

ADDRESS TO THE SECOND
PAC RIM CONFERENCE
IN TRANSCULTURAL AESTHETICS

Grazia Marchianò

Dear friends,

In expressing my sincere gratitude to Eugenio Benitez and Catherine Runcie for the honor which has been granted, although undeservedly, to my work as a comparativist aesthetician on the occasion of the 2nd Pac Rim Conference in Transcultural Aesthetics, I would like to contribute further to our works by making a few side comments thanking in particular those colleagues who so kindly allowed me to read their papers afterwards.

At a distance the broad variety of fields covered in the 24 papers which were delivered seems to converge consistently on a trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural approach to aesthetics seen as a sort of theoretically *empty* space ready to receive and elaborate issues where the ‘how’—rather than the ‘what’—of aesthetic experience is critically explored in both *pakeha* and indigenous contexts. This process of emptying aesthetic theory of its Western-rooted, rigidly structured dialectical paradigms is equivalent to a retrieval of perennial human values such as memory, beauty, gentleness and respect, which it is the job of a reshaped philosophy of beauty-and-goodness combined to instil, or rather re-instil in the new generations of a world community. In reconsidering one by one the matters treated in our papers I could recognize a number of underground threads linking together topics apparently unrelated to one another as in the case of the epistemology of *ta-va* (time-space) relationship in Tonga poetry examined by ‘Okutisino Mahina, of matters concerning the Self/Other representation in contemporary filmography from Aoteaoroa (the Maori Land) in Deborah Walker’s paper, dealing with the feminine/materic identity of artistic creativity in Yoruba thought or with smallness as a cypher for immensity in Japanese prose poetry—

according to Babatunde Lawal and Yasuko Claremont respectively. What Archibald McKenzie identifies as the ‘politics of Ecstasy’ in some major examples of ancient Greek and Chinese ritual poetry provides keys to attempt a comprehensive hermeneutics of creative processes grounded on a Dionysiac/Shamanistic ideology widely spread in ancient Eurasia. Those keys equally help to re-consider Plato’s concept of artistic beauty and to question whether the Greek philosopher had “a tribal view of Art”—as in Eugenio Benitez’s and Ross Bowden’s respective papers.

A genuine concern for working out a syllabus of aesthetic qualities on a truly cross-cultural background made *shimmer* emerge as a powerful catalyst of beauty in contexts as antipodean as Aboriginal bark painting, Byzantine icons and early Renaissance painting. Whereas the notion of *epiphany* explored by L. Santoro-Brienza in the context of Joyce’s poetics offered a seminal ground to by-pass and eventually transcend taboos still deeply ingrained in post-modern cultural anthropology such as the ones pointed out by Eizabeth Coleman, Patrick Hutchings, Sondra Bacharach and David Eng respectively, related to the categories of *otherness*, *incommensurability*, *authenticity* and *originality* when the matters concerned are the aesthetic appreciation of ‘primitive’ art as well as of celebrated masterpieces exhibited in to-day museums for the masses.

I sincerely wish that aesthetic conferences of the same scope as the ones which have taken place twice at Sydney University (in 1997 and 2004), and once at Bologna, Italy (in October 2000) can become a stable ground for *pakeha* and non-*pakeha* scholars to train themselves to interact just as *human* beings thereby overcoming the embarrassment of identities. An old habit of mine to check the etymology of words in order to grasp their original meaning has prompted me in this case to look up the entries for ‘embarrassment’ in the dictionaries of various languages. The Italian word *imbarazzo* derives from the Spanish *embarazo*, which is in turn linked to the Latin *barra*, an ancient Mediterranean word meaning ‘mud’ or ‘clay wall’, and which survives also in the Basque *parra*, *marra*, meaning ‘boundary’ and ‘rim’. If I’m not wrong the Japanese equivalent of ‘embarrassment’ is the word *komaru*. The Chinese ideogram *kun* (*k’un*) used to represent *komaru* shows a tree set in a square and thus unable to grow freely in any direction. In other words, the problem that begs reflection is how to remove the wall

blocking the free growth of the tree of identity and, leaving aside the metaphor, how to allow identity to be transcended without being dis-owned. In my view a set of truly transcultural aesthetic theories at the junction of many connected avenues in the Humanities has all the adequate prerogatives to cope with this essential creative job.

Thanks again to you all!