'; *Americanus rubescens*, 'red American'; *Asiaticus fuscus*, 'yellow Asian'; *Africanus niger*, 'black African'). Historians, e.g. John Hope Franklin (*Color and Race*, Houghton Mifflin, 1968) and Winthrop D. Jordan (*White over Black. American Attitudes towards the Negro. 1550-1812*, University of North Carolina Press, 1968), have demonstrated an existing homology between the shift of chromatic metaphors, their rapports to technical tables of psychological features, and both the self-assessment of the observer and his cultural politics in interpreting history under modalities of both a divine and a natural election. Hence, the slave trade is not detachable from a christian exegesis on chromatic perception of humankind and its erroneous biblical justifications. A few years ago, Alden T. Vaughan suggested, in an excellent article on 'Changing Anglo-American perception of the American Indian' (*The American Historical Review*, 87, 4, 1982), that the American Indian's color evolved from 'innately white' to 'innately dark,' becoming

red only in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century; and, this transformation in perceptual behavior ‘helped assure the Indians’ continued segregation and heighten their exploitation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (op. cit., 919).

My own bias has been sketching out thematic lines in order to introduce, and illustrate how types of specialized motives authenticate efficiently manifestations of the Anton’s syndrome, in a variety of ways. As they actualize themselves contributing to individual identities, they simultaneously subvert the very idea of a fixed identity as an essence. Does this raise the issue of alternatives true versus false, authenticity versus inauthenticity? Let me postpone the question; and provisionally, focus on the subject of perception, the ego of the *cogito* who, as Lacan used to say, is an eye. It can apprehend itself in representation as an object, and an alienated one in a world of images and stones.

What I see now, and very clearly, is this. Acting out the principle of indifference, for more than twenty years, I have been pretending, with good reasons, not to see that most of my American students, at some of the best universities in the nation, were monolingual, thus restricted to a linguistic canon and what it could integrate thanks to translations. On the other hand, I could see also that most of my Latin American students were competent in, at least, three languages. And, my perception as well as my understanding have been that, indeed, this basic linguistic imbalance, relative, is the reverse of the disparity represented by the economic capital which, sooner or later, problematizing it, would normalize two competing cultural capitals determined by a single economic reason, and both destined to live in the same cosmopolitan vocation.

### **3.**

Globalization, transnationality, and performance of paradigm shifts contribute to a new type of economic reason that dominates today’s global economy and its organization. Through the lines of its technology and policy grids, this new structure affects the identity of millions of people absorbed in its mechanisms. The measure of alienation created by human needs and distributive constraints seem the most obvious phenomena.

A number of approaches can be taken to analyze the 1990s world trade, which is one of a single economy and marketplace, and the booms it created: growth, no energy crisis, spread of free enterprise, the ‘East Asian miracle’, etc. I choose, instead, a different angle: to look at norms concerning formal structuration of systems, the action of three competing reasons—the economic, the cultural, the ethical—and their statements on human identities. Two main references will support my analysis aimed at an argument, an ethical one, that extols human dignity as a non-negotiable value. They are, firstly, Amitai Etzioni’s typology, *Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations* (Macmillan, 1961 and 1975), that goes beyond Max Weber’s classic on *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, (Hodge, 1947); and, secondly, Geert Hofstede’s twenty-five years research in *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind* (McGraw-Hill, 1991).

Using as a core variable, the notion of compliance, that is ‘a relation in which an actor behaves in accordance with a directive supported (command, manipulation) by another actor’s power, and the orientation of the subordinate to the power applied’ (op. cit: 3), Etzioni’s study focuses on asymmetrical rapports of subordination and, for their evaluation, distinguishes two things: on the one hand, three main classes of power administration: (a) coercive (e.g. correctional institutions), (b) utilitarian (e.g. industries), (c) normative (e.g. education systems); and on the other hand, the corresponding set of forms of compliance relations—alienative, calculative, moral. These may be congruent in alienating, effective, coercive systems; and, as such have a negative impact on human qualities of subordinates’ work; and, another possibility, the compliance rapport might be incongruent, as in the case of Church organizations, and collective institutions based on a value-commitment; as such, reflecting a positive involvement, independent from the degree of members’ subordination. In fact, Etzioni’s typology sets up three types of power: coercive, remunerative, normative. They correspond to three modes of response behaviors: alienative, calculative, moral; and, produce nine different forms of compliance. Among these, Etzioni decides to focus on three combinations, the most frequent, and all of them congruent: the alienative

coercive type of power (e.g. a slavery structure), calculative remunerative (e.g. capitalist corporate function), and moral normative (e.g. political party activism). Thus, the following ‘dynamic hypothesis’:

Congruent types are more effective than incongruent types. Organizations are under pressure to be effective. Hence, to the degree that the environment of the organization allows, *organizations tend to shift their compliance structure from incongruent to congruent types and organizations which have congruent compliance structures tend to resist factors pushing them toward incongruent compliance structures.*

Congruence is attained by a change in either the power applied by the organization or the involvement of lower participants. Change of power takes place when, for instance, a school shifts from the use of corporal punishment to stress on the ‘leadership’ of the teachers. The involvement of lower participants may be changed through socialization, changes in recruitment criteria, and the like. (op. cit.: 14)

Differentiating himself from the Weberian emphasis on authority and its connection to the concept of legitimate power, Etzioni qualifies the efficacy of the economic reason from the rapport between economic goals and effective compliance, precisely the instrumental function of remuneration, rather than coercion, or normative power. In effect, in his language:

Production is a rational activity, which requires systematic division of labor, power, and communication, as well as a high level of coordination. It therefore requires also a highly systematic and precise control of performance. This can be attained only when sanctions and rewards can be readily measured and allocated in close relation to performance. Remunerative sanctions and rewards are the only ones that can be so applied, because money differentials are far more precisely measurable than force, prestige, or any other power differentials. (op. cit: 112)

The argument asserts a principle deduced from the analysis of complex systems operating in the West or, on the basis of its adaptation in transitional economies, in Mexico for example. Postulating the superior capacity of the remunerative type of power in the capitalist model, this principle does not induce its efficiency everywhere in all communities and all the time. Thus, as a case, the Chinese rural society, between 1949 and 1968, demanded a different grid that could account for its conflictual cycles between coercion and normative types. In the same man-

ner, the Zulu community was linked to lines of a theory of society that Etzioni elaborated later on, in *The Active Society. A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (The Free Press, 1968). These two exceptions may indicate something relevant, not about their obstinate refusal to integrate the general grid of operation, but rather about production as a key measure regulating all complex systems. In effect, the effectiveness of the economic reason, in the competence of complex systems, is, in actuality, contingent on issues of human needs which, as suggested by Etzioni himself, should be addressed in difficult questions, having ethical implications:

Substantively, the question is, which kinds of governance in the institutions as well as society at large will people tolerate, accept, and thrive on? What are the long-term consequences of relying on remunerative rewards and settling for calculative commitment on the part of participants (the basis of capitalist systems)? Can a system last which relies on 'higher' sanctions and loyalties implied in the notion of 'permanent revolution?' Can an organizational system survive relying on no rewards or punishments, each participant doing his or her own thing, completely voluntarily (the ideal of the *kibbutzim* and numerous communes)? (*A Comparative Analysis*, op. cit: 469)

The questions bring to light the major issue about modalities of integration in, or exclusion from complex economic organizations. In today's international context, taking into account the resources and knowledge capital of the economic reason, these modalities, as Etzioni's analysis indicates, refer to a number of assumptions, including the genetic endowment of persons involved in the workforce, their regional cultural ensemble and its singularity vis-à-vis the liberal 'bourgeois' signification of important basic material and spiritual needs to be managed. These involve, *inter alia*, rules of structural subordination and hierarchy; and, on the other hand, values such as commitment, dedication, and freedom.

The project to transnationality of the economic reason, over the socio-cultural system of values of its blue or white collar agents, manifests itself in statements combining in a unique technical grammar, both individual alterity expectations, and their relation to an economic system having, these days, more and more its own diversity requirements. Diversity in this field implies two concepts expressing two very distinct realities: cultural differentiation, on the one hand; and, the most important, the

capacity for the transnational system to adapt to a variety of milieus, on the other hand. This second meaning designates a functional adjustment ability for optimal performance. It pertains to a flexible capability (style), knowledge-capital and technology (science) and, indeed, *savoir-faire* (policy), the objective being to maximize both productivity and the quality of products, thus profits.

Depending on this economic reason, individuals submit, and their difference becomes a question mark. Alterity always affirms itself in a reciprocal relation with someone else: the ipseity of the subject self-consciousness apprehending itself, to refer to Hegel, in a necessary need for an external recognition; a whatever gaze or voice which, from an outside standing, can stabilize it in a perceived, reidentified, and potentially usable difference. And, in this effort, a ‘we-community’ might constitute itself. The power that an economic complex system often manipulates resides in its authority for assigning to an alterity a value, often as only a possible integrable body in its production processes. In such a conversion into a labor force, an incommensurable alterity is impoverished, a social identity reified, its meaning instrumentalized.

To address such a scandal, third world intellectuals have attempted to oppose the reification by turning this absurdly created alterity into a nature. Indeed, one thing consists in negating a controversial thesis by contradicting it, and thus positing an anti-thesis, a procedure well exemplified in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Black Orpheus* (*Présence Africaine*, 1976). Another thing would be to stabilize such a weak moment of a dialectical process into an essence. From this view, the now popular ‘subaltern studies’ that conceptualizes an agenda in defense and promotion of stable egalitarian principles and values from the legacy of the Enlightenment, seems really puzzling. No serious student in today’s humanities and social sciences could dismiss a transdisciplinary outlook that excels modes of either/or in our disciplines. Bridging horizons and re-appraising post-Marxist trends, philosophy, globalization critical theories, and academic engagement in public political spheres, such an intellectual orientation preserves an ethical balance for sure, in the challenging paths toward our common future. Then, why on earth, should it label itself ‘subaltern’? The

notion seems to misrepresent an exacting perspective in conveying semantics of 'subordination' that such an adjective calls to the fore. To refer to the technical meaning of subalterneity in philosophy, the work of Gayatri Spivak, one of the founders of the movement, cannot be reduced to a subaltern proposition vis-à-vis a founding universal proposition. And only by mistake, one would qualify as subaltern Enrique Dussel's signification in contemporary ethics. A sign: his *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización* (Editorial Trotta, 1998) tracks, in an exemplary manner, the paradoxes we are concerned with; and, by its standards, attests the best in descriptive and normative ethical reflections of today.

From Dussel's work as a reference, we evaluate complex systems, knowing that human morality cannot be run by emotions concerning complex systems and their productivity. Can one say that ethics is an expression of contexts? The agent's dilemmas record a way of being in structures whose functioning in the global world largely depend on the politics of calculating orders. Let me be specific. The economic reason animates and assumes an expedient conjunction of rigorous lines that contributes to its success in three interconnected topographies and their internal processes: (a) procedures and mechanisms of a market space, as defined in interactions of resources, human intervention, work productivity and distribution of wealth; (b) procedures and mechanisms of a political space, as defined by a particular organization of power, its inscription in a history and the justification of its legitimacy; (c) finally, procedures and mechanisms of a social space, as defined by traditions, their rapports to the transmitted, negotiations à propos customs and the demands of necessary transformations. From ways they are approached for an analysis, conceived as processes of integration into a technical taxonomy, or invested for exploitation, these spaces function literally as texts and deliver organized lines determining the particularity of their syntax, against which experts articulate the most adequate grids of regulating power in order to maximize the efficacy of productive complex systems.

Two types of social constructs face each other. On the one side, the structure of a machinery, modeling its aims on the basis of its morphology as a universal narrative of productivity. On the other side, individual-

ized forms in their regional, conventionally expected arrangements, duplicate regulatory norms. This rendering of socio-cultural relations to, and vis-à-vis abstract models, analogizes Ferdinand de Saussure's view of any language system. The machinery activity of a complex system functions like a conventional normative tongue, a *langue*; and the agent's performance, in its compliance, actualizes the norm, expressing it in an individualized, concrete enunciation, that is a speech, a *parole*. The analogy could be reinforced, since one might, in the case of an economic system, as well as a linguistic model, consider the singularity of their inscription in history, say, the diachronic dimension; or, their synchronic capacity, that is their expression at a particular time. This is to say that, in time or in space, the two constructs produce their own particular grammars that unveil a difference, witnessing a personal identity.

The banality of the analogy I am suggesting between language and economic complex systems should not distract us from what it implies, with regard to asymmetrical relations of subordination, a socially constructed psychic blindness, the notion of alterity, and their impact on social identity modulations.

Let me summarize what the analogy allows, proceed with some illustrations, and then come back to comment on the concept of diversity. Like language (*langage*), an economic complex system is an abstraction transcending concrete contexts. Like language, when it manifests itself as this or that particular tongue (*langue*), that is a social institution, an abstraction in its own right, the economic system comes to exist as a model, an idea corresponding to a virtual type of enterprise, with expected functions and objectives. It is speech (*parole*) which, using the tongue as a databank, actualizes it in an individualized and creative way. In the same manner, a complex economic system comes to existence as a given entity incorporated somewhere, and having the means and methods for meeting its aims. And now, let us note three determining characteristics that contribute to the specificity of these systems' identity: an inscription in a particular history, the singularity of their topography, the dynamics between the virtuality of their abstract systems and the creative performance of their members. The interactions and conjunction of these three factors,

important but not the only ones, bring about their style and manifest the distinction, that is, the difference of their characters.

A sign of the collaboration between a collective identity in which one is inscribed at birth, and the exercise of a personal creative will to invent one's project, an individual identity, a flux said Hume, intends both causing to experience, and giving to be known. Let us separate, for necessary and illustrative reasons—after all, we have been allegorizing the economic in apprehending it as a language—, the two systems we are comparing. We should focus on the fact of organizational control in these systems, and its influence in the construction of social identities.

About the economic system, to the descriptive analysis of Amitai Etzioni, I am adding a famous prescriptive textbook, *Thriving on Chaos. Handbook for a Management Revolution* (Alfred A Knopf, 1987) by Thomas Peters, the author of *In Search of Excellence* (1988); and, more recently, of the startling 'Tom Peters Seminars': *Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (Vintage, 1994); and, *The Pursuit of Wow! Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (Vintage, 1994). Etzioni's presentation, in the abstract, indicates mechanical lines of systems, their structuration and guiding principles. Peters's stance, an epic discourse on an injunction: listen to me, buy me; otherwise, you are lost. Etzioni describes processes through which complex systems stabilize their 'personality', hence constituting a functional organism; and he elaborates on their impact on, and expectation from, the identity formation of their agents. Peters depicts the regulating personality of a mechanical system as it is required by his evaluation of contemporary 'dire competitive situations'; the true objective, he writes in the preface to the *Handbook*, being 'to take the chaos as given and learn to thrive *on* it. The winners of tomorrow will deal *proactively* with chaos, will look at the chaos per se as the source of market advantage, *not as problem* (my emphasis) to be got around' The underlined restriction makes all the difference between a descriptive and prescriptive presentation. Thus, for example, on the issue of the elite corps, a major factor in instituting and promoting the identity of any complex system, and activating the agents' social identities and orienting them for the better, we get two visions. Etzioni organizes the prob-

lem around the question: ‘*who* controls *what*, and what the relationships are among those who control’ (op. cit: 159). This approach, emphasizing a comprehensive inquiry, establishes several levels of analysis: (a) an outline of constitutive elements (individualities, power, relations), (b) a qualification of elements (types of elite, source and forms of power, structures of relations); (c) a correlation of structural interconnections (activities, relations between elites, nature of these relations with, and in sub-collectivities’s). The outcome of the study portrays identity figurations whose subjective representation can be discussed. At least, they permit hypothetical interpretations on lines of self-fulfillment in coercive economic systems, on those concerning the notion and forms of integrative measure in normative organizations, on margins of social alienation in utilitarian complex systems. Grounded on re-interpreting history as evidence, Peters’s prerequisites for the internationalist achiever list instead, and only, objective conditions of exclusion. His model, in his own words, casts a ‘leadership that honors the line’; as a matter of fact, the *frontline* in the military sense: ‘attention to the line,’ and ‘hard leadership,’ that ‘promotes leaders who lead’ (op. cit: 446-448).

Let us suspend briefly this valuation of complex systems, and emphasize, again and again, language as a notion and reality which, everywhere and fundamentally, regulates and impacts any human system. This is to say that, indeed, a fortiori in preceding descriptive and prescriptive modalities of work in identity formation, language should be posited as the original experience of one’s identity in the community of being ‘in-the-midst-of-the-world.’ On this point, one would easily agree with Jean-Paul Sartre when, in *Being and Nothingness*, he writes:

In a universe of pure objects language could under no circumstance have been ‘invented’ since it presupposes an original relation to another subject. In the intersubjectivity of the for-others, it is not necessary to invent language because it is already given in the recognition of the Other. I *am* language. By the sole fact that whatever I may do, my acts freely conceived and executed, my projects launched toward my possibilities have outside of them a meaning which escapes me and which I experience. It is in this sense—and in this sense only—that Heidegger is right in declaring that *I am what I say*. Language is not an instinct of the constituted human creature, nor is it an invention of our subjectivity. But neither does it need to be referred to the pure ‘being-outside-of-self’ of the *Dasein*. It forms part of the *human condition*; it is originally the

proof which a for-itself can make of its being-for-others, and finally it is the surpassing of this proof and the utilization of it toward possibilities which are my possibilities; that is, toward my possibilities of being this or that for the Other. (op. cit: 485-6)

Language, in the dimension articulated here—that of the whole way of being, the most primitive manner of existing—expresses the conditions of possibility of one’s transcendence, that is identity, any identity, as a dynamic procession. At the same time, this activity reveals ‘the freedom (the transcendence) of the one who listens to me in silence.’ Indeed, contextual circumstances and their conditions clothe the peculiar way one is a language aimed at one’s transcendence.

What would life be like for a ‘languageless man’?, asks the neurologist Oliver Sacks, in his preface to Susan Schaller’s *A Man Without Words* (Summit Books, 1991). Ildefonso, an Indian Mexican, ‘who looked Mayan,’ has never been exposed to any language. Total, complete, incomprehensible isolation. Who can ‘imagine the alienation of life without language’, ponders Schaller, a teacher of American Sign language.

‘How did the man think without language? What did he see in all the apparently senseless interactions around him? Could we ever meet?’ (op. cit: 27).

Against the orthodox certitudes of experts on the sheer impossibility of bringing into language an untaught born-deaf, Schaller connects with Ildefonso. At the beginning, they are two strangers separated by an invisible line. Yet, in its nature, how different is it really, compared to other types of identity distinctions? Schaller confesses: ‘Ildefonso shared none of our language categories, whether parts of speech or division of time. His inability to understand my lessons on verbs and nouns and now on time did not derive merely from ignorance but from an entirely different view of reality. It struck me that his view could be just as legitimate as mine’ (op. cit: 118). Introduced into a common system, comments the neurologist Oliver Sacks,

‘Ildefonso’s mental processes, his perspectives and his very identity are transformed as he acquires language and all it embodies.’ (op. cit: 15)

One might say, right, but there is not a conversion of nature; instead, inscription into an unending process of creating one, inventing an identity.

And a question imposes itself on our consciousness: cannot we, through analogic steps, imagine what similar cultural integrations into the required structures of the economic reason, may represent for alienated bodies, submitting to the rationality of transnational mechanical languages, and might signify in the constitution of 'slave' social identities? What, here, would symbolize the sign represented by Susan Schaller for an Ildefonso?

#### **4.**

One could consider a number of axes which, à propos work in transnational ensembles, state cultural diversity principles as governing strategic policy for advancing lines of individualized performances.

A most globalist perspective would accent the capability in rules of market unification in diversity, emphasizing programmatic lines of action which would include the code of a new lexicon, perspective, methods for managing a new style in corporation culture. In *Managing Across Borders* (Harvard Business School Press, 1998) by Christopher Bartlett and Sumatra Ghoshal, two Business School academics at their best theorization, one finds suggested ideal lines of an economic will to truth: the transnational coincides with a definitive solution, identifies with a possibly perfect body. Its portrait decodes an agenda. One, it is a challenge by its capability, its model, and objective beyond structural fit; two, it is a paradigm by its competitiveness, flexibility, innovation; three, it legitimizes diversity, manages complexity, builds a pretty solid socio-economic commitment; four, conclusion, it is the solution. This recitation of the table of contents illustrates well the spirit of an imperial culture. It highlights the claim 'to defy geography' analyzed in John Micklethwait's and Adrian Wooldridge's exposition of management gurus under a telling entry, 'what does globalization mean?' The globalist project intends to create an original matrix not submitted to territorial contingencies. The globalist statement amplifies lines for penetrating different cultures, managing technical intricacies through coordination instead of centralization, allocating and integrating multiple tools, favoring flexibility, and adapta-

bility to a variety of environments. As a concept, such a model typifies, I am afraid, a divisive path extolled in an interested analytical study by the Japanese theorist Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-State* (Free Press, 1995); and substantially debated in another volume that Ohmae edited the same year, *The Evolving Global Economy: Making Sense of the New Global Order* (Harvard Business School Press, 1995). Well, the magic of diversity lines might be served well in modifying the coloration of Barbie's hair from blonde to dark, in East Asian countries, and the system in negotiating the quality of coca-cola sweetness for non-American markets; but, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldrige write in *The Witch Doctors* (Random, 1996): 'whenever the wages in the host country get too high, the firm simply shifts production to a cheaper country' (op. cit.: 229). That is important, ethically. In effect, we should remember at least this from Levinas's 'language and proximity': an ethical practice, or discourse, 'does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent from the description developed until then. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge' ( in A. Lingis, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, M. Nijhoff, 1987: 124.)

As a consequence of the preceding, one sees that the diversity theme belongs to the globalist argument only as a secondary support line of the economic reason in its postulations about investment, effective productive performance, and their relation to henceforth modalities of power (coercive, remunerative, normative), thus the issue of wage surfaces; and indeed, with it, that of modalities of compliance. Another example in conflict of interests, the Japanese in sub-Saharan Africa. Let me go back in time, just briefly, to the most inductive progress period for transnational systems: *The Roaring 1980s*—as they were thematized in 'a way to think about the past and the future' (Summit Books, 1988), an economic best seller published under a telling name, Adam Smith, a pseudonym of the Harvard educated host of a PBS trendy financial show on 'Money World,' George J.W. Goodman. Let me highlight a number of things. One, the central African region is universally recognized for its raw materials, notably antimony ore, bauxite, aluminium, chromium, cobalt, copper, ferro chromium, fluorspar, lead, petroleum, titanium ore.

Two, to this factor, another one: the 1980s globalization phenomenon was—as the international market expert Theodore Levitt put it, in an issue of the *Harvard Business Review* (May-June, 1983)—producing ‘a new commercial reality, the emergence of global markets on a previously unimagined scale of magnitude’ (quoted in *The Witch Doctors*, op. cit.: 213). Three, as such, the phenomenon would have qualified the African continent as a superb market for capital and consumer goods.

In a comparative study of the economic competition between Japan and the United States during this period, *Emerging Japanese Economic Influence in Africa. Implications for the United States* (IIS University of California, 1985), Joanna Moss and John Ravenhill, of the Berkeley Institute of International Studies, deduce a number of interesting marks for interpreting an array of statistics charts they compiled.

- a. At the threshold of the 1980s: two hypotheses, an identical economic reason, two competing policies.

In the statistical tests of this study we shall test the hypotheses that after 1975 (1) the Japanese share in African imports increased while the U.S. share declined; and (2) the United States became a more important market for African exports. The first hypothesis would require a stronger performance on the part of Japan than might appear true at first sight. Most African countries are oil importers and were faced with a rapidly increasing oil import burden after 1973. Accordingly, one would expect the share of oil-exporting states in their market to rise, leaving little room for non-oil exporters to increase their market share. If Japan is found to have been successfully maintaining its market share, it would represent a major achievement. A confirmation of hypothesis (1) would testify to a particularly impressive export performance on the part of Japan. (op. cit.: 18)

- b. About the early 1980s, the authors indicate ‘alarming trends in the development of U.S. and Japanese commerce with Africa’:

Whereas Japan has generally been successful in maintaining its shares of African markets, the U.S. share in most cases has declined in a statistically significant manner. This decline has been a major cause of the burgeoning U.S. trade deficit with the continent; the deficit is not merely the result of increased imports, but also stems from the failure of the United States to maintain its share of markets in sub-Saharan Africa other than South Africa. (op. cit.: 39)

- c. By the mid-1980s, Moss' and Ravenill's survey of Japanese enterprises, and their interviews with decision-makers, lead to two apparently paradoxical statements. On the one hand, an alarm signal à propos 'the relative success of Japanese corporations in winning a growing share of the market for capital equipment'; and, on the other hand, the two analysts foresee a revision of this economic activity:

While Japan was willing in the early 1970s—a time of great concern regarding future supplies of raw materials—to undertake investments that were perceived by others as being too risky (...), the current prevailing orthodoxy in Tokyo is that the risk of African mineral ventures generally has not been worthwhile (with the exception of uranium in Niger and oil in Gabon). Having successfully diversified its sources of raw materials over the last decade, Japan is now much more discriminating in choosing new projects and places greater emphasis on the potential reliability of new suppliers. (op. cit.: 113)

The strategic revision of a successful economic program addresses, in actuality, an external challenge to its own policy, and this is accounted for by both different work-ethics and cultural *a priori*s: difficulty of the Japanese in understanding African cultures, difficulty of the African in understanding the Japanese, perceived as 'one-dimensional economic being'; and, indeed, conflicts of interpretation about the diversity factor: 'although willing to participate in joint ventures, Japanese investors were generally wary of demands for increased African participation in shareholding, management, and intermediate inputs.' (op. cit.: 61)

## 5.

It remains now to register the cultural factor, a weak reason to all appearances. At first sight, it does not stand as having the monolithic solidity of the economic reason, nor its muscles and highly respected authority. It does not compare really with the political reason. In effect, the political calls to mind fascinating arts and techniques for managing communities, their history and their fate. It gives rise to imageries of complicated procedures and choices, along with cunning expediency, and shrewdness

figures. The cultural reason, somehow or another, brings to mind metaphors à propos a soft field welcoming attentive operations concerning the destiny of a community and its values as they relate to its fundamental conditions of existence: a genesis (to give birth, to grow, to ground); the quality of its reality and authenticity (to create, to cultivate, to nurture); the will to last (to communicate, to transmit, to bequeath). There are sciences, strictly devoted to the activity of the economic and political reasons. On the other hand, strictly speaking, there is not a science of cultures. The Husserlian *Geisteswissenschaften* whose semantic clarity supports the incredible solidity of *The Crisis of European Sciences* (Northwestern University Press, 1970), actualizes an administrative proposition of the Berlin Academy to distinguish two types of knowledge on the basis of the mind-body dualism. The division, now universally accepted, specializes fields—natural versus spiritual, or moral—, but it remains cumbersome. And today, an indeterminate number of disciplines—e.g. anthropology, geography, psychoanalysis—, disperse the immense domain of the cultural lines. As a matter of fact, in its incommensurable signification, anyhow and somehow, the cultural domain contains all the scientific practices that both, the economic and political reason, might motivate.

Culture is a body. Its metaphors and symbols inform a rich thesaurus in all human traditions, and represent a variety of maternal womb figures. A *corpus*, it folds and embraces existence, expands and consolidates it to potentially all the limits of space and time; at any rate, it animates questions and statements about destiny. It is from this perspective that one might consider distinguishing or uniting two cross-cultural types of narratives: those related to πνεῦμα *pneuma*, things spiritual, and those related to φύσις *phusis*, things natural, outward forms. Thus: on the one hand, spiritual libraries; on the other, another type of library, containing knowledge of forms, everything pertaining to the regular order of nature. The human uniqueness brings together the two types of knowledge, integrating φύσις and πνεῦμα in the mysterious cipher of a ‘human nature.’ Of all the most challenging axial metonymies, comes to my mind, the Arabic *rahim*, womb, that Titus Burckhardt reminds us, attests the same

root with the very name of the supreme divinity, *ar-Raḥmān*, the Compassionate, and the manifested expressions in, *ar-raḥmānīyah*, the divine bliss animating all aspects of reality. On the other hand, on the scientific side, we still have a perennial search, and its extrapolations for something like a foundational *mathesis universalis* to which, in our time, we can link the ambitious vision of Jean Charon in *Eléments d'une théorie unitaire d'univers* (Kister, 1962); or, closer to home, the extraordinary project of Claude Lévi-Strauss for ordering structural invariants of the human mind.

One could connect Lévi-Strauss's 'Kantism without transcendental subject'—as Paul Ricoeur summarized it magnificently—, to more pragmatic theories which, through cultural lines, have been decoding cognitive grids that tabulate systems à propos truth and falsity in epistemologies, good and bad in ethics, beautiful and ugly in aesthetics. In contemporary explorations for 'intercultural cooperation,' one would then account for a model such as the Geert Hofstede's 'software of the mind.' The founding director of an Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation, executive director of the Personnel Research Department of IBM-Europe, the Maastricht (the Netherlands) professor of organizational anthropology and international management, has been concerned with practical issues for administering multi-national businesses and negotiations. From a twenty-five years research in fifty countries, Hofstede suggests professional ethical guidelines for 'intercultural understanding,' and cultured positions. Concretely, (a) techniques for 'spreading multicultural understanding' in 'global challenges'; (b) intercultural cooperation that transcends regional value-laden choices and originations, as well as problems inherent to encounters and confrontations of cultural grammars of difference; (c) how to accentuate ethically sound converging lines for living in a projected global harmony.

If the establishment of Western-style democracies depends on a country's level of economic development (...), whoever wants to make the whole world democratic should face the economic and ecological consequences of this goal. At present, the rich countries' standard of living also implies a standard of environmental pollution and depletion of resources which makes it utterly impossible to extend this standard of living to the entire world population. Therefore, achieving the goal of democracy for everybody requires an entirely new way of handling our ecosystem: sustaining the rich countries' quality of

life but drastically reducing its ecological cost.’ (op. cit.: 244)

Against trends of cultural divergences determined by native ‘mental programs,’ Hofstede’s approach, acknowledging a constant interaction between the three reasons—economic, political and cultural—aims at engineering a ‘mental software intercultural space.’ Would his own intellectual education—a MSC in mechanical engineering and a Ph.D. in social psychology—explain, at least partially, his arguments on procedures for ‘rectifying’ mindsets? In any case, students of debates about the nature of the mind and the relationship between the mental and the environment might be puzzled by Hofstede’s assurance. The issue is both complex and tricky. On the one hand, it supposes that, to beg only few authorities, we know how to conceive properly the tension between the ‘savage’ and the ‘domesticated’ mind; and, one quotes the work of a Jack Goody, that of Claude Lévi-Strauss; or, the deviation between the ‘pathological’ and the ‘normal’; and, there, besides Georges Canguilhem’s philosophical oeuvre in the domain of life sciences, who to consult in the immense library of psychopathology who might not go in the sense of Canguilhem’s uncertainty about the very nature of the deviation? At any rate, the most recent critical anthologies in philosophy of sciences (e.g. that of Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, Routledge, 2001); and in philosophy of mind (e.g. that of David J. Chalmers, Oxford, 2002) are sources for sheer bewilderment, insofar as the mind and its operations are concerned. Indeed, this may not be a sufficient reason to raise doubts on the efficacy of a practical reason.

Hofstede’s model of intervention trades on a diagram defining the core of any culture from an index having as entries three notions—‘rituals,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘symbols’—, as what activate local practices and their referential registers. By age ten, believes Hofstede, any citizen has internalized them, and converted them into a constraining ‘habitus,’ a concept he borrows from the French Pierre Bourdieu in order to designate a way of being and behaving, as it is conditioned by one’s culture. Visible to anyone, including a disagreeable observer, the way of relating to the cultural frame of reference would be, in terms of meaning, fully decodable and understandable only to insiders, that is natives and inculturated for-

eigners. In effect, it expresses the cultural standards of ‘the desirable,’ in terms of agreement and disagreement in reference to an ethics; versus ‘the desired,’ in terms of individual interest, specifically in the tension between yours and mine. Hofstede’s intercultural software of the mind would witness to a meta-grammar. This system is built from regional grammars of norms presiding over activities between the desirable and the desired in schemata created by binary oppositions such as the following used in his information questionnaire.

Evil vs. good  
Dirty vs. clean  
Ugly vs. beautiful  
Unnatural vs. natural  
Abnormal vs. normal  
Paradoxical vs. logical  
Irrational vs. rational

Relativist in the light of its avowed respect for all possible cultural ensembles and their internal ordering principles, Hofstede’s horizon comes to reproduce the ‘grand dichotomy’ model without addressing its implications. Moreover, it transcribes, on business management agenda, an equation between economic convergence and necessary transcendence of any alterity; and by this fact, it might be bypassing, to some extent, the equality principle between cultural systems, in order to outline the requirements of a transnational organization. Thus, it comes without surprise that Hofstede would seem perplexed by the fact that: one,

‘there is little evidence of international convergency over time, except an increase of individualism’;

two,

‘not only will cultural diversity among countries remain with us: it even looks as though differences within countries are increasing’ (op. cit.: 238);

and three, finally, this commonsense observation that might not have needed twenty-five years of comparative research in fifty countries:

‘culturally a manager is the follower of his or her followers: she or he has to meet the subordinates on these subordinates’ cultural ground. There is free choice in managerial behavior but the cultural constraints are much tighter than most of the management literature admits.’ (op. cit.: 235)

An intellectual challenge, Geert Hofstede’s *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind* is exemplary, compared to treatises that can be found on ‘sidewalks of transnational management theory’; in these ‘wilder areas where, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge put it felicitously, theory mixes with self-help, philosophy, futurology, or downright quackery—these unmapped regions (...) where the greatest fortunes are to be made’ (op. cit.: 304). Hofstede’s endeavor stands as both a paradox and a question mark à propos the collaboration between the economic and the cultural reason. Sign and symbol of a will to truth, it attempts to reconcile lines of competing statements, those on the validity and coherence of self-regulating cultural bodies, and those of the economic reason as directive of a global historical convergence. It has the straight of a beautiful illusion that reminds me of a gifted teenager’s exquisite illumination. In his *Nature Loves to Hide. Quantum Physics and the Nature of Reality, a Western Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Shimon Malin, a professor of physics at Colgate University, to the purpose of ‘the doctrine of the oneness of mind’, remembers a story told by Kenneth Brower, the biographer of Freeman Dyson, of the second generation of American quantum physicists in the 1950s.

Freeman told us that when he (...) was fourteen he had started a religion. Unhappy with the Christian notion that the heathen are doomed for reasons out of their control, he had begun a sect of his own. ‘I was convinced suddenly that all people are the same. We are all one soul in different disguises. I called it Cosmic Unity (...) I seem to remember that I even had a convert. Cosmic Unity lasted about a year, I think.’ (op. cit.: 234)

An adolescent fancy?, asks Malin. Yes, the oneness of mind, and acting like a mirror and actualizing one’s own reflection, that is Plotinus’ philosophy in *The Enneads*, insists Malin. And he adds,

‘we are all one soul in different disguises,’ that is a precise enunciation of the idea of the oneness of mind. This gifted fourteen-year-old boy suddenly taped into the universal mind.’ (op. cit.: 234)

## 6.

From yesterday to tomorrow, our predicament remains a question: how to handle a collaboration between our three competing reasons—the economic, the political and the cultural; and, defend the authority of an ethics of human dignity. The complex systems englobing us are the products of our intelligence and imagination. They should not become our masters. They contribute to the invention of our social identities. We should be conscious and responsible participants in this process, affirming a critical primacy of the ethical reason over the economic, the political and the cultural.

At the turn of the new millennium, Mary Modahl, the vice president of Forrester Research Inc. that specializes in market analysis, warned us about a new global enterprise of extreme efficiency: electronic commerce, which was steadily modifying the basic structures of transnational companies. Her *Now or Never. How Companies Must Change Today to Win the Battle for Internet Consumers* (Harper Business, 2000) addresses, indeed, experts on how to ‘exploit internet business models’ and ‘defy the gravity of the old ways.’ However, its main exploration is on diversity in businesses, and about forms of alterity represented by consumers’ differences. The research dwells on the psychology of behaviors, processes and dynamics of integrating individualities into the commerce systems. In sum, here, we face a concrete illustration of meta-systems transcending, for commerce purposes, Amitai Etzioni’s analysis of complex organizations and Geert Hofstede’s software of the mind program.

How to resituate the notion of compliance as a moral attitude?

Compliance, yes, in our public collective system of shared spiritual values in this global culture; in reference to the constitutive language of our community, the legality of values it enshrines according to a code of

ethics in the making, and transcending its own organic structure in a transhistorical and transcultural effort. How, conceptually, one could comply to what such an abstract sign might be supposing, a symbol traced by an unstable moving point, a cipher representing a possible convergence of continuous lines on the surface of histories? In sum, could we speak allegorically of a path which, from the uniqueness of human dignity as demarcated through time and space in a multiplicity of narratives, would state its own alignment in its transcriptions of lessons from traditions?

Reformulated in our concrete communities of existence within their laws and governance codes, and how the ethical reason is articulated in them, compliance to human dignity exigencies should stand as our supreme value, an absolute one. It should, in effect, prescribe and evaluate the activity of both the economic and political reasons. In this way, this notion of compliance would come to allegorize itself in modalities of agreement and obedience whose lines intersect in the common space of our 'we-community': acquiescence to, and accord with legally binding values in symmetrical relations. On the other hand, in intransitive determinations of difference, obedience to the authority of a grammar whose components, as they were well summed up in a XIX<sup>th</sup> century note by Renouvier, which can be found in the Lalande dictionary of philosophy: ipseity, alterity, synthesis. As a matter of fact, they call their coherence in the dynamic succession of identity, distinction, determination. And, compliance comes to signify a perpetually recommenced search for an access to an ethics of coexistence. Should not we adapt here, Locke's language à propos knowledge of the existence of beings and things, and promote an ethics presiding over acts, dispositions, willingness that synchronizes everything for the better? In our time, accenting the project of his *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas reminded us this which transcends all technicalities:

'the word 'ethical' and the word 'just' are the same word, the same question, the same language.'

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