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Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation¹

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1. In search of self-identity: from Eurocentrism to *developmentalist* coloniality

I belong to a generation of Latin Americans whose intellectual beginnings are situated in the 1950s, after the end of the Second World War. For us, in the Argentina of that era, there was no doubt that we were a part of “Western culture.” For that reason, some of our subsequent categorical judgments are a natural expression of someone who opposes himself.

The philosophy that we studied set out from the Greeks, in whom we saw our most remote lineage. The Amerindian World had no presence in our studies, and none of our professors would have been able to articulate the origin of philosophy with reference to indigenous peoples.² Moreover, the ideal philosopher was one who was familiar with the precise details of classical Western philosophers and their contemporary developments. There existed no possibility whatsoever for a specifically Latin American philosophy. It is difficult to evoke in the present the firm hold that the European model of philosophy had on us (since at that moment in Argentina there was no reference to the United States, yet). Germany and France had complete hegemony, especially in South America (although this was not the case in Mexico, Central America, or the Hispanic, French, or British Caribbean).

In cultural historical philosophy, there was reference to Oswald Spenger, Arnold Toynbee, Alfred Weber, Alfred Louis Kroeber, José Ortega y Gasset or Fernand Braudel, and later William McNeill. But this was always in order to comprehend the Greek phenomenon (with celebrated works such as Werner Wilhelm Jaeger's *Paidea* or *Aristotle*), the debate about the Middle Ages (since the revalorization authorized by Etienne Gilson), and the understanding of Western (European) culture as the context in which to comprehend modern and contemporary philosophy. Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, Emmanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Martin Heidegger, and Max Scheler were the key figures. This was a substantialist view of culture, without fissures, and in chronological form going from East to West, as required by the Hegelian view of universal history.

With my trip to Europe – in my case, crossing the Atlantic by ship in 1957 – we discovered ourselves to be “Latin Americans,” or at least no longer “Europeans,” from the moment that we disembarked in Lisbon or Barcelona. The differences were obvious and could not be concealed. Consequently, the problem of culture—humanistically,

philosophically, and existentially—was an obsession for me: “Who are we culturally? What is our historical identity?” This was not a question of the possibility of describing this “identity” objectively; it was something prior. It was the existential anguish of knowing oneself.

In Spain as well as in Israel (where I was from 1957-1961, always in search of an answer to the question of what it is to be “Latin American”), my studies steered me toward challenging this mode of questioning. But the theoretical model of culture would inevitably continue to be the same for many years. The impact of Paul Ricoeur’s classes, which I attended at the Sorbonne, and his oft-cited article “Universal Civilization and National Culture,”³ responded to the substantialist model, which was moreover essentially Eurocentric. Although “civilization” still did not have the Spenglerian connotation of a moment of cultural decadence – denoting instead the universal technical structures of human-instrumental progress as a whole (whose principal actor during recent centuries had been the West)—“culture” nonetheless constituted the valorative-mythical content of a nation (or a group of nations). This was the first model that we used during those years in order to situate Latin America.

It was from this “culturalist” perspective that I began my first studies of Latin America, hoping to discover the place of the latter in universal history (à la Arnold Toynbee), and discerning new depths inspired primarily by Paul Ricoeur (as previously mentioned), but also by Max Weber, Pitrim Sorokin, Karl Jaspers, Werner Sombart, etc.

We organized a “Latin American Week” in December of 1964, with Latin American students that were studying in various European countries. It was a foundational experience. Josué de Castro, Germán Arciniegas, François Houtart, and many other intellectuals, including Paul Ricoeur,⁴ articulated their perspectives on the matter. The theme was “achieving awareness” (*prise de conscience*) of the existence of a Latin American culture. Rafael Brown Menéndez and Natalie Botana disagreed with the existence of such a concept.

In the same year, I was in the process of publishing an article in Ortega y Gasset’s journal in Madrid,⁵ which contested the “historicist reduction” of our Latin American reality. Against the revolutionary, who struggles for the future “beginning” of history; against the liberal who mystifies early nineteenth-century national emancipation from Spain; against the conservatives who, for their part, mythologize the splendor of the colonial era; against the *indigenistas* who negate everything that followed the great Amerindian cultures, I proposed the need to reconstruct—in its integrity and within the framework of world history—the historical identity of Latin America.

These philosophical works corresponded to a period of historico-empirical research (from 1963 onward) that paralleled (through funding that I was awarded in Maguncia over various years) the thesis in Hispano-American history that I defended at the Sorbonne (Paris) in 1967.⁶

A course in the “History of Culture” at the Universidad del Nordeste (Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina)⁷ gave me the opportunity to survey the panoramic of “world history” (in

the manner of Hegel or Toynbee), in the context of which I sought to “situate” (the location of) Latin America through a reconstruction (a Heideggerian “de-struction”). The product of that course, *Hipótesis para el estudio de Latinoamérica en la historia universal* [Hypothesis for the study of Latin America within world history],⁸ attempted to elaborate a history of cultures that sets out from their respective “ethico-mythical nucleus” (the *noyau éthico-mythique* of Ricoeur). In order to engage in an intercultural dialogue, it was necessary to begin by conducting an analysis of the most remote “contents” of their mythical narratives, of the supposed ontologies and the ethico-political structure underlying each of the cultures in question. There is a tendency to quickly theorize such a dialogue without a concrete understanding of its possible themes. For this reason, that *Lectures of 1966*, with an extensive methodological introduction, and with a minimal description of the “great cultures” (taking into account, criticizing, and integrating the visions of Hegel, Nicolay Danilevsky, Wilhelm Dilthey, Oswald Spengler, Alfred Weber, Karl Jaspers, Arnold Toynbee, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and many others, and with reference to the most important contemporary world histories) allowed me to “situate” Latin America, as mentioned, within the process of human development since the origins of the *homo* species, through the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, and up to the time of the West’s invasion of America.⁹ From Mesopotamia and Egypt to India and China and across the Pacific, one finds great Neolithic American cultures (a source of Latin American “proto-history”). The confrontation between sedentary agricultural communities and the Indo-Europeans of the Euro-Asiatic steppes (among them the Greeks and Romans), and between these latter and the Semites (mostly from the Arabian desert), provided me a key to the history of this “ethical-mythic nucleus,” which had passed through the Byzantine and Muslim worlds, arriving at the Romanized Iberian Peninsula (the other source of our “Latin American proto-history”).

In March of 1967, returning to Latin America, when the ship passed through Barcelona, the editor of *Nova Terra* hand-delivered to me my first book: *Hipótesis para una historia de la iglesia en América Latina*. In this work one could see, at the religious level, the basic contours of a philosophy of culture for our continent. This small work “would make history,” because it offered the first reinterpretation of religious history within the context of a global cultural history. In the historiographic tradition, the question was formulated as follows: “What were the relations between church and state?” Now, on the other hand, it was defined in terms of: “The cultural clash and the position of the church.”¹⁰ The crisis of emancipation from Spain, enthroned until 1810, was described as “the passage from a *model of Christendom* to that of a *pluralist and secular society*.” In this work, we can already see a *new cultural* history of Latin America (not only of the church), which was no longer Eurocentric but still “developmentalist.”

This is why, when I gave the speech “Cultura, cultura latinoamericana y cultura nacional” [Culture, Latin American culture, and national culture] at a conference at the Universidad del Nordeste on May 25, 1967,¹¹ it was like a *Manifesto*, a “generational take of consciousness.” Rereading it, I find sketched out many issues that, in one way or another,

would be modified or expanded over the next thirty years or more.

In September of that same year, I began giving semester-long courses in an Institute based in Quito (Ecuador), where I was able to posit the full breadth of this new reconstructive vision of the history of Latin American culture in the presence of over eighty participants from almost every Latin American country (including the Caribbean and U.S. Latinos). The impression that I caused in the audience was immense and profound—disquieting for some—and in the end, inspiring in all the hope for a new interpretive era.¹² In a lecture given in Buenos Aires in 1969, I began with “Toward a Philosophy of Culture,” (see “Cultura latinoamericana e historia de la iglesia” 33-47) a question that culminated with a section entitled: “The Achievement of Latin American Consciousness,” which was perceived as the cry of a generation:

It is commonplace now to say that our cultural past is heterogeneous and at times incoherent, hybrid, and even in a certain way marginal in comparison to European culture. But what is most tragic is when the very existence of such a culture is ignored, since what is relevant is that, at any rate, there exists a culture in Latin America. Although some may deny it, its originality is evident, in art, in the style of life. (48)

As a professor in the National University of Cuyo (Mendoza, Argentina), I let flow this very same historical reconstruction, and did so in a strictly philosophical way. This took the form of an anthropological trilogy (in questions such as the conceptualization of the body-soul and the immortality of the soul; or the spirit-flesh, person, resurrection, etc.), always bearing in mind the question of the origins of “Latin American culture.” These works were published as *El humanismo helénico* [Hellenic humanism], *El humanism semita* [Semitic humanism], and *El dualismo en la antropología de la cristiandad* [Dualism in the anthropology of Christendom]. The latter concluded the *Lectures of 1966*, which had covered up to the fifth-century of Latin-Germanic Christianity and its relationship with and expansion into Latin America. I reconstructed anew the history of different Christianities (Armenian, Georgian, Byzantine, Coptic, Latin-Germanic, etc.) and described, in later works, the clash of the Islamic world with Christian Spain (between 711 and 1492).¹³

The obsession was not to leave aside any century without being able to integrate it into a view of World History which would allow us to understand the “origin,” “growth,” and “content” of Latin American culture. Both existential demands and a (still Eurocentric) philosophy led us to search for a cultural identity, but it was there that a rupture began to appear.

2. Core and periphery: the problem of liberation

Since the end of the 1960s, as a fruit of the emergence of *critical* Latin American social science (particularly “Dependency Theory”),¹⁴ as well as the Emmanuel Levinas’s

lecture *Totality and Infinity*, and perhaps initially and principally as a result of the popular and student movements of 1968 (worldwide, but fundamentally in Argentina and the rest of Latin America), a historical rupture was produced in the field of philosophy and, consequently, in the philosophy of culture. What had been previously considered the metropolitan and colonial worlds were now categorized (through the still developmentalist terminology of the economist Raúl Presbisch of the CEPAL) as “core” and “periphery.” To this, we should add an entire categorical horizon originating in *critical* economics, which demanded the incorporation of social classes as intersubjective actors to be integrated into a definition of culture. This was not merely a terminological question but a conceptual one, which allowed for the rupturing of the substantialist conception of culture and for the discovery of fractures (internal to each culture) and between them (not only as an intercultural “dialogue” or “clash,” but rather, more strictly, as *domination* and *exploitation* of one culture over others). It was necessary to take into account on all levels the asymmetry of the actors involved. The “culturalist” stage was over. Thus, in 1983, in a chapter entitled “Beyond Culturalism,” I wrote:

From the structuralist view of culturalism, it was impossible to understand the changing situations of *hegemony*, within the well-defined historical blocs, and in respect to the ideological formations of diverse classes and factions [...]. Moreover, culturalism lacked the categories of *political society* (in the last analysis, the state) and *civil society* [...]. (*Historia general de la iglesia* 35-36)

Latin American philosophy, as *Philosophy of Liberation*, discovered its cultural conditioning (since it understood itself *from the perspective of* a determinate culture), but, moreover, it was articulated (explicitly or implicitly) from the perspective of the interests of determinate classes, groups, genders, races, etc. Location¹⁵ had been discovered and was the first philosophical theme to be addressed. Intercultural “dialogue” had lost its simplicity and came to be understood as over determined by the entirety of the colonial era. In fact, in 1974 we initiated an intercontinental “South-South dialogue” between thinkers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, whose first meeting was held in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) in 1976.¹⁶ Those encounters gave us a new and immediate panorama of the great cultures of humanity.¹⁷

This new vision of culture was on display at the last of these meetings, which took place at the University of El Salvador in Buenos Aires, at which point the Philosophy of Liberation was already fully in development.¹⁸ It represented a frontal attack on the position of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, an eminent Argentinean educator and author of *Facundo: Civilización o barbarie*. For him, civilization meant North American culture and barbarism was represented by the federal *caudillos* that struggled for regional autonomy against the port of Buenos Aires (the transmission belt of English domination). My critique was the beginning of a de-mythologization of the national “heroes,” who had conceived a neocolonial model in

Argentina that had already begun to run out of steam.¹⁹ An “imperial” culture (that of the core), which originated with the invasion of América²⁰ in 1492, confronted the “peripheral” cultures in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. The result was not a symmetrical dialogue, but rather one of domination, of exploitation, of annihilation. Moreover, the elites of these “peripheral cultures” were educated by the imperialists, and therefore, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in the preface to Franz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), echoed what they had learned in Paris or London. Enlightened neocolonial elites were so loyal to the empires that they distanced themselves from their own “people” and used them like hostages for their dependent politics. Therefore, there were asymmetries of domination on the world map:

- a) A Western, metropolitan, and Eurocentric culture (the *civilization* of Ricoeur) that dominated and sought to annihilate all peripheral *cultures*; and
- b) Postcolonial cultures (Latin America from beginning of the nineteenth century and Asia and Africa following the Second World War) which were themselves split between
 - i) Groups associated with the current empires, “enlightened” elites whose authority required them to turn their backs on their ancestral regional culture; and
 - ii) The popular majority, settled in their traditions, which they defended (often in a fundamentalist manner) against the imposition of a technocratic, economically capitalist culture.

Philosophy of Liberation, as a *critical* cultural philosophy, needed to generate a new elite whose “enlightenment” would be integrated with the interests of the *social bloc of the oppressed* (Gramsci's *popolo*). For that reason, I spoke of the “liberation of popular culture”: “There is, firstly, a *patriotic revolution* of national liberation, secondly, a *social revolution* that liberates the oppressed classes, and thirdly, there is a *cultural revolution*. The last of these operates on the pedagogical level, the level of the youth, the level of culture” (*Oito ensaios* 137). That peripheral culture—oppressed by the imperial culture—should be the point of departure for intercultural dialogue. I wrote in 1973:

The culture of cultural poverty, far from being a minor culture, represents the most uncontaminated and irradiative core of the resistance of the oppressed against the oppressor [...] In order to create something new, one must have a new word that bursts in from the *exteriority*. This *exteriority* is the people itself which, despite being oppressed by the system, is totally foreign to it. (*Oito ensaios* 147)

The “project of cultural liberation” (see *Oito ensaios* 146ff) arises from popular culture,

although thought through the Philosophy of Liberation in the Latin American context. We had overcome culturalist *developmentalism* that believed that a traditional culture would be able to transition into a secular, pluralist culture. However, it was still necessary to radicalize our misguided analysis of “the popular sector” (*lo popular*) (the best), since it is in the womb of the latter contains the nucleus that would harbor populism and fundamentalism (the worst). Another step would be necessary.

3. Popular culture: not merely populism

In an article published in 1984,²¹ I again needed to clarify the difference between a) the “people” (*pueblo*) and “the popular sector” (*lo popular*); and b) “populism,” which has taken various forms: from “Thatcherite populism” in the United Kingdom—as suggested by Ernesto Laclau and studied in Birmingham by Richard Hall—through the contemporary incarnation of “fundamentalism” in the Muslim world, a “fundamentalism” that is equally present, for example, in the North American Christian sectarianism of George W. Bush, and the Zionism in Israel today.

In that article, I divided the material in four sections. In the first section (see *Oito ensaios* 171ff), I reconstructed positions since the 1960s, showing the need to overcome the limitations of reductivism (of ahistorical revolutionaries, or of the liberal histories of Hispanic-conservatives or *indigenistas*), and also reconstructing Latin American cultural history within the framework of world history (from Asia, our Amerindian component; the Asian-Afro-European proto-history through Hispanic Christianity; colonial Christianity though postcolonial and neocolonial “dependent Latin American culture”). The whole discussion culminated with a project for “a popular, post-capitalist culture” (*Oito ensaios* 189ff): “When we were in the mountains—wrote Tomás Borge about the *campesinos*—and we heard them speak with their pure, clean hearts, with a simple and poetic language, we understood how much talent had been lost [by the neocolonial elites] *throughout the centuries*” (116). This required a new point of departure for the description of culture *as such*—the subject of the second section (see Dussel, *Oito ensaios* 191ff).

Through a careful and archaeological rereading of Marx (from his early works in 1835 to those of 1882²²), we showed that all culture is a *mode* or a system of “types of *work*.” It is no coincidence that “agri-*culture*” means, in a strict sense, “*work* of the earth,” since the etymological root of “culture” comes from the Latin “cultus” in the sense of sacred consecration.²³ Both *material* poetics²⁴ (the physical fruits of labor) and *mythical* poetics (symbolic creation) are forms of cultural *pro*-duction (putting the subjective – or better yet the intersubjective and communal – *outside*, objectively). In this way, we recuperated the economic (without falling into economic reductionism).

In a third section (see Dussel, *Oito ensaios* 198ff), I analyzed the various, newly fractured moments of a post-culturalist or post-Spengerian understanding of cultural experience. “Bourgeois culture” (a, below) was studied in its abstract relation to “proletarian

culture” (b), and the “culture of the core countries” was analyzed in relation to the “culture of the peripheral countries” (in the order of the global “world-system”). Moreover, “multinational culture or cultural imperialism” (c) was described in relation to the “mass or alienated culture,” (d) which was globalized, and (e) “national or populist culture” was integrated with the “culture of the enlightened elite,” (f) and it then counterposed to “popular culture,”²⁵ or “resistance through cultural creation” (g).

Evidently, this cultural typology, and its categorical criteria, would presuppose a long and critical “epistemological struggle” proper to the new social sciences of Latin America and the Philosophy of Liberation. We had already achieved these distinctions long before, but now they took a more definitive shape.

DIAGRAM 1:

(a) Bourgeois culture	Core capitalism	Multinational culture (c)		National culture (e)	Mass culture (d)
	Peripheral capitalism	Enlightened culture (f)			
(b) Proletarian culture	Wage-labor	<i>Campesinos</i>	Popular culture (g)	National culture (e)	Mass culture (d)
	Maintain exteriority ²⁶	Ethnic groups, Artisans, Marginals, Others			

In 1977, in the third volume of *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana* [Toward an ethics of Latin American liberation], I wrote:

*Imperial culture*²⁷ (with universal claims) is not the same thing as *national culture* (which itself is not identical to the popular sector), nor is it the same as the *enlightened culture* of the neocolonial elite (which is not always bourgeois, but is always oligarchic), nor is it the same as *mass culture* (which is alienating and one-dimensional, in the core as well as in the periphery), nor is it the same as *popular culture*. (*La pedagógica latinoamericana* 72)

And it continued:

Imperial, enlightened, and mass culture (within which we can include proletarian culture as a negativity) are the imperative internal moments in the dominant totality. However, *national culture* is still wrong despite its importance [...] *Popular culture* is the key moment for [cultural] liberation. (*La pedagógica*

latinoamericana 72)

In the 1980s, with the active presence of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in Nicaragua and many other events in Latin America, creative culture was conceived of as “popular revolutionary culture” (see Cardenal 163ff):

Latin American popular culture—I wrote in the 1984 article mentioned—can only be elucidated, decanted, and authenticated in the process of liberation (economically from capitalism, politically from oppression), establishing a new democratic type, thereby representing *cultural liberation*, taking a creative step along the path of the historico-cultural tradition of the oppressed, the current revolutionary protagonists. (See Dussel, *Oito ensaios* 220-21)²⁸

In that era, one spoke of the “historical subject” of revolutionary culture: the “people” (*pueblo*) as the “social bloc of the oppressed,” when it recovered the “subjective consciousness” of its historico-revolutionary function (See Arce 155; Ramírez 8).

This notion of popular culture was not populist. “Populist” indicated the inclusion within “national culture” of the bourgeois and oligarchic culture of the elite, as well as the culture of the proletariat, of the *campesino*, of all the inhabitants of the soil, organized under a state (designated “Bonapartism” in France). The popular, on the other hand, was an entire social sector of the nation, insofar as they were exploited or oppressed, but who, moreover, retained a certain “exteriority,” as we will see later. This sector is oppressed in the state system, but maintains its alterity, difference, and freedom in those cultural moments scorned by the oppressor, like folklore,²⁹ music, food, dress, and festivals, the memory of their heroes, their emancipatory moments, their social and political organizations, etc.

As one can see, the monolithic substantialist conception of *a single* Latin American culture had been left behind, and the internal cultural fissures grew thanks to that very same cultural revolution.

4. Modernity, the globalization of Western culture, liberal multiculturalism, and the military empire of the “preventative war”

Although the question had been glimpsed intuitively since the end of the 1950s, there was a gradual theoretical shift from a) the obsession with “situating” Latin America within world history—which demanded a total reconstruction of that vision of history—to b) calling into question the *standard*³⁰ vision of that universal history (common to the Hegelian generation) that had “excluded” us, since the “eurocentrism” of the latter constructed not only a distorted interpretation³¹ of non-European cultures, but also—and this conclusion was unpredictable in the 50s and had not been expected *a priori*—an equally inadequate interpretation of its own western culture. “Orientalism” (a defect in the European interpretation of all cultures east of Europe, as Edward Said shows in his famous 1978 text *Orientalism*) was a defect connected to and simultaneous with “occidentalism” (the

misguided interpretation of Europe's own culture). The hypothesis that had permitted us to reject the idea that there was no Latin American culture now enabled us to discover a new *critical* vision of both peripheral and even European culture. This task was undertaken almost simultaneously in all areas of peripheral postcolonial culture (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), although unfortunately to a lesser extent in Europe and the United States.

In effect, beginning with the “postmodern” problematic about the nature of Modernity—which is still, in the final instance, a “European” vision of Modernity—we began to notice that what we ourselves had called “postmodern”³² was something distinct from that alluded to by the Postmodernists of the 1980s (or at least their definition of the phenomenon of Modernity was different from the understanding I had developed through my works, which sought to situate Latin America in confrontation with a modern culture as seen from the perspective of the colonial periphery). For this reason, we saw need to reconstruct the concept of “Modernity” from an “exterior” perspective, that is to say, a *global* perspective (not provincial like the European perspective). This was necessary because “Modernity,” in the United States and Europe, had (and continues to have) a clearly Eurocentric connotation, notorious from Jean-François Lyotard or Gianni Vattimo through Jürgen Habermas, and in another, more subtle manner even in Immanuel Wallerstein, which I have called a “second Eurocentrism.”

Focusing on this line of argument allowed us to glimpse a horizon of problems and categories that brought back interest in the area of culture, only this time as a critique of “liberal multiculturalism” (in the manner of John Rawls, for example, in *The Law of Peoples*), and also as a critique of the superficial optimism of the ostensible ease with which some suggested the possibility of multicultural communication or dialogue, ingenuously (or cynically) presupposing a symmetry between participants that is nonexistent in reality.

This was no longer a matter of “locating” Latin America. It was a matter of trying to “situate” *all of the cultures* that today *inevitably* confront each other in all levels of everyday life, from communication, education and research, to the politics of expansion, and cultural or even military resistance. Cultural systems, minted throughout the millennia, can be torn apart in decades, or develop through confrontation with other cultures. No culture is assured survival in advance. All of these issues are of increasing importance today, a crucial moment in the history of cultures of the planet.

In *Hypothesis for the study of Latin America within Universal History* (1966), and in my initial works of that period, I tended to portray the development of each culture as an independent or autonomous whole. There were “contact zones” (like the Eastern Mediterranean, the Pacific Ocean and the Euro-Asiatic steppes from Gobi to the Caspian Sea), but I explicitly attributed the unfolding of the “world-system” to the moments of the Portuguese expansion into the South Atlantic and toward the Indian Ocean, or to Spain's “discovery of America,” or to the first between the great, independent cultural *ecumenes*³³ (from Amerindia, China, Hindustan, the Islamic world, Bantu cultures, Byzantine and Latin-Germanic cultures). The radical modification of this theory due to André Gunder Frank's

proposed “five thousand year world-system”—which immediately imposed itself on me because it mirrored my own chronology—changed the panorama. If there existed firm contacts in the steppes and deserts of Northeastern Asia (through the so-called “silk route”), it was above all the region of old Persia – first Helenized (around Seleukon, not far from the ruins of Babylon) and later Islamicized (Samarkand or Baghdad) – that served as the axis around which the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean world turned. Latin-Germanic Europe was always peripheral (although in the South it carried some weight due to the presence of the ancient Roman empire), but was never the “center” of that immense continental mass. The Muslim world (from Mindanao in the Philippines, Malaka, and Delhi, Baghdad—the “heart” of the Islamic world—, to the Maghreb, Fez in Morocco, or the Andalusia of Averroes's Cordoba) was a much more highly-developed mercantilist culture (scientifically, theoretically, economically, and culturally) than Latin-Germanic Europe after the catastrophic Germanic invasions³⁴ and the Islamic invasions that began in the seventh century. *Against* Max Weber, we must recognize the great civilizational difference that existed between the future European culture (still underdeveloped) with respect to Islamic culture through the twelfth century (the Turkish-Siberian invasions would later cut short the great Islamic and Arabic culture).

In the west, “Modernity,” which was initiated with the *invasion* of America by Spain—a culture that inherited elements from the Mediterranean Muslims (around Andalusia) and the Italian Renaissance (through the Catalan presence in Southern Italy), to name only two³⁵—is the geopolitical “opening” from Europe to the Atlantic; it is the unfolding and control of the first “world-system” in a strict sense (through the oceans, and no longer the slow and dangerous continental caravans), and the “invention” of the *colonial system*, which over three-hundred years would progressively shift the politico-economic balance in favor of the peripheral and isolated old Europe. This was all, moreover, simultaneous with the origin and development of capitalism (which was mercantile in its initial stages, based only upon the primitive accumulation of capital) and Eurocentrism. That is to say: modernity, colonialism, the world-system, and capitalism were all simultaneous and mutually-constitutive aspects of the same reality.

If this is the case, *then Spain was the first modern nation*. This theory runs contrary to all interpretations of modernity as originating in the north of Europe and the United States, and is even contrary to the opinion of the great majority of contemporary Spanish intellectuals. However, it asserts itself upon us with increasing force in proportion to the discovery of new arguments. In effect, the *First moment of the Early Modernity*, the Iberian Modernity (from 1492 through approximately 1630), which came to have Muslim tinges through Andalusia (the most educated area of the Mediterranean³⁶ during the twelfth century), was inspired by the humanist Italian Renaissance. This tendency was firmly implanted by the “Reform” of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, by the university reform of the Salamancan Dominicans (whose Second Scholastic school was not merely medieval, but in fact “modern”), and in particular, a little later, by the Baroque Jesuit culture that in the

philosophical figure of Francisco Suárez inaugurated, in a strict sense, modern metaphysical thinking.³⁷ *Don Quijote* is the first modern literary work of its type in Europe whose characters have each foot in a different world: in the Islamic south and in the Christian north, in the most advanced culture of their era and in the emergent European modernity.³⁸ The first syntactic theory of a romance language was the guide to Spanish (Castilian) grammar edited by Antonio de Nebrija in 1492 (*Gramática de la lengua castellana*). In 1521, the first bourgeois revolution, in Castile, was put down by Carlos V (the commoners fought to defend their urban charters). The first global currency was minted with Mexican and Peruvian silver, which passed through Seville and eventually accumulated in China. This was a pre-bourgeois, humanist, mercantile Modernity, which initiated the expansion of Europe.

It was only the *Second Moment of Early Modernity* [“la Segunda modernidad”] that developed in the United Provinces of the Netherlands, which had been a Spanish province until the beginning of the seventeenth century³⁹: this was a new stage of Modernity (1630-1688), now properly bourgeois in its own right. The *Third Moment of Early Modernity* [“la Tercera modernidad”], which was English and then later French, extended the earlier model (initiated philosophically by René Descartes and Baruch de Spinoza, unfolding with more practical coherence in the possessive individualism of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and David Hume). With the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment, Modernity reached its fullest development, and at the same time colonialism was strengthened through Northern European expansion, first into Asia and later into Africa.

Modernity, like the “world system,” is five centuries old, and both were coextensive with European domination of the world; a Europe that has represented the “core” since 1492. For its part, Latin America was a constitutive moment of Modernity. The colonial system could not be feudal—a central question for social sciences in general, as demonstrated by the Argentinean historian Sergio Bagú in 1949—but was instead peripheral to the modern capitalist world, and thereby to the modern world itself.

In this context, there was a critique of the ingenuous position that imagined intercultural dialogue as a possible—and in part idealized—multicultural symmetry in which communication between rational beings would be possible. “Discourse Ethics” adopted this optimistic position. Richard Rorty, and to some extent Alasdair MacIntyre, demonstrated the complete incommensurability of an impossible communication, or at least its extreme difficulty. In any case, they dispensed with the situatedness of cultures (without naming them concretely or studying their history and structural content), failing to recognize the asymmetry that resulted from their respective *positions* in the colonial world system. Western culture, with its obvious “Occidentalism,” has positioned all other cultures as primitive, pre-modern, traditional, and underdeveloped.

Upon delineating a theory of a “dialogue between cultures,” it may seem that all cultures exist under symmetrical conditions. Or, that through an *ad hoc* anthropology, the task of neutral observation (or in the best cases, “engaged” observation) of primitive cultures can be achieved. In this case there exist superior cultures (of academic “cultural

anthropology”) and “the others” (the primitives). In both extremes there are the developed, symmetrical cultures and “the others” (that cannot even be situated asymmetrically due to the unsurpassable cultural abyss separating them from the former). Such is the case of Émile Durkheim and Jürgen Habermas. In the face of anthropology’s observational perspective, there can be no cultural dialogue with China, India, the Islamic world, Mexico, etc., because they are neither enlightened nor primitive cultures. They are “no man’s land.”

These cultures – neither “metropolitan” nor “primitive” – are being destroyed by propaganda and the sale of merchandise, material products that are always cultural (like drinks, foods, clothes, vehicles, etc.), while on the other hand there is an ostensible attempt to preserve them by valorizing in isolation folkloric elements or secondary cultural moments. A transnational restaurant chain (like Taco Bell) can subsume in its menus a plate typical of a specific to a culinary culture. This action passes off as “respect” for other cultures.

This type of altruistic multiculturalism is clearly formulated in John Rawls’s “overlapping consensus,” which requires the acceptance of certain procedural principles (which are inadvertently and profoundly culturally western and liberal) by all members of a political community, while at the same time permitting the diversity of cultural (or religious) values. Politically, this presupposes that those who establish the dialogue accept a liberal, capitalistic and multicultural state, overlooking the fact that the very structure of this multicultural state – as institutionalized in the present – is an expression of Western culture and restricts the possibility for the survival of all other cultures. Surreptitiously, a cultural structure has been imposed in the name of purely formal elements of coexistence (which were an expression of the development of a determinate culture). Moreover, this liberal state is founded upon an economic structure of transnational capitalism, invisible to its defenders, that has only smoothed out unacceptable anti-Western differences in “incorporated” cultures thanks to the previously-mentioned “overlapping consensus” (which results from a prior hollowing-out of the critical anti-capitalist elements of those cultures).

This sort of sterile multicultural dialogue (which also frequently takes place between universal religions) becomes in certain cases an aggressive cultural politics, such as Samuel Huntington’s call, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, for the defense of Western culture through military means, particularly against Islamic fundamentalists, under whose soil (they forget to mention) exist the greatest petroleum reserves in the world (and without referring to the presence of a Christian and Jew fundamentalism on a comparable scale, especially in the United States). Again, they fail to mention that the “fundamentalism of the market”—as George Soros calls it—serves as the foundation for an aggressive military fundamentalism, taking the form of “preventative wars” that are disguised as cultural confrontations or as the expansion of democratic political culture. In this way, we have passed from a) the claim of a symmetrical multicultural dialogue to b) simple suppression of all dialogue and the forced imposition of that same Western culture through military technology (at least this is the pretext, since we have suggested that it is merely about the fulfillment of economic interests, such as the role played by petroleum in the war in Iraq).⁴⁰

In their work *Empire*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt maintain a certain postmodern perspective on the globalized structure of the world-system. It is necessary to place prior to any such vision an interpretation which allows for a more dramatic understanding of the present conjuncture of world history, under the military hegemony of the North American State, which—as *home-state* for the largest transnational corporations, is slowly, as when in the Roman Republic Caesar crossed the Rubicon—transforming from a *republic* into an *empire*, a post-Cold-War domination that sets its sights on unipolar control of global power.⁴¹ To what is multicultural dialogue reduced in such a situation, if not to a certain naïve recognition of the asymmetries between participants? How is it possible to imagine a symmetrical dialogue given the near impossibility of seizing the technological instruments of a capitalism based in military expansion? Will everything be lost, and will the imposition of an Occidentalism (identified more and more by the day with the “Americanism” of the United States), erase from the face of the earth all of the universal cultures that have been developing over the last few millennia? Will English be the only language, imposed upon humanity that, under such a weight, will forget its own traditions?

5. The transversality of transmodern intercultural dialogue: mutual liberation of universal postcolonial cultures

Thus we arrive to the most recent stage of the process of discovery of our position, beginning from the new hypotheses of André Gunder Frank. His *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (and the more complex argument put forth by Kenneth Pomeranz in *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*)⁴² once more allows us to open up a broader critical problematic, which should take up again the interpretative keys to the problem of culture. We are now able to introduce a new theoretical proposition – which we call the “*Trans-modern*” – and which constitutes an explicit overcoming of the concept “*Post-modernity*” (since the latter *still represents a final moment of Modernity*).

This most recent working-hypothesis can be formulated in the following, heavily simplified, manner: Modernity (capitalism, colonialism, eurocentrism, the first world-system) is not contemporary with European hegemony, which functioned as the “center” of the market with respect to the rest of the cultures. The European “centrality” of the world market and Modernity are not synchronous phenomena. Modern Europe became the “center” *after* it was already “modern.” For Immanuel Wallerstein, these phenomena are coextensive (this is why he delays Modernity in the world market until the “Enlightenment” and the emergence of liberalism). In my view, the four phenomena (capitalism, the world-system, colonialism, and modernity) are contemporary to one another, but they do not respond to the “centrality” of the world market. Today, then, I should note that until 1789 (to give a symbolic date for the end of the eighteenth century), China and the region of Hindustan had a productive-economic weight in the “world market” (producing its most important goods, like porcelain, silk, etc.) that Europe could not equal. Europe could not sell

anything in the market of the Far East, and it has only been able to make purchases in the Chinese market until the end of the eighteenth century thanks to Latin America silver (primarily from Peru and Mexico).

Europe began to function as the “center” of the world market (and therefore to extend the “world system” throughout the world) with the advent of the industrial revolution; on the cultural level, this produced the phenomenon of the Enlightenment, the origins of which, *in the long run*,⁴³ we should look for in the Averroist philosophy of the caliphate of Cordoba. Europe's crucial and enlightened hegemony scarcely lasted two centuries (1789-1989).⁴⁴ Only two centuries! Too short-term to profoundly transform the “ethico-mythical nucleus” (to use Ricoeur's expression) of ancient and great cultures like the Chinese and others of the Far East (like the Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.), the Hindustanic, the Islamic, the Russian-Byzantine, and even the Bantu or the Latin American (though with a different structural composition). These cultures have been partly *colonized*, but most of the structure of their values has been excluded—*disdained, negated and ignored*—rather than annihilated. The economic and political system has been dominated in order to exert colonial power and to accumulate massive riches, but those cultures were deemed to be unworthy, insignificant, unimportant, and useless. This disdain, however, has allowed them to survive in silence, in the shadows, simultaneously scorned by their own modernized and westernized elites. This negated “exteriority.” that alterity—always existent and latent—indicates the reality of an unsuspected cultural richness, which is slowly revived like the flames of the fire of those fathoms buried under the sea of ashes from hundreds of years of colonialism. This cultural exteriority is not merely a substantive, uncontaminated, and eternal “identity.” It has been evolving in the face of Modernity itself; what is at stake is the “identity” in the sense of process and growth, but always as an exteriority.

These universal cultures, asymmetrical in terms of their economic, political, scientific, technological, and military conditions, therefore maintain an alterity with respect to European Modernity, with which they have coexisted, responding in their own way to its challenges. They are not dead but alive, and presently in the midst of a process of rebirth, searching for new paths for future development (and inevitably at times taking the wrong paths). Since they are not modern, these cultures cannot be *post-modern* either. They are simultaneously *pre-modern* (older than modernity), *contemporary* to Modernity, and soon, *trans-modern* as well. *Post-modernism* is a final stage in modern European/North American culture, the “core” of Modernity. Chinese or Vedic cultures could never be European *post-modern*, but rather are something very different as a result of their distinct roots.

Thus, the strict concept of the “*trans-modern*”⁴⁵ attempts to indicate the radical novelty of the irruption—as if emerging out of Nothing—from the transformative exteriority of that which is always Distinct, of universal cultures in the process of growth and that assume the challenges of Modernity, and even of European/North American post-modernity, but which respond *from another place, another Location*. They respond from the perspective of their own cultural experiences, which are distinct from those of

Europeans/North Americans, and therefore have the capacity to respond with solutions that would be absolutely impossible for an exclusively modern culture. A future *trans*-modern culture, a *new age of world history*—that assumes the positive moments of Modernity (as evaluated through criteria distinct from the perspective of the other ancient cultures)—will have a rich *pluriversity* and would be the fruit of an authentic intercultural dialogue, that would need to bear clearly in mind existing asymmetries (to be an “imperial-core” or part of the semi-peripheral “central chorus”—like Europe today, and even more so since the 2003 Iraq War—is not the same as to be part of the postcolonial and peripheral world). But a post-colonial and peripheral world like that of India, Africa or Latin America in a position of abysmal asymmetry with respect to the metropolitan core of the colonial era, does not for this reason cease to be a creative nucleus of ancient cultural renewal that is decisively distinct from all of the others, with the capacity to propose novel and necessary answers for the anguishing challenges that the Planet throws upon us at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

“*Trans*-modernity” points toward all of those aspects that are situated “beyond” (and also “prior to”) the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a *pluriversal* utopia.

An intercultural dialogue must be also *transversal*,⁴⁶ but at the same time it needs to set out from a *place-other than* a mere dialogue between the learned experts of the academic or institutionally-dominant worlds. It must be also a multicultural dialogue that does not presuppose the illusion of a non-existent symmetry between cultures. We will now turn to some aspects of this critical, intercultural dialogue with respect to *trans*-modernity.

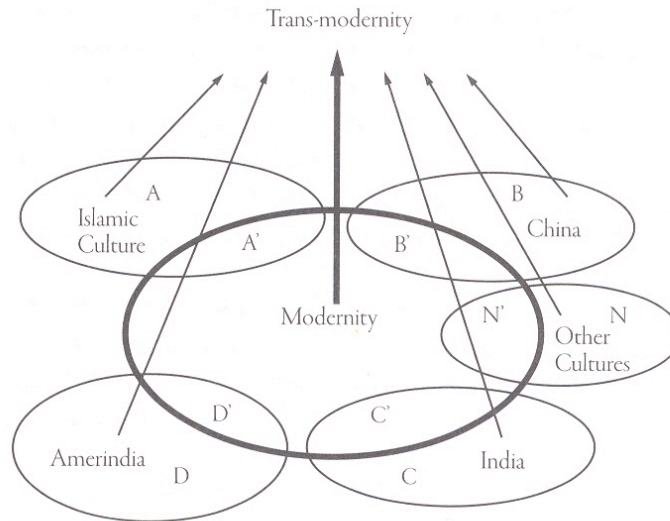
DIAGRAM 2

Rough sketch of the meaning of cultural trans-modernity

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Diagram 2

Rough sketch of the meaning of cultural trans-modernity

Approximate model for understanding the thought
of cultural trans-modernity

We will take as the leitmotif of our exposition a philosophical discussion of Islamic culture. Mohammed Abed Al-Yabri (or, Al-Jabri, in English), in his texts *Crítica de la razón árabe* [Critique of Arab Reason] and *El legado filosófico árabe* [The Arabic philosophical legacy], is an excellent example of what I hope to explain. Al-Yabri is a Maghrebian philosopher, which is to say that he is from a cultural region that was under the influence of the classical thought of the Caliphate of Cordoba, which began a deconstruction of Arab tradition.⁴⁷ In Cordoba culminated an authentic philosophical “Enlightenment,” a direct antecedent of the Latin-Germanic revival of thirteenth-century Paris, and as such represented even a direct antecedent of the eighteenth-century European *Aufklärung* (which was, according to the hypothesis of Al-Jabri, Averroist).

5.1. *Affirmation of the denied exteriority*

Everything begins through an *affirmation*. The *negation of the negation* is the second moment. How can one negate the negation of oneself but through setting-out on the path of the self-discovery of one's own value? This is the affirmation of an evolving and flexible identity in the face of Modernity. Postcolonial cultures need effective decolonization, but for this they must begin with self-valorization.

However, there are different ways to affirm oneself, some of which are misguided. For this reason, beginning with the example suggested in the first place, Al-Yabri criticizes the typical interpretations or hermeneutic “readings” of the Islamic tradition by contemporary Arab philosophy in the Muslim world. The first interpretive strand is that of fundamentalism (the “*Salafis*”).⁴⁸ This interpretation has an *affirmative* intention, like all the rest, since it attempts to recuperate ancient Arab tradition in the present. But for Al-Yabri such a current is ahistorical—merely apologetic and traditionalist. Another interpretive strand is the liberal-Europeanist, which claims to be merely Modern, but in the end negates the past or does not know how to reconstruct it. The third is the leftist interpretation (“Marxist *salafism*”).⁴⁹ The question, considering these three interpretive strands, is the following: “How [can we] reconstruct our legacy [today]?” (Al-Yabri, *El legado* 24).

It seems evident that the first step is to study that legacy affirmatively. Al-Yabri, a reader whose mother tongue is Arabic and whose training in Islamic cultural traditions date back to childhood, has an enormous advantage above all the other European and North American specialists who study the Arab world as a scientific “object” and as a “foreign” culture. Thus, he reads the classics, grasps neglected nuances, and he does this through contemporary French hermeneutic philosophy that he has studied as a Maghrebian. In this way, he positively expounds the thought of Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Avempace (Ibn Bajjah), Averroes (Ibn Rushd), and Ibn Khaldun, but he does so not merely as an ingenuous and apologetic *pure affirmation*.

On the level of popular culture, another example, Rigoberta Menchú, in *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, dedicates long chapters to the description of the culture of her Mayan village in Guatemala. She begins with a self-valorizing affirmation of herself, and this is the originary reflection upon which she constructs her entire edifice. Against prevalent opinion, it is necessary to begin from the positive origin of one's own cultural tradition.

This first step represents a reminiscence of the past from an identity that is prior to Modernity or which has imperceptibly evolved in the inevitable and furtive contact with Modernity.

5.2. *Critique of tradition with the resources of one's culture*

But the only way to grow from within one's tradition is to engage in critique from within the assumptions of that same culture. It is necessary to find within one's culture the originary moments of a self-criticism.

It is in this way that Al-Jabri carries out a “deconstruction” of his own tradition with critical elements of the same, and with others adopted from Modernity itself. It is not Modernity that imposes the tools upon the critical intellectual; it is the critical intellectual that controls and directs the selection of those modern instruments that will be useful for the critical reconstruction of her own tradition. In this way, Al-Jabri shows that the

“Eastern” schools of the Arab world⁵⁰ should initially confront their primary enemy: Gnostic Persian thought. In a strict sense, the *mu'tazilites* created the first theoretical Islamic thought (which was anti-Persian), with components of the *Koran*, but which also creatively subsumed elements of Greek-Byzantine culture, with the political aim of justifying the legitimacy of the Caliphate state.⁵¹ This is how *eastern* traditions were born. However, the Abbasid schools in Baghdad, as well as in outlying regions like Samarkand and Bukhara, as well as the Fatimite traditions of Cairo, with theorists such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna, were inclined toward the Neo-Platonic thought with theological-mystic tinges. On the contrary—and against many historians of Arab philosophy—Al-Yabri teaches that the properly *Western* Andalusian-Maghrebian philosophy (situated around the great cultural capitals of Cordoba in the north and Fez in the south⁵²), represented an original rupture that would have a powerful and lasting legacy. For motives as much political as economic (and here the Moroccan philosopher utilizes the critical tools of Modern European philosophy), the Cordoban caliphate, which as we have seen was *Western*, broke the theologizing perspective of *eastern* thought, thereby inaugurating a clear distinction between natural *reason* (which achieves knowledge through scientific observation, developing physics, mechanics, and mathematics in a new way), and enlightened reason attained through *faith*. This introduced a distinction between *reason* and *faith*, in which these were neither blurred together nor negated, but rather articulated in a novel way.

It was the philosopher Abu-Muhammad Abd-al-Majid Ibn-Abdun who brought the rationalist orientation of the Baghdad school to Al-Andalus (contrary to the position of Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Avicenna). A second generation, at the beginning of the fifth century of the Hegira (the eleventh Christian century) specialized in mathematics and medicine. The third generation, with Abou-Bekr Mohammed ben Ya 'hya (commonly known as Avempace), integrated physics and metaphysics and discarded the neo-Platonic Gnosticism of the *eastern* school, invoking rational Aristotelian argumentation (purged of neo-Platonism).⁵³

The Almohads had the following cultural motto: “Abandon the argument from authority and return to the sources.” This was the cultural movement led by the Amazigh (Berber) Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Tumart, during times of great change and thereby of great political liberty and critical, rationalist impetus. Ibn Tumart criticized analogy, seeing it as a method that moves from the known to the unknown.⁵⁴ If Al-Farabi and Avicenna had sought (due to the multiplicity and the political problems of *Eastern* thought) to unite philosophy and theology,⁵⁵ Averroes (in the Almohad *West*) intended to separate them while showing their mutual autonomy and complementarity. Such was the theme of his work *Doctrine and Ground of the Concordia between Faith and Science*, a veritable “discourse on method”: (revealed) truth cannot contradict (rational) truth, and vice versa. In particular, his *Destruction* shows that the arguments with which Al-Ghazali sought to demonstrate the irrationality of philosophy were not demonstrably true or apodictic. Thus Averroes elaborated and expressed the so-called doctrine of “double truth,” so wrongly interpreted in the Medieval

Latin World.⁵⁶ At the same time, the Cordoban philosopher suggested a method through which to interact with *other* cultures:

It is doubtless that we need to make use, to aid our research (a rational study of existent beings), of the investigations carried out by all those who preceded us [i.e., the Greeks] [...] Be that as it is, and since in reality the ancient philosophers already studied, and with greater care, the rules of reason (logic, method), it would be useful for us to lay our hands on the books of those philosophers, so that, if we find everything they say therein to be reasonable, we accept it, but if there is something unreasonable, it can serve us as a precaution and warning. (qt. in Al-Yabri, *Crítica* 157-58)

For this reason, “to adopt the Averroist spirit is to break with the Gnostic, obscurantist, and *Eastern* spirit of Avicenna” (Al-Yabri, *Crítica* 159). As we can see, Arab philosophy practiced this method that we are describing. It remained faithful to its tradition but it subsumed the best elements of the other culture (as determined according to its own criteria), which were in some aspects more highly developed (for example, in the elaboration of logical science).

In the same way, Rigoberta Menchú searches for the cause for the passivity and fatalism of related indigenous communities, and initiates a community critique that will bring them to commit themselves to the struggle against the mestizo government and military repression. Thus, the critical intellectual should be someone located “between” (in-betweenness⁵⁷) the two cultures (their own culture and Modern culture). This is really the issue of the “border” (the “frontier”) between two cultures as a *locus* for “critical thought.” This theme is explored at length by figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa with primary, but not unique reference to the case of the U.S.-Mexico “frontier” as a creative bicultural space. Anzaldúa has inspired various figures with this idea, including the decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo, among others.

5.3. *Strategy of resistance: hermeneutic time*

In order to resist, it is necessary to mature. The affirmation of one’s own values requires time, study, reflection, a return to the *texts* or symbols and constitutive myths of one’s culture.

Al-Jabri shows the error of “some Arab intellectuals, whose relations with the European cultural legacy seems to be more narrow than those that they maintain with the Arab-Islamic legacy, who pose the problem of contemporary Arabic thought in these terms: How can this thought assimilate the experience of liberalism *before or without the Arab world going through the stage of liberalism?*” (Al-Yabri, *Crítica* 159). Abdalah Laroui, Zaki Nayib Mahmud, Mayid Fajri and many others pose the question in this fashion. The real problem, however, is different:

How can Arab thought recuperate and assimilate the rationalist experience of

its own cultural legacy and bring it to life again, with a perspective similar to that of our ancestors: to struggle against feudalism, against Gnosticism, against fatalism, and to install the city of reason and justice, a free Arab city, democratic and socialist? (Al-Yabri, *Crítica* 160)

As one can observe, a project of this scope requires tenacity, time, intelligence, research, and solidarity. It requires the long-term maturation of a new response in *cultural resistance*, not only to the elites of other cultures, particularly those that are dominant, but also against the Eurocentricism of elites in peripheral, colonial, and fundamentalist cultures.

Rigoberta Menchú shows, for her part, how the community, upon gaining critical consciousness, reinterpreted traditional Christianity in order to justify the community's struggle against the domination of the militarized white elites in Guatemala. This represents a new hermeneutics of the constitutive *text* of the cultural life of the community (since the symbolic level is fundamental for Amerindians, which integrates Mayan with Christian/colonial sources).

5.4. *Intercultural dialogue between critics of their own culture*

This intercultural dialogue is neither only nor principally a dialogue between cultural apologists that attempt to demonstrate to others the virtues and values of their own culture. It is, above all, a dialogue between a culture's critical innovators (intellectuals of the "border," *between* their own culture and Modernity). It is not a dialogue among those who merely defend their culture from its enemies, but rather among those who *recreate it, departing from the critical assumptions* found in their own cultural tradition and in that of globalizing Modernity. Modernity can serve as a critical catalyst (if it is used by the expert hand of critics of their own culture). But, additionally, this is not even the dialogue between the critics of the metropolitan "core" and the critics of the cultural "periphery." It is more than anything *a dialogue between the "critics of the periphery,"* it must be an intercultural South-South dialogue before can become a South-North dialogue.

This sort of dialogue is essential. As a Latin American philosopher, I would like to begin a conversation with Al-Yabri from the following question: Why did Islamic philosophical thought fall into such a profound crisis after the fourteenth century? This cannot be explained merely by the slow and growing presence of the Ottoman Empire. Why did this philosophy enter the blind alley of fundamentalist thought? It is necessary to lend a hand through a broader world-historical interpretation in order to understand that the Islamic world, after having been the "key" to contact with the "ancient world" (from Byzantium, and to a lesser degree Latin-Germanic Europe, to Hindustan and China), would slowly but inevitably be left *outside* the central zone of contact with other cultures by the constitution of an ocean-based world-system under Spanish and Portuguese domination. The loss of "centrality" (and with it, "information"), the relative impoverishment (even if only for the inflation of silver due to the extraction of massive quantities from Latin

America), as well as other non-cultural and non-philosophical factors, plunged the Arab world into “peripheral” poverty. This led to a political factionalism and isolationism that “tribalized” it, disintegrating into destructive separatisms the ancient regions once unified in different degrees by law, religion, science, commerce, and the Arab language. This philosophical decadence was only a moment in a broader civilizational decadence, of the economic, political and military crisis of a world transformed from “core” to “periphery.” It is therefore necessary to link, for example, the history of the Islamic world with the nascent “world system,” with Latin America and with the growth of European Modernity, which through 1800 was, in cultural terms, as important as Hindu-Chinese culture. In the nineteenth century, that is to say after the industrial revolution, this would even allow the “colonization” of the Arab world. Cultural “coloniality” is expressed philosophically as philosophical decadence. Augusto Salazar Bondy posed a similar question in 1969: Is it possible to think philosophically and creatively from the position of colonial being? (see Salazar Bondy, *¿Existe una filosofía en nuestra América?*).

In the case of Rigoberta Menchú, the most productive dialogue was carried out between the critics of different communities, and between those of the indigenous communities and critical elements of the mestizo world and of hegemonic Latin America. Feminists, ecologists, and antiracist movements, among other groups, transformed Rigoberta into an interlocutor of many voices, of many claims.

Intercultural dialogue brings about a transversal and mutual cross-fertilization among the critical thinkers of the periphery and those from “border” spaces, and the organization of networks to discuss their own specific problems transforms this process of self-affirmation into a weapon of liberation. We should inform ourselves and learn from the failures, the achievements, and the still-theoretical justification of the creative processes in the face of the actual globalization of European/North American culture, whose claim pretense of universality must be deconstructed from the optical pluri-focality of each culture.

5.5. *Strategy for trans-modern liberation growth*

A strategy presupposes a project. We have defined the “*trans-modern*” project as a liberation intention that synthesizes all that we have discussed. In the first place, it suggests the affirmation, the self-valorization of one’s own negated or merely devalued cultural moments which are found in the exteriority of Modernity, those still remaining *outside* of the destructive consideration of that ostensibly universal modern culture. Secondly, those traditional values ignored by Modernity should be a point of departure for an internal critique, from within the culture’s own hermeneutical possibilities. Thirdly, the critics, should be those who, living in the bi-culturality of the “borders,” can create critical thought. Fourthly, this means a long period of resistance, of maturation, and of the accumulation of forces. It is a period of the creative and accelerated cultivation and development of one’s own cultural tradition, which is now on the path toward a *trans-modern* utopia. This

represents a strategy for the growth and creativity of a renovated culture, which is not merely decolonized, but is moreover entirely new.

The dialogue, then, between the critical cultural innovators is neither modern nor post-modern, but rather in a strict sense “*trans-modern*,” because, as we have shown, the creative force does not come from the interior of Modernity, but rather from its exteriority, or better yet from its exterior “borderlands.” This exteriority is not pure negativity. It is *the positivity rooted in a tradition distinct from the Modern*. For example, for the indigenous cultures of Latin America there exists an affirmation of Nature that is completely distinct and much more ecologically balanced, which today is more necessary than ever, given that capitalist Modernity confronts Nature as something exploitable, marketable, and destructible. The death of Nature is the collective suicide of humanity, and yet this globalizing modern culture learns nothing about Nature from other cultures, which are apparently more “primitive” or “backwards” according to *developmentalist* parameters. This ecological principle can also integrate the best of Modernity (and it should not refuse all elements of Modernity from the perspective of a pure, substantialist cultural identity), in order even to construct scientific and technological growth that emerges from the very experience of Modernity.

The affirmation and growth of the cultural alterity of postcolonial communities (*peoples*), which subsumes within itself the best elements of Modernity, should not develop a cultural style that tends towards an undifferentiated or empty universal cultural identity, an abstract universality,⁵⁸ but rather a *trans-modern pluriversity* (with many elements similar in common: European, Islamic, Vedic, Taoist, Buddhist, Latin American, Bantu, etc.), one which is pluricultural, and engaged in a critical intercultural dialogue.

Notes

- ¹ Translated by George Ciccariello Maher and Kristie Dorr, with edits by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in consultation with the author. Translated text in English includes the quotations from texts whose titles appear in the “Works Cited” section in Spanish.
- ² Our province of Mendoza (Argentina), it’s true, was among the furthest southern territories of the Incan empire, or more precisely of the Uspallata Valley between Argentina and Chile, with an “Incan Bridge” and “Incan Trails”, which, in my youth as an Andean expert, I could observe with awe at more than 4500 meters above sea level. For biographic-philosophical aspects of my generational experiences, see “Hacia una simbólica latinoamericana (hasta 1969),” in my work *Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty y la filosofía de la liberación*, 138-140; and §§ 1-3 in the article “En búsqueda del sentido.” 14-19..
- ³ Published in *Histoire et vérité*, 274-288, and earlier, in the journal *Esprit* (Paris) in October 1961. The differentiation between levels of “civilization” – with reference to technical, scientific, or political instruments – from “culture” indicates what I would call today a “*developmentalist* fallacy,” as it fails to note that all instrumental systems (especially the political, but also the economic) are already “cultural.”
- ⁴ These works were published in the special issue “Amérique latine et conscience chrétienne,” *Esprit* (1965)..
- ⁵ See “Iberoamérica en la Historia Universal.” At that time I had nearly completed two books: *El humanismo helénico* written in 1961, and *El humanismo semita* written in 1964, and I had the materials for what would later appear as *El dualismo en la antropología de la cristiandad* which was finally completed in 1968. I had performed a

creative reconstruction of what I called a Latin American “protohistory,” that of Christopher Columbus or Hernando Cortés.

- ⁶ In contrast to many of those who speak of culture, and of Latin American culture in particular, I had the opportunity over four years to spend long hours in the General Archive of the Indies in Sevilla, to study foundational historical works of the scientific-positivist understanding of Latin America in the sixteenth century—the beginning of the colonial period. This filled my brain with an impressive quantity of concrete references from all parts of the Latin American continent (from Mexican California to the South of Chile, since I also immersed myself in documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). For me, to speak of “Latin American culture” was to refer to indigenous peoples, struggles for conquest, processes of indoctrination, the foundation of cities, missions for forced relocation and subjugation of indigenous people (*reducciones*), the local colonial administrations (*cabildos*), provincial councils, diocesan synods, the tithes of the haciendas, the payment of mines, etc. See the nine volumes published between 1969 and 1971 about *El episcopado hispanoamericano. Institución misionera en defensa del indio*.
- ⁷ Which took place over the course of four months of feverish work, from August to December of 1966, since upon leaving Maguncia in Germany I would return again at the end of that year to Europe (my first airplane trip over the Atlantic) to defend my second doctoral thesis in Paris in February 1967.
- ⁸ Printed by the Universidad del Noreste in 1966, with 265 pages; it is available through internet in www.enriquedussel.com
- ⁹ I omitted Latin-Germanic Europe, since I had only studied it through the fifth century.
- ¹⁰ This is included in a book edited in 1972 under the title: *Historia de la iglesia en América Latina*, 56.
- ¹¹ This speech appeared for the first time, with that title, in the journal *Cuyo* in 1968, and appears in a compilation in Portuguese, under the title *Oito ensaios sobre cultura latino-americana e liberação*, 25-63. I had included it before, in modified form, in *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 29-47.
- ¹² A synthesis of these courses in Quito appeared later under the title *Camino de liberación latinoamericana*. The revised edition appeared in Spanish as: *Desintegración de la cristianidad colonial y liberación*; in English as: *History and the Theology of Liberation*; in French as: *Histoire et théologie de la libération*; and in Portuguese as: *Camino de liberação latino-americana*. Another version was published in abridged form as: *América latina y conciencia cristiana*. These were years of great critical and creative intellectual effervescence.
- ¹³ For example, in the “General Introduction” to the *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 103-204. And, in many other works (like in *Ética de la Liberación*, section 26; and more extensively in *Politics of Liberation*, I again take up the question of the “foundation” and “development” of Latin-Germanic Christianity (the first stage of Europe, properly stated). See my article “Europa, Modernidad y Eurocentrismo” in Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* 345-359.
- ¹⁴ See the history and the theoretical reconstruction of Dependency Theory in my book *Towards an Unknown Marx: A commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861-1863*, 205-230. Theotonio dos Santos has recently returned to this theme in his book *Teoría de la Dependencia*, confirming my thesis entirely. From 1975 through the end of the 1990s, Latin American social sciences were becoming increasingly skeptical of Dependency Theory. I demonstrated (see *Towards an Unknown Marx*) that the refutation was inadequate and that, thus far, Dependency Theory has been the only sustainable theory. In a polemic with Karl-Otto Apel, Franz Hinkelammert has emphatically demonstrated the validity of this theory.
- ¹⁵[Tr: English in original.]
- ¹⁶ In subsequent years (and indeed up to the present), we have held encounters in Delhi, Ghana, São Paulo, Colombo, Manila, Oaxtepec, etc.
- ¹⁷ For me, after living in Europe for almost eight years, two years among Palestinians (many of whom were Muslim) in Israel, traveling and giving conference talks or participating in seminars on five occasions in India (among all cultures, the most impressive), in the Philippines three times, in Africa at numerous events (in

Kenya, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, Ethiopia, etc.), I had an immediate understanding of the “great cultures” that I have respectfully and passionately venerated.

- ¹⁸ This appeared under the title “Cultura imperial, cultura ilustrada y liberación de la cultura popular” [Imperial culture, enlightened culture and the liberation of popular culture] and was included in *Oito ensaios*, 121-152. This speech was given in front of a crowd of hundreds and hundreds of participants, and openly attacked the military dictatorship. It appeared for the first time at a conference given at the Fourth Academic Week at the Universidad de El Salvador, Buenos Aires, on August 6, 1973; in the journal *Stromata* (Buenos Aires) in 1974; and in *Dependencia cultural y creación de la cultura en América Latina*, 43-73.
- ¹⁹ The tumultuous protests of December 2001 in Argentina were the culmination of a long process of the hollowing-out of a peripheral state through three centuries of colonial exploitation, through foreign loans and extraction of agricultural riches since the middle of the nineteenth century, and through the accelerated extraction of the neoliberal model implemented by Bush and Menem. A generation was physically eliminated in the “dirty war” (1975-1984) so that an economic model could be implemented that brought misery to what had been—from 1850 to 1950—the wealthiest and most industrialized country in Latin America. All of this had been clearly foreseen since the early 1970s by Philosophy of Liberation, following the rightward political shift that removed the Cámpora administration, under the direction of the unconcealable fascism of J.D. Perón from June 1973.
- ²⁰[Tr: I retain the accent to emphasize that Dussel is referring to Latin America as a whole, and not the United States.]
- ²¹ “Cultura latinoamericana y Filosofía de la Liberación (Cultura popular revolucionaria: más allá del populismo and dogmatismo)”, in *Oito ensaios* 171-231. It first appeared in *Cristianismo y Sociedad* (México) in 1984, and and in *Latinoamérica: Anuario de Estudios Latinoamericanos* (México) in 1985.
- ²² This was later explored in my trilogy: *La producción teórica de Marx*; *Hacia un Marx desconocido* (translated in English as *Towards an Unknown Marx*), and *El último Marx*.
- ²³ Although in reality these are the same things, because upon harming the *terra mater* with the plow, the Indo-European needed a sacred act of anticipated “reparation”: a “cult of *terra mater*” serving as a condition for the possibility of extracting from it – through work and its “sorrows” (both those of the earth and of humanity) – the fruit, the harvest, human nourishment. This is the dialectic of life-death, happiness-sorrow, nourishment-hunger, culture-chaos. And consequently, of death-resurrection, sorrow-fertility, necessity-satisfaction, chaos-creation.
- ²⁴[Tr: Dussel refers to the Greek term *poietiké*.]
- ²⁵ See a special issue on this subject in the journal *Comunicación y cultura*; Bosi, *Cultura de massa e cultura popular*; Osvaldo Ardiles, “Ethos, cultura, y liberación”; Amílcar Cabral, *Cultura y liberación*; José L. Najenson, *Cultura popular y cultura subalterna*; Arturo Warman, “Cultura popular y cultura nacional”; Raúl Vidales, “Filosofía y política de las étnias”; among others..
- ²⁶ Keep in mind that cultural groups (indigenous, lumpen, marginal, etc.) are located “outside” of the capitalist order but inside or in the *womb of the people* (*pueblo*).
- ²⁷ In 1984 we had designated this “multinational culture” in connection with “multinational” corporations, but in reality it would be more appropriate, in 2003, to call it the “dominant culture that is globalizing from the core of Post-Cold-War capitalism.”
- ²⁸ Mao Tse-tung wrote: “It is imperative to separate the fine old culture of the people which had a more or less democratic and revolutionary character from all the decadence of the old feudal ruling class [...] China's [...] present new culture, too, has developed out of her old culture; therefore, we must respect our own history and must not lop it off. However, respect for history means giving it its proper place as a science, respecting its dialectical development [...]” (339-384). In this short work, Mao distinguishes between “ancient” and “old” culture; between “dominant,” “current,” “imperialist,” “semi-feudal,” and “reactionary” culture, a culture of “new democracy,” a “culture of the popular masses,” a “national” or “revolutionary” culture, etc.

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- ²⁹ As Gramsci points out in his *Quaderni del carcere*, “Folklore should not be conceived as ridiculous, as something strange that provokes laughter, as something peculiar; rather, it should be conceived as relevant and it should be considered seriously. In that manner, it would be possible to know more effectively the culture of the large popular masses (*cultura delle grandi masse popolari*)” (90).
- ³⁰[Tr: English and italics in original.]
- ³¹ In those affirmations that are so evidently true for all *Europeans* or North Americans that “Europe is the culmination of world history,” or that that history “develops from East to West,” from the beginning of humanity through its full development. See my first lecture given in Frankfurt, published in my book *The Invention of the Americas*.
- ³² In 1976, before Lyotard, I used this concept in the “Preface” of my *Philosophy of Liberation* where I wrote: “Philosophy of liberation is postmodern, popular (of the people, with the people), profeminine philosophy. It is philosophy of the youth of the world, of the oppressed of the earth, of the wretched of the Earth” (n.p.).
- ³³ [Tr: this reference is, literally, to the Greek for inhabited (*oikos*) spaces (*nenon*), and rendered in English as anything from “cultural circles” to “regional civilizations.” For an understanding of Dussel’s view of the role of these ecumenes, see the “Appendix” in *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 297-298.]
- ³⁴ A further explication of what we are discussing can be found in my article: “Europa, Modernidad y Eurocentrismo” in Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía*, 345ff; found in English as “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism.”
- ³⁵ For intellectuals from Northern Europe and the United States, from J. Habermas to Toulmin, Modernity more or less follows this geopolitical path: Renaissance (East)→Protestant Reform (North)→French Revolution (West)→English Parliamentarianism. Western Mediterranean Europe (Portugal and Spain) is explicitly excluded. This is due to a historic myopia. Even G. Arrighi, who studies Genovese financial capital, ignores that this represented a moment of the Spanish Empire (and not vice versa). That is to say, Renaissance Italy was still Mediterranean (ancient), whereas Spain was Atlantic (that is to say: modern).
- ³⁶ See the magnificent reinterpretation of the history of philosophy by Abed Al-Yabri’s two books: *Crítica de la razón árabe* (Critique of Arab reason); and *El legado filosófico árabe* (The Arabic philosophical legacy).
- ³⁷ Keep in mind that René Descartes was a student at La Flèche, a Jesuit school, and that the first philosophical work that he read was F. Suarez’s *Disputationes metaphysicae*. See the historical chapter in *Politics of Liberation*.
- ³⁸ But we should not forget that the medieval gentleman, Quijote, confronts the windmills which are symbols of Modernity (but which originated in the Muslim world: Baghdad had windmills in the seventh century).
- ³⁹ See the first three volumes of Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Modern World-System*.
- ⁴⁰ This was written in March 15, 2003. Guest editor’s note: The original Spanish refers to the “inminente guerra de Irak”, the imminent Iraq War. Operation Iraqi Freedom, as the military action by the United States against Iraq was called, began on March 19th, 2003.
- ⁴¹ In face of the passive position of Congress (doesn’t it appear to be an example of the Roman senate’s tragic lack of efficiency in times of Cicero, right at the heart of the Roman Republic?), the Department of State and President George W. Bush’s “team” make every decision in the previously mentioned Iraq War (like Julius Caesar who installs the “Empire”, a juridical figure and political institution that did not exist before in Rome). Guest editor’s note: This note was missing from the English translation. I translated it and added it here.
- ⁴² In this text Pomeranz proves that until 1800 England did not actually have any significant advantage over the Yangtze River Delta in China, and that after evaluating, with new arguments, the ecological development of the exploitation of the land in both regions, he attributes the possibility of the industrial revolution in England to two fortuitous factors which were external to the English economic system: the possession of colonies and the use of coal. No other factor were responsible for the minimal initial advantage of England over the Yangtze River Delta region which, within a short time, became enormous. He does not even

consider an economic crisis in China and Hindustan. The increasing and anti-ecological use of land in China required a greater degree of peasant labor, which prevented the simultaneous development of a nascent capitalist industry in China (unlike England, which could do so thanks to the factors external to its economic system).

⁴³[Tr: English in original.]

⁴⁴ From the French Revolution to the fall of the USSR, which has meant the unipolar rise of the current North American hegemony, after the end of the Cold War.

⁴⁵ See Section 5, “ ‘Trans’-modernity as an Affirmation of the Multiculturality Excluded by European Modernity” in my article “World-System and Transmodernity,” 233-7.

⁴⁶ “Transversal” connotes that movement from the periphery to the periphery. From the feminist movement to the antiracist and anticolonial struggles. These “Differences” enter into dialogue from the perspective of their *distinct* negativities, without the necessity of transversing the “center” of hegemony. Frequently, large metropolitan cities have subway services that extend from suburban neighborhoods to the center; however they do not offer connecting service between the suburban subcenters themselves. This is an analogy for what occurs in intercultural dialogue.

⁴⁷ Arabic, after centuries of translation of the Hellenic philosophical works from Greek, invented an extremely sophisticated technical-philosophical language. For that reason, from Morocco to the Philippines, the philosophy of the Muslim world is called “Arab philosophy,” the name of the classic language.

⁴⁸ See Al-Yabri, *El legado* 20ff. To the question of “how to recognize the glory of our civilization, and how to give new life to our legacy,” our author responds with a thorough description of the ambiguous, partial, and Eurocentric responses. The “salafies” originated from the position of Yamal al-Din al Afgani (+1897), who struggled against the English in Afganistan. He resided in Istanbul, took refuge in Cairo and eventually fled to Paris. That movement intended to liberate and unify the Muslim world. [Tr: “Salafi” means predecessors or ancestors, and refers to an interpretation of Islam which derives from the lives and behavior of the three generations that followed Muhammad.]

⁴⁹ I have indicated above that my first publication (1965) sought to criticize the interpretations or hermeneutics of the “Latin American issue.” All *new* interpretations grasp consciousness and critique other partial interpretations.

⁵⁰ The schools linked to Baghdad are truly *oriental*, closer to the Persian Gnosticism, whereas those linked to Cairo, to the Alexandrian Neo-Platonic tradition, are *occidental* within the Islamic East, as we will see.

⁵¹ In a truly original and authoritative manner, Al-Yabri shows that “Greek philosophical sciences” transformed into Islamic “philosophy,” theology, and jurisprudence thanks to four philosophical currents: “The first is that which is represented by Iranian translators and secretaries [...], the *eastern (Persian) model* of neo-Platonism. The second is that which is represented by Christian doctors and translators that had come from the Persian school of Yundisapur [...which] besides Nestorian teachers lodged a group of teachers from the Athenian school [...] this was the *western neo-Platonic model*. The third [and most important] current, *eastern*, was that which was represented by the Harranian translators, teachers, and wise men. The fourth, western, was that which appeared finally with the arrival of the Alexandrian Academy” (Al-Yabri, *El legado* 177 [Tr: my translation]). The Academy functioned for 50 years in the city of the Sabeans in Harran. This school was fundamental, since it represented a synthesis of Persian, Neo-platonic, and Aristotelian thought (see Al-Yabri, *El legado* 165)—a question rarely studied outside of the Arab philosophical world, since it requires a bibliography of texts that have not been translated into western languages. The “Brothers of Purity” [Tr: an association of Arab philosophers founded in Syria in the tenth century] depended on the tradition of Harran.

⁵² Fez came to have over 300,000 inhabitants in the twelfth century.

⁵³ See Al-Yabri, *El legado* 226ff. For Avempace, human perfection did not consist in the ecstatic contemplation of Sufism, but rather in the life of the “solitary man” (who, like a budding plant in the imperfect city longs for the perfect city), and the rational study of philosophical sciences. The act of the “intellect agent” *par*

excellence—the knowledge of the wise—is spiritual and divine. Al-Yabri dedicates several wonderful pages to the theme of Avempace and his treatise on the happiness of the wise, which was inspired by and develops upon the late work of Aristotle. See my article: “La ética definitiva de Aristóteles.”

⁵⁴ Al-Yabri shows the remarkable similarities between the basic theses of Ibn-Tumart and Averröes (Al-Yabri, *El legado* 323ff).

⁵⁵ That is to say, they confused and blurred the two in several manners, which would prove inadequate for Averröes.

⁵⁶ The “Latin Averroism” which was present in the schools of art, and would decisively influence the origins of experimental science in Europe, was an exception to this.

⁵⁷[Tr: English in original.]

⁵⁸ The abstract universality, the claim of Modernity ought to be converted in a analogical pluriversal similarity (*similitude*), that is not the equivocal incommunicability or the identical univocity, but the concret pluriversality of the analogical similarity with the inevitable distinction of each cultural tradition.

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