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 power-
ful 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 anthro-
pology such as the ones pointed out by Elizabeth 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 Medi-
terranean 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 disowned. 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!