

The Aesthetic Eye: Bridging the Gap between Heart and Mind

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*The school of spontaneity, unpredictability and naturalness,
may produce a man capable of thinking untraditionally and independently
and of writing in a language that is daring, nervous and lofty.*

Elémire Zolla, an unpublished fragment.

Dear friends,

Besides expressing my joy in finding myself in Sydney once again, and my gratitude to the leaders of the SSLA and ANZALA for promoting a meeting that will no doubt show the benefits of the trans-cultural opening in aesthetics of the past ten years, allow me to start with two small confessions.

The first one is that I am indeed glad to see that the horizon of theoretical aesthetics at the beginning of the 21st century is no longer just Western, like it was at the end of the 18th century, nor even Western *and* Eastern as was the happy case during the 20th century. Today, it tends to embrace the culture of every inhabited continent on earth. In terms of time, this horizon runs from the present day to a past rooted in mythical times, a time when the landscape of the earth was truly different from the one known in the past millennia, one where Gondwana could have existed, a super-continent uniting the Antarctic, Australia, Africa and New Zealand into one. In a submerged area of human memory, well beyond the rim of both personal and collective historic memory, the non-eradicable myth of the origins shines.

Regardless of the technical level of human societies, all men and all women carry within themselves the unmemorable traces of an original

state. This trace is probably the most precious legacy that each generation, knowingly or not, passes on to the next.

As everybody knows “aboriginal” is a Latin expression made up of the word *origo*, ‘origin’, and the preposition *ab*, ‘from’, therefore indicating provenance of time and place. As far as I know, a systematic research on the presence and influence of a poetics of origins in Western, Eastern and indigenous aesthetic thinking as a whole, has still not been attempted: should the works of this conference provide the basis for an exciting research group on this broad subject, I believe the SSLA and ANZALA would render a truly important service to the cause of world-aesthetics.

A comparative glance between the Proceedings of the 1st Pacific Rim Conference in June 1997 and the program of this 2nd conference, shows subtle changes in the general approach to aesthetic issues. In 1997 the cross- or trans-cultural factor represented for many of us a sort of *avant-garde* to be conquered within a context very much marked by the different aesthetic visions between East and West, and the attention paid to aspects and problems of indigenous and tribal art was relatively scarce. Seven years later, the bond between aesthetic thought and anthropology has become both evident and explicit, and a first glance at the titles of our papers suggests that the notion of otherness is now, directly or indirectly, at the heart of multi-faceted interdisciplinary analysis.

That the ways of thinking and feeling of the peoples of the earth have now become protagonists in the field of the humanities is a result of which these studies as a whole should be proud of, and the proof that the identity crisis they are suffering, aesthetics included, resembles one of those rites of passage in indigenous societies from which the initiated comes out stronger and renewed. It is a mistake to think that the health or even the survival of the *studia humanitatis* depends upon a gracious concession of the so-called exact sciences and new technologies.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that Athena, the Greek goddess of knowledge, invites to a banquet on mount Olympus all the branches of knowledge, and that the criteria used for the assignment of table places are the current ones of economic return or strategic advantages that each discipline may offer on a world social scale. Philosophical and

literary disciplines would definitely find themselves in the remotest corner, and it wouldn't be long before a rude guest would see fit to tell them unpleasantly to get lost for good. Aesthetics would, no doubt, belong to this unfortunate party.

In a brief article entitled "Aesthetics and Power" published in the Newsletter issued by the International Association for Aesthetics (n. 26, Spring 2004, E. Zenko ed.), the IAA Secretary General Curtis L. Carter expressed his sincere condolences to aesthetics because: 1) its role "is increasingly diminished in the academic world, where it is considered by many departments of philosophy (at least in the Western Universities) to be one of the first expendable programs of study"; and 2) "as an independent scholarly discipline, it occupies a small place in the realm of political and societal power..."

In turn, upon the end of his mandate as President of the IAA, the Japanese philosopher Sasaki Ken-ichi made a public confession on the "serious discrepancy or discordance, or even conflict" found in his thirty years of scholarly work.

On the one hand, being a specialist of modern European aesthetics he wrote books in Japanese on this subject that his Western colleagues can neither read nor comment on; on the other hand, in the last eight years he wrote (I quote) "papers on the aesthetics of the Japanese mentality in English (or in French)", which he very much regrets can hardly reach his Japanese readers. If I interpret Sasaki's point well, it is quite evidently not a mere problem of linguistic translation, but one of 'translating' a way of thinking and of living the aesthetic experience inherent to a civilisation and a culture, without betraying them.

This point is at the heart of the problematic relationship between identity and otherness in the cultural and, even before them, the mental dynamics shaping local visions of reality and world views.

Remember Whitehead's quip: "If mind matters, also matter minds". Well, I have long believed that the aesthetic sphere plays a key role in the interplay between mind and matter, ethnos and ethos, nature and culture, physics and metaphysics. Therefore one should never stop rejoicing in the fact that today we have at our disposal the cognitive resources of all the disciplines invited to Athena's banquet, thereby allowing us to explore this crucial sphere of human experience in depth. I think that the meaningfulness of aesthetics—a discipline whose

only blame is perhaps that of having the wrong name—lies in the exploration of facets of human experience of uncertain and elusive nature, not only in empirical terms, but also ontologically. Wonder, mystery, the subtle overtones of the aesthetic emotion, the spiritual dimension of the creative process that Mircea Eliade highlighted in Australian aboriginal cultures beyond the strictly religious context, these are the very salt and bread of aesthetic thought. In fact, it is no coincidence, by the way, if in late 17th century European thought the uncertainty on the nature of the aesthetic factor raised to the rank of a veritable category that was named after an originally Latin formula: *nescio quid* whose resistance to translation into English as ‘that certain something’ was noted, with some satisfaction, by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Lord of Shaftsbury in the seventeenth century.

In its French, Spanish and Italian versions, on the other hand, the *Je ne sais quoi*, *No sé que* and *Non so che*, respectively, met with a brilliant critical fate as an expression that could embody the indefinable, charming side of beauty. Japanese scholars here know very well how much Kuki Shūzō favoured the “je ne sais quoi” in the 1930s for its capacity to come quite close to the elusive overtones of the Japanese traditional concept *iki*, at the heart of Kuki’s homonymous famous treaty (*Iki no kōzō*, Tokyo 1930).

My second confession, if you’ll allow me, is doubly personal. On an occasion such as this, each one of us would like to give his or her best, and the knowledge that this best does not amount to much, is truly embarrassing. Furthermore, as you may have guessed from the introduction to this paper, some of the things I am about to say may jar with what is expected from a sophisticated academic speech.

In this case the first to be sorry, especially in regard to our most gracious hosts, would be myself. Therefore, even though my participation to this important conference will be associated with my registered name and to my University of affiliation in Italy, which I do not mean to deny, nevertheless and if you will allow me, I would like to borrow a different identity for the following few minutes, so as to feel I can speak my mind more freely.

Since this conference takes place in Australia, I shall pretend to be the main character of one of the latest books written by the South

African Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee. This book, published in the USA in 2003, carries the name of an elderly woman writer from Melbourne, *Elizabeth Costello* (the surname, by the way, seems to indicate remote Italian origins), author of novels. The fourth of them, *The House on Eccles Street* (1969), made her famous, also because its heroine is the wife of Leopold Bloom, the hero of the most famous novel of the 20th century, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).

Coetzee describes Mrs. Costello as being busy with a series of conferences regarding literature, but also ethics and the human condition in general. At Altoona College, Williamstown, Pennsylvania, where she attends to receive the prestigious Stowe Prize for literature, Elizabeth holds a conference on realism in literature, a dimension that she, being Australian, has explored from "its remotest origins", as she would say in an interview. "We are not a country of extremes—she says—but a country of extreme boundaries" (Lecture n. 1, "What is Realism", *Salmagundi* 114-115, 1997).

In another chapter of the book, it is the well-known Nigerian writer Emmanuel Egudu, former professor at the University of Queensland and an old friend of Elizabeth, who takes up the word aboard a Swedish luxury cruise through the Antarctic. He entertains passengers on the subject of the novel in Africa, an Africa, Egudu says, that has been assigned the unenviable role of "house of poverty" by today's global system. Elizabeth finds Egudu's conference full of sterile commonplaces. Sitting at a meal with other members of the cruise, she attempts a comparison with today's state of culture in Australia, and she says to Egudu: "We Australian writers have freed ourselves from the affectation of writing for foreigners when our market, the Australian market, decided it could support a national literature... This is what Africa may learn from us" (Lecture n. 2, "The Novel in Africa", Occasional Paper n. 17, Townsend Centre for the Humanities, University of California, Berkeley 1999).

I will skip the other chapters in Coetzee's book, to mention Lecture n. 3 ("Die Menschenwissenschaften" / "The Humanities in Africa", München: Siemens Stiftung 2001).

The scenario this time is the main Hall of a South African university, where Elizabeth's sister Blanche, or rather Sister Bridget, missionary in Zululand, speaks in the occasion of her honorary degree

for humanitarian merits (she founded the Holy Virgin Hospital of Marianhill for children born with HIV). *The Humanities in Africa* is the title of Blanche Costello's lecture. In short, Blanche's thesis holds that in their inheritance of a mundane and anthropocentric vision of reality, a vision belonging to classic pagan antiquity, humanistic studies failed in the task of offering a life message, one guiding man towards the experience of the divine or, in St. Augustine's words, to the city of God. During an official lunch, Elizabeth publicly differs from her sister's position, which she finds imbued with a backward and unlikely form of Christian fundamentalism.

For a series of reasons that would be much too long to list, but mainly because I find Elizabeth Costello appealing, let us pretend it is another Costello talking here, having come from a country somewhere between Australia and Europe, just for the second Pacific Rim Conference of 2004.

Fair enough, I am no famous novelist like Elizabeth nor have I written a novel based on the life of Leopold Bloom's wife. And, quite differently from Elizabeth's sister, the honorary degree I have just received from the Open University, Edinburgh, is not for humanitarian merits, but for my work in the field of those Humanities that sister Bridget criticised, in my opinion, not altogether without reason.

In fact, scholars in the Humanities and particularly aesthetics specialists, while having indubitable virtues I would be the last to disown, are however guilty of considering their subjects with monofocal lenses, without realising that other types of lenses are more appropriate to the exploration of larger and less familiar horizons. Let us imagine that Mrs. Costello, at an advanced point of her life as a scholar, realised she had been observing aesthetic matters with a *pakeha* eye, which as Australian anthropologists know means a white-man's eye. An eye capable of grasping "the marvels of everyday vision", as Ernst Gombrich's beautiful expression describes—and about which Richard Woodfield here is certainly the most appropriate person to comment—in an inevitably selective manner, lacking the incomparable gift of unpredictability and naturalness that would guarantee the true immersion into the marvels of everyday vision, if indeed they do exist. By training and cultural background, my alter-ego Elizabeth in truth belongs to the community of *westheticians*. I borrow

the term coined by Mineke Schipper and taken up by Wilfried van Damme in his recent research on “Western Philosophy and the Study of Aesthetics in African culture” (*Thamyris Intersecting*, n. 11, 2003). Mineke Schippers—in his own words—uses the term “westhetics” “to unveil the parochialism of those who pretend to deal with aesthetics generally, while in fact they limit their analyses to Western culture only” (*Ibidem* p. 95).

This is paramount to saying that, whatever aesthetic phenomena are observed and even more so when regarding indigenous cultures, the *pakeha* eye reads and interprets them following pre-configured westhetic categories, even when the matter concerned regards certain peculiar forms of estranged realism in the works of some contemporary New Zealand *pakeha* artists as the ones examined by an expert like Patrick Hutchings.¹ These pre-configured westhetic categories are by no means inadequate to perceiving the original sense and values held within those phenomena.

On aesthetic value in Huichol material representations, Anthony Shelton, a specialist in this field, argued that “...once we abandon attempts to force indigenous categories into supposedly precise and scientific Western terms, we may be able to describe broad fields of experience which correspond to historical and cultural experiences similar to those in the history of our own civilisation. It is not enough—he concluded—to relativize the object of our subject, the subject must itself be treated with a similar epistemological scepticism” (“Predicates of Aesthetic Judgement: Ontology and Value in Huichol Material Representations”, *Anthropology Art and Aesthetics*, J. Coote & A. Shelton eds., Oxford: Clarendon 1992, 209-243).

Once Mrs. Costello accepts Shelton’s suggestions as true, it is inevitable for her to realise her failure of perception in those fields to her less familiar. For instance, her *pakeha* eye is completely incapable of seeing the marvels of the colour patterns of Dinga oxen—showed up by Jeremy Coote in his field research among the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes (“‘Marvels of Everyday Vision’: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes”, *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 245-273); the subtle elements of mythical grammar present in a Meso-American Huichol yarn painting; or the symbolism of the snake ritual among the Pueblo Indians on which Aby Warburg based the famous conference

held at Kreuzlingen, in the psychiatric hospital of Bellevue, where he stayed until the spring of 1923.

Let it be said, by the way, that the text of the conference (“Schlangenritual: Ein Reisebericht”, Verlag Klaus Wagenbach and The Warburg Institute, London 1988) is an important fragment of the history of contamination between an illustrious *pakeha* eye, in this case Abi Warburg’s, and the symbolical density of the Pueblo and Hopi rites that made such an impression on him in his travels through the south-west of the United States in 1895. Allow me to quote a passage:

As a historian of civilisation—Warburg said—what interested me was how an enclave of *primitive* and *pagan* men (Elizabeth stresses these two adjectives) could survive in the middle of a country that had made of technical culture a wondrous weapon for rational man, persevering with unshakeable faith in magical rituals usually considered by us as a sign of total backwardness.—But here the so-called “superstition”—Warburg went on—...is a religious veneration of natural phenomena, animals and plants, to which Indians attribute active souls that they believe may be influenced mainly through their masked dances” (*Il rituale del serpente*, It. tr., Milan: Adelphi 1998, p. 12). “The Pueblo—he said later on in the text—were half-way between magic and logos, and their steering compass is symbol” (p. 95).

While Costello re-read Warburg’s paper, eighty years after it had been given, she couldn’t help wondering if Warburg’s perspicacious observations were but the inevitably impure result of what Lévi-Strauss had defined as a distanced look’ (*regard éloigné* is the original French expression).

The eye—in so far as it is *cultural*—is never innocent and no matter how much it tries, it remains ever distanced (*éloigné*). During the 20th century the contact with hundreds of different cultures, each with its own language, history, mythology and unique way of seeing the world, both natural and supernatural reality, has softened the stigma of negativity inherited by the notion of otherness from the old and never abandoned Western prejudices on primitivity and barbarity.

With the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss and of a pleiad of specialists counting ever more non-Westerners, I hope we may have left behind once and for all the myth of the intellectual coarseness of primitive peoples. Megalithic monuments like Stonehenge speak of the mental complexity and the depth of the astronomical notions of communities of old. The levels of reality with which indigenous peoples relate go far beyond the realm of the visible and this is reflected in the rites and arts of traditional communities. On the subject of mythical realism in traditional Huichol art Anthony Shelton observed: “Modern realism has as its end the reproduction of the visible; that of mesoamerican realism is to make visible the invisible. The artist in Western civilization believes he represents a nut by depicting its shell. In pre-Hispanic Mexican thought the shell of the nut is only an exterior aspect of little importance. The essential thing is the nut itself” (in the article quoted above, p. 234).

The experience of otherness, whatever point of view is used, is like the nut—Elizabeth ponders on. One cannot know it unless one bites it. One of the most emblematic cases of the modern meeting with cultural otherness is certainly Paul Gauguin. Even more than his famous paintings of indigenous subjects, his notebook and sketches (recorded between his first and second stay at Tahiti between 1893 and 1895) describe Gauguin’s manner of biting the nut of Tahitian culture, making it the pivot of a decisive experience where—he wrote—it is “the heart that has allowed my eyes to see”.

The notebook, 76 pages, of which 57 were hand-written, had a fibre cover and was entitled *Ancient Maori cult*. The Louvre Museum bought it in 1927 and showed it twice. The first time in 1928, for the exhibition “Gauguin: sculptor and engraver” held at the Musée du Luxembourg, and the second time in 1949 at the Orangerie, for a retrospective of the artist’s centenary celebrated the year before. The notes on the *Ancient Maori cult* constitute the canvas of the better known *Noa Noa*, Gauguin’s diary of his voyage to Tahiti in 1895. Perhaps not everybody knows that the most detailed account of Paul Gauguin’s last weeks in Tahiti was sent to Paris from the Marquesas islands by a young naval doctor, Victor Segalen, who arrived just too late to meet the great recluse. It was a significant missed rendezvous—as James Clifford explained in a review of Segalen’s novel *Les Immémoriaux*, 1907

(“Encounters with the exotic”, *TLS* June 22, 1984)—for Segalen was to become a writer of major importance in what may be called a post-symbolist “poetics of displacement”. This movement had already sent Rimbaud to Abyssinia. It would propel Cendrars around the globe, Leiris to Africa, Artaud to the Tarahumaras, Abi Warburg among the Pueblos, and Charles Chatwin to the Antipodes in South America and Australia, to mention but a few of the better known and most commented cases.

Unlike her anthropologist colleagues who, returning to Shelton’s metonymy, had bitten the nut of indigenous otherness, Elizabeth knows it only through literature, and the eye with which she has looked in books and museums at examples of tribal art is, as I said, an inevitably *éloigné* eye. But would not the same happen if a Huichol man or a Yolngu aboriginal from the Arnhem Land were to face, for the first time, Mona Lisa’s smile or Lady Spring’s heavenly look in Botticelli’s homonymous masterpiece? This is a question Elizabeth wishes to address to her anthropology colleagues, after telling them about an experiment she carried out with her aesthetics students. She announced that she was about to project slides of a famous Italian painting from the 2nd half of the 15th century, namely *Spring*, made in 1477 by the Florentine painter Alessandro Filipepi (1455-1510) better known as Botticelli, a nickname (meaning ‘small butt’) inherited from his elder brother Giovanni. Further, she was going to explore Botticelli’s *Spring* and his other masterpiece, *Venus’s birth* (painted in 1483) not only with the usual historical-critical tools, but also using aesthetic notions extrapolated from Anthony Shelton’s and Howard Morphy’s field research on Huichol and Yolngu art, in Mesoamerica and north-east Arnhem Land respectively. These notions are embodied in the Huichol word for heart, namely *iyari*, and the Yolngu one for brilliance, namely *bir’yun*.

Should this comparative experiment turn out some positive hermeneutic result, we would then own elements supporting Dr. Costello’s (*alias* Marchianò’s) old thesis that there is an underlying basic unity in the syntax of aesthetic experience in spite of the different selective organisation of the observing eye. Sight, like all other human senses, is indeed culturally structured, yet the cultural framework does not prevent aesthetic experience from being universally acknowledged as an experience marked by some generalized characters related to

heart emotion, radiance, wonderment, and a inherent although elusive sense of beauty.

While Elizabeth invited her students to gaze at the details of the two Botticelli masterpieces, she set out her journey into the faceted meanings of *iyari* and *bir'yun* under the guide of Shelton's and Morphy's explanations.

The Huichol—Shelton explains—translate *iyari* into Spanish as *corazón* (heart). “This gloss, however, fails to give the full significance of this complex concept. It is used to refer to an essence inherent in all human beings which is considered essential to life... *Iyari* also means ‘sacred word’ and it is seen as expression of occult knowledge”.

It is believed that its origin is not human—in fact, only the shaman (*mara'akame*) can have access to it—and that it is the original wisdom of the deities. Without mentioning other data of strictly ethnological content, the third semantic facet regarding *iyari*, next to ‘heart’ and ‘sacred word’, is the one that relates it to the sight (*irumari*). Shelton says: “Ordinary sight, the perception of the world by untutored sense, has no depth and little meaning for the Huichol, since it is unable to penetrate appearance and reveal the essence which lies at the heart of the object (p. 233). *Iyari* as a second sight is attained by the ingestion of peyote, a sacred substance made of tobacco and restricted to ceremonial use. It is sustained and effected through the aid of various external objects which are collectively called *nierika*. It is said that *nierika* puts one in contact with an inner dimension of one's mind resembling Watetuapa, that is the pre-creation world.

“With this in your mind—Elizabeth said to her students—please look again at the mythical dream-like landscape where Lady Spring is represented as spreading flowers on earth, where the Graces embodying the virtues of faith, hope and charity dance, a young blind-folded Eros shoots his arrow and Mercury disperses the clouds with his staff. In the words of André Chastel, the authoritative interpreter of symbolism in Italian Renaissance art, Botticelli's *Spring*, like *Venus's birth* is a cosmological representation of Nature's creative force. It is built with all the culturally determined ingredients of Florentine neoplatonism fused with Christian vision. Endless learned comments can be made and have been made on the extremely learned and sophisticated context of Botticelli's visual language. Yet in a transcultural

aesthetic perspective we may simplify this complex matter by saying that the marvels in *Spring* and *Venus's birth* lie in their possessing 'heart' in the same way as a Huichol yarn painting does.

As for the aesthetic value of brilliance, Elizabeth takes into account Howard Morphy's report on Yolngu art. There is a kind of Yolngu painting which—he says—is made of a number of components of different types organised in a particular way. "There is a base colour, then various internal subdivisions, figurative representations, geometric background patterns and cross-hatching" (p. 186 through 188). The two main criteria employed by the Yolngu in judging a painting, apart from the matter of the painting's correctness—he adds—are its brightness and the clarity of the cross-hatched lines. The importance of brilliance in Yolngu art was first noted by the anthropologist Donald Thomson in his unpublished field notes in the late 1930s. "*Bir'yun*, the word for 'brilliant' in its secular meaning—Thomson wrote—refers to intense sources and refractions of light, the sun's rays, and to light sparkling in bubbling fresh water... Applied to paintings, *bir'yun* is 'the flash of light, the sensation of light one gets and carries away in one's mind's eye. This brightness, which is seen as emanating from the ancestral beings in the ancestral past, is one of the factors that endows the painting with ancestral power'" (*Ibidem* p. 189).

Mrs. Costello cannot help noticing that brilliance and brightness are qualities with an extremely high aesthetic value in the iconology of Western and Eastern Christian sacred art, with a climax in the Byzantine-school icons and in the 14th century Sieneese paintings with their dazzling golden backgrounds. And if the cultural *pakeha* eye is not inclined to noticing the signs of an ancestral power, an old legend dating back to the early centuries of Byzantine art says that the first models of primitive icons painted by monks and hermits were in fact the work of angels. This kind of ancestral icons carry a specific name (Greek *acheiropites*), which literally means, 'made by not human hands'. It seems legitimate to consider such icons as part of the *nierika* items in Huichol terms, as well as of the paintings having *bir'yun*, 'brilliance' in Yolngu terms.

With these elementary indications my alter-ego Elizabeth has attempted to provide some elements for thought on the complexity of the as yet unnamed main actor of this conversation: *the aesthetic eye* and its occult

powers. Furthermore, Elizabeth wonders whether the time has come for aesthetics—the discipline carrying perhaps a wrong name—to build up a unified theory of aesthetic feeling, a feeling which in so far as it is *aesthetic* is trans-ethic, trans-religious and trans-cultural: just human, in the same way as the heart is just human.

In the *Rg Veda*, one of the most authoritative texts of archaic Indian thought, *manas*, the human mind, is compared to the swiftest of birds (VI.9, 5). The mind of which the *Veda* speaks of is the numinous mind (the Latin term *numen* means a sign from above, granted by a force or a god). More simply said: a mind whose inner guide is the heart.

As in China and Japan, where the term *xin* means mind-and-heart together, in India the Sanskrit term for heart (*hrd*) is associated with the sky, literally the ‘inner sky’ (*antar-hrdaya*), and on the basis of the intimate mind-heart relationship ancient Indian aesthetic theory has raised the concept of selfless sympathy (*sahrdayata*) to the highest rank. Whoever develops selfless sympathy thereby transcending his or her own personal and cultural identity, gets in touch with an intimate and subtler layer of otherness and he/she no longer needs to travel physically to the antipodes in order to taste the wonders of everyday vision.

Before Elizabeth finishes talking she wishes to introduce a Japanese lady artist, Setsuko Aihara,² author of the “Portrait of a Young Lady” (2002), who happens to be her own daughter Helen. Mrs. Aihara was so fascinated with Albrecht Dürer’s (1471-1528) style of painting at the antipodes of the traditional Japanese style—for example, Dürer’s famous self-portrait with the thistle in his hand (1500)—that she assimilated Dürer’s manner and turned it into a vehicle of her peculiar style of painting.

As you can see, the attraction of cultural antipodes plays strange tricks on people’s lives, taking and giving new identities all the time. Perhaps the real reason why Elizabeth Costello (*alias* Grazia Marchianò) has come to Sydney is to waken an ontological doubt in each and every participant of this Conference, herself included, on the question of identity: whether apart from cultural distances and conditionings there is something that renders each one of us into a being linked to the origins, that is an *ab-original* being, and if this something that we all share may not be our possessing a heart. Ancient Taoist sages said: the earth is

man's home, the cosmos is the earth's home and the human heart is the crucible where the energies of heaven and earth meet and ferment as if in a veritable alchemic crucible. We may all agree that artistic alchemies have no other birth place than the inner crucible where heaven and earth meet.

NOTES

- 1 I have mostly in mind P. Hutchings's studies on "Young Contemporary New Zealand Realists", *ART International*, the Lugano Review, vol. XVII, 3 March 1973; and on "Aspects of Contemporary New Zealand Painting", *The Royal Society of Arts Journal*, n. 5256, November 1977, pp. 793-813.
- 2 An artist member of the Copley Society of Boston Oil Painters of America, Setsuko Aihara, MA in Linguistics, studied life drawing and figure painting with Ken Bushnell. She is recipient of the Crabby Award for the cover of *ArtCalendar* magazine (1997). Her works *Transformation I*, *Transformations II*, *Snake Madonna* and *Mummy Mummy* were exhibited at the Women's Art Show at Dudley House, Harvard University (1997). The *Portrait of a Young Lady with a Thistle* (belonging to a private collection) was exhibited along with her *Portrait of a Philosopher* and *Portrait of Ah Quon McElrath* at the New Members Show at the Copley Society of Art (2003). She has studios in Honolulu and Wien.