The Wanderings of the Goldfish. Transdisciplinarity and Co-Living

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Abstract

The author recounts his encounter with transdisciplinarity, initiated by his spirit of contradiction and his desire to think outside established frameworks. He discovered this approach through Bassarab Nicolescu, well before the founding of CIRET, during a seminar for business leaders. He sees transdisciplinarity as an opening beyond traditional scientific concepts and models, which are often limited by our implicit beliefs. This approach rejects any confinement of thought and aims to preserve intellectual freedom. It requires the establishment of a common definition of its foundations in order to contribute to peace between communities and cultures. Rejecting Western scientific models as the sole reference, it values other forms of knowledge, such as aesthetics, art and spirituality. Western technoscience is but one perspective among others, and its claim to universality must be questioned to promote coexistence. Academic dogmatism is presented as a new religious legacy of the West. Transdisciplinarity is therefore part of a transcultural approach, recognising the value of all worldviews. The interface between these visions can only exist through a dialectical dialogue between the "I" and the "you". This constitutes an essential condition for the harmonious cohabitation of cultures.

Keywords: *transdisciplinarity; intellectual freedom; transcultural dialogue; plurality of knowledge systems; critique of western technoscience.*

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1. Introduction

When I was a child, I often had the following dream: I was trying to leave the house and garden where I lived. But the more I tried, the more I felt paralyzed, unable to go any further, as if held back by something I could not identify. This dream could be interpreted as an experience of limits, of the desire to transgress them and the inability to do so. What was undoubtedly confining me were the certainties, customs, and conventions that had been imposed on me. So I had to free myself from them.

With the help of my "contradictory spirit," I have spent my whole life doing just that, seeking arguments outside of what is considered politically correct, and that is how I met Bassarab Nicolescu. It was even before CIRET was

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created, at a seminar organized for the managers of a large insurance group. This was a time when, in companies, it was still sometimes possible to think. And so I searched contemporary physics for analogies or homologies that could renew managerial discourse (theoretical or practical, depending on the case). And so that was my first contact with transdisciplinarity.

In my view, transdisciplinarity evokes what lies beyond what is recognized and what we believe we know because we have marked out its field using concepts and models that we consider to be "scientific " because they fit within the (narrow) framework of what we take for granted and which represents the horizon of our beliefs (because any "scientific" approach is based on a set of beliefs that are unproven but taken for granted). A kind of obsession with anything that represents a risk of confinement leads me to avoid in advance anything that could constitute an obstacle to what Raymond Aron so aptly called "freedom of thought." Hence my attention to anything that could close it off while giving the illusion of having moved beyond what was familiar and comfortable to us.

2. The contribution of the transdisciplinary

The contribution of the transdisciplinary approach to the construction of peace between different communities and cultures requires, above all, that a commonly accepted definition of his foundations be established.

1. The transdisciplinary approach cannot be expressed within the framework of any scientific model, given the principle of incompleteness. It opens up a space of complexity leading to other levels of being.

2. The transdisciplinary approach goes beyond the vocabulary commonly used in the West to express its own philosophical and scientific concepts, whose value is limited to the particular worldview in which they take place. The natural tendency to submit to it is a form of confinement in the Heideggerian "we," which excludes any possibility of accessing other levels of being.

3. The transdisciplinary approach is not limited to the scientific approach as defined by Western culture; it extends to other ways of understanding being: aesthetics, artistic activity, and spiritual research. It thus represents an opening to other levels of reality than that of "scientific models", regardless of their value in the realm of being where they are situated.

4. Western technoscience, regardless of its major influence on the living conditions of the entire planet's population, represents one dimension of Western culture and cannot claim to constitute a universal mode of access to being as it is in his being. Its scope is in fact limited to one region of being to the detriment of all others. The search for "co-living"[1] between humans from different cultures

[1] Why co-living and not coexistence ? Because « coexistence » is a passive way to think relation between one and another. « Co-living » is a way to think this relation in duration.

and communities therefore implies that it must be "put on hold" in order to seek what brings us together rather than what imposes itself on us.

5. The conditions required by the academic community for an approach to be considered "scientific" or not are most often the result of a dogmatic attitude that is closed in on itself; they are therefore foreign to the transdisciplinary approach. This dogmatism leads to a ritual imposed as a norm outside of which there can only be ignorance and disbelief. This is therefore an approach of a religious nature that follows on from the one imposed in the past by the Catholic religion, as professed in the West and imposed elsewhere in the world as the sole holder of truth.

6. The transdisciplinary approach cannot be envisaged outside of a transcultural approach that gives full recognition to knowledge, insights, and worldviews that owe nothing to Western culture. These worldviews, however foreign they may be from a Western perspective, must be considered as equally truthful as the Western worldview. The interface between them remains problematic and can only be bridged by the dialectic of "I" and "you." This is a necessary condition for the "co-living" of different cultures.

7. Transdisciplinary reduction is closely related to phenomenological reduction. It focuses on understanding being-there by avoiding becoming trapped in representations that say more about the person expressing them than about what they refer to. It is a matter of seeking out and allowing oneself to be surprised by what is there, even before it is expressed according to a conceptual definition, in a theory or in a model. What is there can be considered a rabbit or a cat (Wittgenstein) depending on the culture in which the speaker is immersed. When people from different cultures and different parts of the world meet, they must therefore face each other before saying anything. Such an encounter, which forms the basis of a possible "co-living," requires each person to shift their focus away from themselves.

8. Each people, based on their personal background, culture, and concerns, may have their own way of approaching the transdisciplinary approach. As long as its founding logical principles are respected, there is no reason to favor one approach over another or over others. Provided that they remain open to discovering the unexpected and accept in advance to be surprised by what they discover, everyone is free to follow their own path. None of these different approaches, as long as they comply with the principles of transdisciplinarity, can be considered the only true one or superior to others.

9. Many discussions about transdisciplinarity, its ontology, its hermeneutics, its theory *versus* its practice, etc., remind me of the circles made by a goldfish in its bowl. The goldfish must be able to swim out into the vast ocean. It is the purpose of transdisciplinarity.

3. These principles having been stated, however provisional they may be, what are the conditions for true co-living on a global scale?

1. The first is the recognition of the other for what he is, in his otherness, according to his own terms, and not according to the terms by which we are tempted to classify him according to our own taxonomy and axiology, which are not his. It is indeed according to our own taxonomy and axiology that we describe any culture that is not our own as "primitive" or "backward." The material success of techno-industrial civilization and "technoscience" in no way proves their "superiority" over other cultures that are less "advanced" technically but perhaps more advanced in other areas of knowledge about human existence. This supposed superiority belongs to a "modernity" that the transdisciplinary approach denounces; it represents a major obstacle to co-living.

2. Co-living is an approach that is not limited to the absence of conflict, at least momentarily. It involves seeking what, on another level of reality, brings together cultures, interests, and points of view that are contradictory on the level of reality at which they were considered. This other level of reality cannot be expressed in either of the languages in which humans immersed in each of the cultures present spontaneously express themselves. In order to meet and agree, they must maintain a level of understanding that is not that which their respective languages lead to. Contemporary *Globish* is only a means of communication, not of understanding. Similarly, the models of understanding, which seem self-evident within one culture, must be put back in their proper place, that is, as one local means among others of accessing reality as it presents itself according to a particular worldview. This is the case with the model of "technoscience" and so-called "scientific" thinking based on language and concepts that, it should be strongly emphasized, are not universal. Similarly, mathematical language is insufficient insofar as it neglects and rejects anything that is not quantifiable. Finally, the same is true of the logic according to which this model is expressed, insofar as it neglects other forms of logic and confuses the "concept" with the "lemma."

3. This realm beyond language, which is necessary for any recognition of otherness, is necessarily based on the encounter between two subjects and two perspectives. The Cartesian aphorism "I think, therefore I am" must therefore give way to the following formulation: "you are, therefore I am," or better yet, "I am what you are" and of course you are what I am. Such an encounter thus presupposes a transcendence in relation to "I" and "you." This transcendence cannot be named without being reduced to what one or the other of the two subjects present says about it. It presupposes remaining unsaid, according to Wittgenstein's formula: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." This unspoken can then only be apprehended through art and spirituality. How is it that this statue of

Buddha, sculpted around the 6th century AD somewhere in the desert of western China, speaks to me so naturally when I know nothing about the artist who created it? And how could I say it?

4. Vladimir Mokyi is therefore absolutely right when he states (in essence) that peace between Russians and French people would require all Russians to immerse themselves in *A la recherche du temps perdu* from Marcel Proust and all French people to read and reread *War and Peace* from Leon Tolstoï. Similarly, Marc Klein argues that in order to understand the culture of the ancient Mayans, which he knows so well, it is necessary to abandon concepts and focus on images. And finally, Maïko Sawada does the same in her investigations into the role of museums as places of memory. The exchange between one culture and another, from one side of the river to the other, requires a deepening of one's own culture, and from there, an exploration of the other, which in turn will lead the subject to a better understanding of their own. I can only understand Monnet by contemplating Hiroshige's engravings, and I can only understand Hiroshige's views of Fuji by contemplating Monnet's water lilies. And what has just been said about culture can be said just as much, if not more, about the spiritual quest.

And so it is on this spiritual level that I will conclude, quoting extensively from Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464) in the excerpts provided by Alain le Pichon, one of the founders, along with Umberto Eco, of the Transcultura Institute, in his book of dialogues with the Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang, *Un Dieu ou tous les* dieux[1] ?

"Since otherness is not a principle of being, it disappears in coincidence, where all diversity is overcome in the unity of God's vision. At the same time, the principle of identity is no longer in force, and coincidence can become the place of reconciliation of contradictory statements. Contradiction bears the mark of truth, and coincidence transcends opposites by opposing them with an opposition without opposition that finds its fulfillment in the infinite. (...).

The wall of coincidence is the boundary between the visible, rational world and the invisible world. This wall is the enclosure below which we cannot see, except in riddles; it is the threshold or the door where you must stand to see the truth, without any veil; it is the place where God dwells, in that God is the coincidence of opposites. But it is first and foremost the boundary beyond which God's dwelling begins. To be in the wall means both to stand in the wall itself and within its limits, that is, on the other side, or beyond. Such is the ambition associated with this term, which precisely marks the end of the meaning of all names and the power of understanding. (...).

Let us consider humanity as the principle common to all men, a principle that I therefore find universally present in all men, and present in each one indi-

[1] Zhao Tingyang and Alain le Pichon, *One God or All Gods,* One Hundred Thousand Billion, 2019.

vidually. Although in itself this universal principle is neither East nor West, neither South nor North, nevertheless, for men who are in the East, it belongs to the East, and for those who are in the West, it is in the West... The nature of humanity, on an individual scale, immanent in men, is such that it belongs no more to one man than to another and appears to each so perfect that it seems to have been made for him and for no one else. However, the universal principle of humanity is far superior, as a model and idea of each application of humanity reduced to the individual scale...".

This text, which it is important to note dates from the 15th century, deserves explanation:

- according to the meaning of the time, the word "God" refers to what we might call "the One," "Heaven," or "the gods." It thus refers to another level of reality, one where contradictions find their resolution in "coincidence";

- this coincidence occurs not only between different levels of reality, from the multiple to the unknowable One, but also between human beings, in so that they participate in the same humanity that transcends them; and it is at this other level that the conditions for coexistence must be sought, beyond the cultural and linguistic expressions that oppose them.

We can therefore draw the following conclusion: it is in this coincidence between human subjects, whatever their differences may be, that the possibility of co-living and peace lies.