



The Narrative as a Way to Construct Transdisciplinary Knowledge: Building Upon Experience in a Polyphonic Way

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When trying to glimpse at the possible realization of transdisciplinary, Basarab Nicolescu points throughout his work at the powerful potentials of the narrative, particularly in its literary manifestation. In response to that and with the intention to contribute to the further development of transdisciplinary theory and methodology, we aim to explore the potentials of the narrative as a form of transdisciplinary knowing that is rigorous yet escapes from the strict methodology imposed by positive science. Our contribution will explore the narrative in its aesthetic form (literature), in its form of vivid culture as well as in its form of cosmological fundamentals (stories and legends). It will analyze if and how the narrative offers a platform to entangle the abundant heritage of human experiences, both in a historic as well as in an individual way. It will finally asks if this lively, discontinuous and complex way of knowing may be a base for the construction of a more open, accessible and democratic house of knowledge.

Keywords: Transdisciplinarity, narrative, literature, polifony, knowledge.

1 Introduction

The structure of the expression represents a piece of reality while the meaning or the idea is nothing more than a shadow.

Paul Valery, *The dialogue of the tree*

“A word of a beautiful maiden that did not suffer yet the erosion of time is now expanding like an explosion of life and meaning, a little bit everywhere in the world,” [1]. Indeed, this is an odd way to start an article, as indeed, it is a curious choice to start a manifest to spread the message of a new and maiden word. The style of the unique Manifest of Transdisciplinarity is drenched with messianic virtues and glimpses of new beginnings, thus presenting a midway between a triumphant outpouring of the spirit and a treaty that leaves spaces of meaning open for understanding, attainable when interpreted within the genus (the manifest itself) where they belong to.

We continue to ask ourselves however why Nicolescu adopted such a descriptive style: to favor the incursion of a new vocabulary within existing knowledge and formal education?; to provide (as he claims)

in a secure axiomatic form the argument about something that, by its very nature, cannot be penetrated due to the limited light of reason?; or only because it was unconsciously created in this way by the less demanding hugs of his intuition? Was choosing the form of a manifest the easiest way to avoid the cumbersome problem of the elucidation of the concepts and procedures of transdisciplinarity or, more simply, to adjust to the fact that approximation always leads to partial understanding?

It looks like Nicolescu wants to tell us how everything that is ambiguous can be the subject of transdisciplinarity, like the face of the moon that is halfway between viewed and invisible, or anything else that is in between being discussed and silenced. What way can there be to approach this kind of apprehension, when we know that the axiomatic knowledge is prior to us, and emerges rather from an inherited disposition than from intimate intuition, without worldly mediation? Certainly it is difficult to find an answer to so many doubts and questions, a reason why we prefer to see the Manifest as an exercise in style and as a fortunate encounter of words intended to be associated so they communicate something to us. To be able to do so however, they need to be submitted to a creative power that organizes them and gives them an organic meaning.

Remaining faithful to our own assumptions we, in this article, do not consecrate a definition of transdisciplinarity but try to explore, with hopefully suggestive outcomes, small regions of its vast territory, following some of the meandering paths of the verbal act of narration. Unlike Nicolescu, who explores the immense wealth of knowledge forms starting from the basis of his training as a physician, we draw from the experience of the narrative to discover our horizon of meaning. To clarify a little bit where we want to arrive, we like to present a short quote from *The Wizard of Vienna* of Sergio Pitol [2]:

“Of the various instruments of man, the most astonishing is undoubtedly the book” says Borges. “All the others are extensions of his body. The microscope, the telescope are extensions of the sight; the telephone an extension of the voice; then we have the plow and the sword, extensions of the arm. But the book is something else: the book is an extension of his memory and imagination.”

The book is obviously one of the many marks left by the passage of man on earth, and it seems to be among the most significant ones since in it, as the above words suggest, mankind has left memory of all that has meant “being a man”. Often philosophy, religion or science suggest us comforting definitions of what that means, but we nevertheless have not found the anthology of complete human experience anywhere, equally not in books. The amazing metaphor inherent in the great Borgesian library warns us that the quest for existential security will not be found in any corner. What mankind passed on to us is a rich universe of everything we have been, are and will be, and paradoxically that has been transmitted largely through books. Far from pretending to be exculpators of the book, this remark merely wants to suggest that the human being is basically and fundamentally that what he has told about himself over time, orally and graphically, instead of a sublimated essence of some *deus ex machina*¹. Mankind, as already suggested by the Greeks, is created through stories that are necessary to establish identity and to avoid getting lost in the awkward whirlwind of time. This afterwordness in the construction of identity [3] has been forged in many stories (myths and literature) in which the unequal and divers human phenomenon has shown many ways of communication and collaboration.

Transdisciplinarity, which essence is in that what is external and additional to the scientific method (without abandoning science), aiming at recovering all the exuberance and complexity of the human experience, cannot overlook or ignore the fertile ground of the narrative, in either its epistemological search process, its professional practice or in the transmission of the knowledge it creates².

¹“... the story is present at all times, all places and in all societies; the story begins with the very history of mankind; there is and there has never been any community without stories; all classes and all groups have their stories and often these stories have aspects in common among divers and even opposite cultures: the story mimics good and bad, international, transhistorical and transcultural literature, the story is there as life”.

²It is important to mention right now that the “fictional” nature of the narrative does not represent a different level of truth of what is put forward (less real or even devoid of truth), but is the very essence of the linguistic framework that allows access to the very reality and is the form to transmit to other realities. In Latin the verb “*ingere*” means to capture something through a form (*figmentum*). The late medieval poet Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Trattatello* translates the Latin ‘*carmina fingere*’ “to” *finzione*

2 The Literary Narrative

In this article we restrict ourselves to the literary narrative as a forefront representation of the oral and written word, while we are obviously aware that the narrative is much wider than the restricted domain of literature or verbal arts. The literary narrative however is of paramount essence to transdisciplinarity as it historically represents a plural and complex way of structuring reality and consequently understanding it. In the narrative, as in the arts and myths in general, the categories of ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ do not have a vital importance or essential weight [5] and the principles of classical logic have been avoided from the beginning³

, in particular those of ‘non-contradiction’ and of the excluded middle’ that both are central in Nicolescu’s understanding of transdisciplinarity [1]. The narrative celebrates the loss of centrality and direction in communication. Its image is that of the mirror that multiplies instead of reflects. Its proliferation is in fact an escape, an abdication from the security of that what is and a resignation to identify with that. In this infinite process of multiplication the faces of both the creator and the created don’t stop to show and hide and when the image ultimately fades, its underlying query converts in an absurdity and arid stubbornness. The narrative does not separate, as it knows how to encompass totality and to restrict to the blind imperative of demonstration. In the narrative, knowledge does not suffer lacerations as all can be seen and grasped.

In this sense we could explore, as we will do later, the path of polyphony. The great Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin [6] believed that we could find polyphony, among other things, in the uniqueness of the individual, which in fact consists of different “I’s” heard and held over time. Man is a living mosaic in a constant state of listening and appropriation. So are society and history that are nourished by a myriad of views, discourses, denials and camouflages. This represents the richness and complexity of reality as a place where truth is denied and the denial becomes an intangible truth⁴.

³“in the sense of composition”.

³The logic to which we refer is that of the aesthetic forms mentioned by Bakhtin [6], and not that of the formal categorical principles of classical tradition.

⁴Freeing the distant and wise Hellenics from all liability, the exercise of power and its formalization in generally recognized and accepted hierarchical structures, are that

These “I’s” of which Bakhtin speaks, point us in the direction of a notion of time that is fragmented and that matches, in many cases through a reality as a (grotesque) parody, denial with affirmation, pleasure with anger and joy with misery.

In this sense, the narrative paraphrases the transdisciplinary methodology of Nicolescu where knowledge is not simply a concatenation of easily verifiable facts that are accessible to everyone in the same way, but a personal (or group) reconstruction of meaning based on elements that are scattered and often incoherent. Knowing is chasing the trails of a mystery (as in a detective?) in the abode (possibly) of creativity [7]:

“So therefore what is referred to as the “knowledge” that Pasolini expressed when saying ‘I know’ consists of [...] being “a writer who strives to know everything he writes, imagining anything that is not known or said, coordinating distant events while bringing together the disorganized and fragmented pieces of a coherent political framework thus restoring logic wherever arbitrariness, madness and mystery seem to reign. To do all of that requires writing a story.”

So in just a few lines we are able to address a manifest and a detective that only differ from each other in as far as they belong to a different type of narrative, but that converge in the sense that both have the inescapable task of having to shape that what is scattered. Like in a square packed with people, where movements and sounds out of tune need to be touched by the right note of an eventual public speaker to reach a center of gravity that is at first strongly rejected by the multitude of private conversations.

To prevent that diversity of voices ends as confused and disjointed Babylonian babbling, it needs higher order synthesis and shape, whose fictionality, to which we refer in footnote 2, is not a simple adjective that is loosely attached (the fictional), but a noun clearly defined (fiction). Unfortunately, academic analysis has primarily been treating form-fiction as an aesthetic object (literary criticism), thus entirely ruling out the whole of ethical implications that an ordering of the chaotic implies, as well as the impact

what most of all have pronounced, not coincidentally, the words “contradiction” and “exclusion”.

that applying shape or form has on thought and behavior. As we will try to argue in the aftermath of this writing it is precisely here, in the order of the action of transdisciplinary knowing, where the aesthetical and the ethical may converge.

As will be clear by now, the point of reference to reflect on our impressions is Basarab Nicolescu's *Manifest* that we consider that to be the most prestigious, most intriguing and most precise approach to transdisciplinarity, as it sees modern science as just one of the many ways of responding to the human longing for understanding. Longing in the sense of looking at ourselves in the reflection of any otherness; letting human dignity prevail over depersonalized yet dominant laws of history; urging a reanimation of the subdued call to man to take responsibility for his own knowledge; giving new life and utopian breath to the dwindling candles of a civilization that is mired in an expiring progressivism.

Finally, with this text we intend to give a small and modest contribution to the practice of the narrative as a way to differentiate the metaphorical from what we call "reality" (the facts) and "truth" (how to reckon) knowing that, as is clear from the words of Valery presented at the beginning of this article, the meaning of a text lies more in the magnificence and coherence of its architecture (as in geometry, seen by Socrates as the supreme art) and less in the content of the argument or the alleged claims.

3 The Animal That Talks

The definition that the wise philosophers of Greek antiquity gave to men and women was that of the "animal of language". The individual that did not speak or that was dead received an indisputable distinct ontological status or, quite simply, belonged to another category of existence like a cypress or a tiger for who the whistling wind or shattering roar could never reach the dignity of true communication. For Parmenides, language was the arrangement in time of the act of thought, as there was, in Being, absolute coincidence between idea and word; it was not necessary to link thought with representation or interpretation or, which is in the end the same, illusion. Language was not submitted to any kind of mental schizophrenia, as thought emerged from the rational and reliable companion that we call the truth: "... thinking and being are the same," said the born in Elea.

However, the most interesting in all of that is not the epistemological status of truth or opinion, but the way a long philosophical tradition, from the pre-Socratics to the present day, has tried to explain the problem of knowledge. Parmenides wrote a poem to represent his ontological argument; Plato, as well as many centuries after him Galileo, resorted to the liveliness and the unfinished style of dialogue while Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida and many others - useless and tiresome to mention all - tested the precious Saussurean scheme of the signifier and the signified to try to express the intangibility of language. Everything, it seems, ends in poetry [8] or, in case this is more acceptable, in a complicated and not always pleasant exercise of style. From this we dare to conclude that fiction, as we understand it now, is not the prerogative of art only but merely a technical process that underlies any attempt of expression.

Throughout history mankind experienced countless ways to shape the chaotic while trying to address the maddening complexity of reality by reducing it's understanding to simplified and therefore abridged worlds. Are cosmologies not attempts to encircle the incomprehensible and to provide us with a secure place from which to speak? Are we sure that science can lead us out of the place of existential doubt if we admit that we can reduce the Method, for example, to a matter of style? Will the Method⁵ not be one of the many ways of organizing discourse and experiences, rather than an infallible tool for the truth? And will science not be yet one more fruitful cosmology, as the philosophers of Hellas apparently conceived it? As Sciascia said in *El caso Moro* [9], the truth is the filter that sits between us and reality (the same reality that Nicolescu, in the *Manifest*, calls trans-subjective) since, for us poor mortals thrown in chaos, what ultimately counts is how this reality is apprehended, that is, how it is represented and organized. So the truth, as Cassirer [10] guessed right in his philosophy of symbolic forms, is a plausible (and consistent) abstraction of reality, and not a natural coincidence between the fact and its representation. In short, representation acquires a status of being that is separate and distinct from the fact to which it refers.

All this presents us with the problem of the centrality of the act of expression (in our case, verbal) and the pleasant possibility of seeing this act as be-

⁵We refer to the Galilean method that still in general underpins the scientific exercise.

ing separate from the factual content that is usually attached to it as a guarantee of its truth. The old ghost of plausibility, suggested by Aristotle, does not appear because it is put to the test of reality (as the very citizen from Stagirus argued himself for the case of history), but receives its full proof in any act of representation or, to put in other words, fiction. In this respect man is undoubtedly a talking animal, while speaking and writing are traces of our passage through the journey of the soul. So as a partial closure, with the intent to underline the fictional foundation on which all claims of truth rest, we turn our focus to the sweet Lust, the crystal lady of Valery [11], who crossed out the daily appearances of Devil as the fruit of the despicable literature against the corruptible minds of men, while suddenly, servant of Fausto announces the entry of “a man who said he was a friend of the master. ...“and who”... spook Italian with a Russian accent.”: nothing more and nothing less than Mephistopheles.

4 Polyphony

It is proven that man, since he wants to fly through the endless skies of thought and rejoice with the exclusive materials of his mind, has not yet been granted the precious gift of solitude. As a result his voice, the single efflux that sprouts from the individual, is doomed to be emptied into the container in which everything is mixed: the world. And in this world he also finds the voices of others, not only people but equally things, ideas, mirrors that, in short, bring him back to the image of his body and the sound of his words; thus revealing other things, other ideas and other words, to the point that all the distance that separates him from other people, things, ideas and words, condenses in him and is released when he decides to build the story of what corresponds to him: his life or, if he settles for much less, some pieces taken from her.

Music catches well the subtleties of polyphony, and interprets it (in the strict performative sense) as a simultaneous set of different voices (human or instrumental) that are placed in different shades and go in parallel or opposite directions, thus showing its consistency as part of the unique and unrepeatable totality of a concert. That what most of all alerts our interest and curiosity is undoubtedly the whole of divergent voices that find their musical coherence in performing dissonance, and that lead us to the

apparent absurd thought that harmony, in a broad sense, is a well orchestrated dialogue of dissonant voices in the sense of note against note or *punctum* against *punctum* (counterpoint). This scenario of polyphonic counterpoints constitutes, for present purposes, a powerful metaphor⁶ that enables us to find the potentials of contradiction (represented precisely by the counterpoint) for realizing synthesis rather than for creating irreconcilable separation. Mikhail Bakhtin, while going over the cultural history of the novel, used polyphony to refer to the social nature of the ‘I’ that writes and, consequently, of any ‘I’ that narrates, provoking in that way a change of the well-known commonplace of man as “talking animal” into man as “animal that is spoken to”. This reversal of direction is not simply one of the many “language games” Wittgenstein saw as essential to humans, but places us in a concrete way in front of the arduous task of recognizing the illusory and ideological nature of any linguistic act and, as a consequence, of each word we use to cope with the challenging journey of life. We are made of an indefinite number of voices that manifest themselves, in most cases, through an equally indefinite combination of materials, among others, linguistic; but these do not belong exclusively to us, as we share them with others within certain historical and geographical settings that determine their senses (we use the plural as they are multiple) and their possible applications. This implies a substantial ambiguity of language (heteroglossia), as the linguistic act to which we refer is submitted to the empire of conjuncture. During such an act, participants choose words and develop discourses to free themselves from a situation they are, *volente o nolente*, wrapped in (dialogism).

However, the “animal that is spoken to” and the

⁶It is important to mention that the metaphorical sense that we refer to, does not intend to substitute a reality that it aims to explain by other means and through other examples, but intends to settle in the threshold that facilitates the connection between areas that, apparently, are not related. To illustrate this, we could say that the metaphor is an extension of the quantum discovery of non-separability (by which two entities continue to interact despite their remoteness), to the polymorphous universe of language. The formula of “all is in all” is nothing more than the transfer of a microphysical truth (for instance the memory of the first moment of life of the universe is maintained in each particle that currently makes up that universe, a reason why time and history require a different meaning) to the realm of poetic truth where memory, through metaphor (its iconic weapon), represents the distant.

“talking animal” are placed in different positions within the order of what we want to express. The first leads us to accept the performative nature of language (like a concert), where no speaking subject can break away from the linguistic universe that is pre-created yet constantly changing, in which he participates as an executor; the second leads us to acknowledge that language is, despite of its enormous range of use and of the multiple scenarios to which it leads, the way we have chosen to communicate, thus actively participating in the construction of this human phenomenon which we observe and live today. As a result, the talking animal is fragmented into a myriad of voices of which he is certainly not always able to capture the contrapuntal unifying potential. At that point polyphony becomes a powerful tool for understanding the ethical dimension of both the linguistic act as well as the individual’s behavior in a given environment.

Has this awkwardness, that most of us humans experience, something to do with the parallel inability to establish harmony within the contrapuntal game intonated by our words and by our actions? Everything we said resonates in the wise words of Montaigne [12] when he wrote that:

“[...]our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of opposite things, as well as of various soft and hard tones, sharp and blunt ones as well as tender and serious ones. What does the musician that only loves some of them wants to tell? It is necessary that he uses and mixes them together. Equally for us the good and the evil are implicit in our life. We can do nothing without this mixture; the one is as necessary as the other. Trying to wrestle with this natural necessity is to imitate the folly of Ctesiphon who was trying to fight with his mule by kicking it.”

The natural need that Montaigne refers to is, paradoxically, a melting pot of arbitrariness for our poor sight. But in part this is also true for nature as on the microphysical level, as quantum physics showed us, nothing is something full of possibilities⁷, so hope

⁷Here the following words of Milton’s Satan resonate: “[...] we have been begotten and created by our own essence and by virtue of our vitalizing power, while fatal course completed its full circle and reached the time of maturity of our birth, of this native sky, ethereal sons, our very own strength [...]”

is rather to be found in the future that is always locked in Pandora’s box than in verifiable facts and as a result, it is to be unfolded rather than to be found in the open. That makes us think that we better orient ourselves at what is hidden behind the appearances of what we put forward right now than at what is built from knowledge in a measurable world. True knowledge is always postponed and found in a plausible future, as Aristotle wisely stated in his *Poetics*, assigned to the likelihood and not the factual findings of the historical narrative. The problem for us, limited humans, is to find out how to understand and practice this simple warning that contemporary physics provides us with, avoiding at the same time that the desire to argue and prove things that are by nature improvable, prevent us from being clear.

So what Nicolescu defines as “levels of reality”, “the included middle” and “complexity”, that what he designated as the pillars of transdisciplinary methodology, must be understood as metaphors that are not less effective or less true than the logical-deductive proofs. Is Nicolescu not telling us that the area of non-resistance is the place where the reality of the object and that of the subject meet and free us from the difficult act of knowing?, is the metaphor not an indication that we are approaching the area where reality no longer resists⁸, but is allowed to penetrate and, in parallel, invades the delicate fibers of consciousness? We believe that the passage from the microphysical world of inherent uncertainty to the macro-physical one of measurable certainties is inherent in any path of wisdom or poetic intuition. Yet we have neglected that path in recent years and relegated it to play not more than a miserable role of embellishing, in fetish and anti-esthetic ways, the reality that we thought we mastered through the arms of technology.

The voice of Nicolescu in the Manifest is a poetical call (in the sense of a hope aimed at a possible future) that, as it belongs to an axiomatic genre, organizes and combines its content in a stylistic way. We see this as its main virtue because as a result it comfortably surpasses *pathos* and efficacy, leaving the desire for philosophical argument present in the text, but more as a guest than as an owner. The powerful ethical and militant voice we hear sur-

⁸“I understand as Reality first of all that which resists our experiences, representations, descriptions, images or mathematical formalizations”.

passes that of the physicist who seeks to disclose the physical foundations of his transdisciplinary proposal. The polyphony of the text is in the presence of all those voices that inspired his writing and, as Bakhtin mentioned, belongs not only to the personal universe of Nicolescu, but to the entire field of use of linguistic materials that he deployed. In a nutshell, the *Manifest* is an example of polyphonic realization submitted to a certain architectural form, whose pillars rest on the firm foundation of an ethical stance and a poetic proclivity. To end, on another level of interpretation more often given to the content: is Nicolescu not describing transdisciplinarity as the convergence of different fields (or voices) of knowing in order to realize the dream of the unity of knowledge?

5 Fiction

We often fall in the trap of misunderstanding the narrative, due to categorical overindulgence or economy of thought, and think of it as the exclusive prerogative of art. But if we accept that human beings are predominantly talking animals that, during linguistic acts, attempt to structure understandable worlds for communication purposes, we may conclude that we are rather animals that tell than talk. This brings us to the question regarding the relationship, as outlined above, between reality and truth.

The withdrawal of the existence of a full coincidence between reality and truth was one of the founding discoveries of modern age, with Kant in the role of material executor of this finding. But admitting that the world cannot be reflected as it is does not mean that we surrender to chaos or, the opposite, to the inevitability of a destination already created by someone. Realizing - for purely historical reasons - that we have been thrown into a world that holds few similarities with the ideal images we have of it, opens up the possibility to recognize and take advantage of the quality of the narrative characteristic of all human phenomenon. It helps us to see truth as the formal coincidence between a reality we observe on the one hand and one we envision in words and actions and that we, sometimes, put in writing on the other hand. The acceptance of this narrative truth means that every truth mounted is the result of narrative invention. The notion of time that exists in the one-way arrow of Newtonian physics actually bears resemblance to that of the

Augustinian *Confessions* in which consciousness of worldly things was perceived as being the antithesis of eternity. Past, present and future humans do not represent a worldly derivate of divine essences, as in the work of Plato, but are rather the result of the necessity, typically human, to build chains of meaning without which we would not be able to see or, even less, imagine ourselves.

So it would be no nonsense to say that what looks to be certain about humanity is, among other things, this narrative boldness in which both the hands painted in a Neolithic cave as well as the leaves pasted in a book about the Neosphere, appear to be revelations. However, the animal that tells displays in a narrative its truth through fiction that allows him to bring order to the abode of chaos and to build from there his reality. But for this reality to acquire a full and communicable meaning, it must be consistent, that is, correctly built, architecturally balanced and capable of organizing those materials of experience that are largely to be found in the word; a word that, as Bakhtin warns us, is not a prerogative of the subject in his abysmal loneliness and infinite freedom, but is declined gloss by a discursive and multiform context that is in constant motion with a large variety of power mechanisms in constant operation.

To explain this better, anthropology may help us, through the introduction of two authors, Clifford Geertz and Marc Augé who, coming from a disciplinary field that was already hybrid (something that questions the naive equivalence made between discipline and disciplinarity that is often used to criticize the rigid boundaries of the knowledge created by the first) both faced the challenging problem of interpretation as a necessary operation for arriving at knowledge. We begin with Geertz [13] to then focus, in the next section on “ethics and aesthetics”, on Augé:

“To elaborate descriptions taken from the point of view of the actor of things related to a Berber chieftain, a Jewish merchant and a French military in 1912 Morocco, clearly constitutes an imaginative act that is by any means different from preparing analogous descriptions of, let’s say, the relationships between a physician living in a French province, his silly and adulterous wife and the futile lover of nineteenth-century France.”

So what is fiction, when we consider the narrative of an anthropologist on the culture and society in late nineteenth-century Morocco as equivalent to a history imagined by an alchemist of language as Flaubert, roughly in the same period? Does the act of interpretation leads us to conclude that, by natural disposition, the human being cannot go beyond appearances?, or is it that there is no appearance because there is no singular reality, but realities that depend on both the contradictory nature of consciousness as of that of matter? If beyond men, disillusioned by the abjections they are able to create because of their weakness and finiteness, we thought the world of consciousness would never have reached the perfection of the natural arrangement, now we discover that the same unevenness, although we lack (and not little) apprehension, is found in the very reality. So where to hang on to when both the inside and outside world have lost the characteristics necessary for us to repair our existential security?, and where can we find the ethical principles that should underlie our behavior, if the reality that we previously thought as given (though inaccessible in its entirety) is, in itself, a fiction (in the sense of a construction which is both necessary and circumstantial, build of elements put together by a law that at the same time precedes the construction⁹)?, how do we relate to a “pluri-real” world that combines laws that are never definitive, materials composed by others that materialize themselves in improvised ways?, what do we do with a living reality in perpetual construction that constantly interprets itself? We like to suggest, as an answer to these questions, to think of reality as a poetic scenario that is constantly completing, in a provisional way, a fiction. This, always being closed and insufficient, is the positive, necessary and synthetic moment of creation or of, in some way or other, a possible embodiment of the entire universe; necessity as a carrier of emergent illusions of totality, to impose order on chaos. It is hoping that things acquire a visible and recognizable body that allow for memory to play with them (or to forget); it is the always frustrated hope that every creative act by nature conveys something in our attempt to reach the ultimate and final essence

⁹We use the term “necessary” to point at the synthetic moment that strives for unity, and to the term “circumstantial” to refer to the one who has the tendency to fragment. This specification is entirely conceptual regarding the universe that moves, contradictory but not incongruously, between order and chaos [14].

of totality.

Hence, here we encounter the crucial importance of responsibility because, in a universe without absolute center, the inescapable law of coexistence requires to relativize all centers sought of by the ego, referring to them as part of a horizon of dialogue and inclusion where no voice is silent. This “democratic” nature of fiction, besides having a clear ethical sense, also implies an aesthetic dimension in the sense that it gives classical antiquity, symmetry and proportion. The universe, without having moral consciousness of being, is wise and creative. We might even mistake it for an artist who knows how to modulate and join his voices into a symphony composed of contradictory elements; his credo being polyphony, his dimension being fiction.

6 Ethics and aesthetics

We open this section with a quote from the French anthropologist Marc Augé [15]:

If I want that the others [those who are the object of ethnographic studies] live fiction, and beyond that their own fiction, I have to situate myself by definition outside of that, and likewise outside of any kind of fiction, because my aim is to produce documents, as Bataille would say, transcribing what I have before my eyes. Am I not stressing the non-contemporaneity of the observer that Johannes Fabian precisely denounced and whose mark is present in all anthropological literature?, or to conclude: am I not contributing to the reproduction and amplification of ethnographic fiction?

Augé is aware, as is Geertz, that in any story where we intend to enclose the explanation of an event, as for instance in the case of an encounter with some cultural otherness, we create a fiction because only we humans know how to make a *posteriori* interpretations out of partial data structured in function of our inevitable prejudices. In transcribing experience, we make a reduction in the complexity of that what, through the selection of scattered fragments that we order along a time line, i.e., we create a fiction, building upon our own version of events, using the materials, both conceptual as well as linguistic, that we have to our disposition. The distance between

the experience we lived and that which we remember (non-contemporaneity) translates into a story as a hybrid compendium of memory and the forgotten, a story of which we are the authors.

This tripartite scheme reminds us of the structure of Hegelian dialectics, when applied to a particular case where it would resolve the duality between thesis (the experience) and antithesis (the memory) in the synthesis of a story. Meaning that fiction, where Augé is talking about, is the dissolving of the dualism between experience and memory under to the persistent macro-physical laws of time. Within this dimension, there can be no memory that exactly reproduces the lived experience simply because the distance that exist between the two terms (which we might think of as a contradiction), is only reconcilable if we give up the belief of full coincidence, settling for a story well crafted. The polyphony that we envision in this case, will submit itself to the rigid but inevitable prescription of time, and the fiction that results from it would become, at best, a well compiled summary of that what is experienced. As such, transdisciplinarity, in our view, discloses itself as an essential practice for understanding the experience of knowledge seen in an ethical sense, and as a force capable of giving attention to the diversity of voices intrinsically present anywhere, and yes in doing so, it will be able to express all voices in an appropriate and consistent way.

Summarizing and paraphrasing both Augé and Nicolescu, we may say that on the macro-physical level of non-contemporaneity, transdisciplinarity is the practice that tries to create a fiction (and hence a methods of inquiry) that is appropriate for and open to the diversity of voices, thus intending to face the challenge of knowledge. But, what happens with the issue of experience and the proprietorship of living knowledge? To try to clarify this question, we return to Nicolescu's concept of the "zone of non-resistance". This zone is the place where two tendencies come together, the subject and the object, who finally, through the occurrence of a third element (the hidden third), dissolve their distances. As we saw above, for Hegel the pair of opposites that are at the basis of the dialectical relationship (in the ontology of the development of reality as well as in the logical understanding of it), is composed of rigid and isolated bodies that need to be put in motion so that, like a pair of two molecules that both reject and attract each other, a third unifying element may

arise from their encounter. For Nicolescu, the third element does not require a temporal dimension but manifests itself, like in Kierkegaard, like a flash of eternity within the natural order of time. In the area of non-resistance the antagonism between subject and object is resolved in the contemporaneity of the occurrence of the third party, i.e., an absolute present that allows transdisciplinarity to penetrate the elusive realm of the sacred. Through the idea of no-contemporaneity, Aug places us, without any escape, in front of the problem of time, i.e., in front of the need to bring order to the chaos that surrounds us, following the linear structure created in the past, in the present and in the future. The past, present, and the future of the ethnologist are not the same as those who he is studying, his fictions are different. Only in moments of real coexistence, the researcher and the researched (subject and object) share, in the full sense of the word, the notion of time; only in the act of jointly repairing a roof when a heavy downpour takes them by surprise or when they eat and laugh together, they experience contemporaneity, that is to say experience that does not require the constant mediation of interpretation in order to be understood; in these experiences they are taken by surprised by unforeseen occurrences of chance. What do we do in these circumstances, when we are not in a position to control and regulate the temporal chain of causalities? Aristotle summarized the virtue of the wise, not the structured narrating of fiction but in his intelligence to know to do the right thing at the right time (*phronesis*). The subject of transdisciplinarity knowledge comes close to the profile of Aristotle's wise, when in the zone of non-resistance fiction is a "fiction in operation" (a narrative of contemporaneity) where the aesthetic dimension of construction of a balanced form goes hand in hand with the ethical composition of a balanced behavior¹⁰. In this place where the subject and the object meet in "contemporaneity", ethics and aesthetics convert in synonyms. This is, in our understanding, the place where the important elements of honesty and openness of Nicolescu's transdisciplinary proposal, get their meaning, sense and specificity.

So we conclude by saying that, in the microphysical level of contemporaneity, fiction is that what, ethically and aesthetically, structures the actual ex-

¹⁰The concept of auto-ethics of Morin [16], points at a horizon of kindred understanding.

perience of both the subject and the object.

7 Conclusions: The Occurrence of a Poetic Disposition

Although it is impossible for us humans to materially access different realms of the macro physical world, and although we are confined to unavoidable temporary fiction, we can try to introduce ourselves to the universe of the full vacuum through what we historically have experienced as poetry. Not in the sense of poetry as an artistic achievement but rather as a poetic attitude that we have lost by giving too much importance to an instrumental pragmatism founded on the belief that to achieve balance and harmony, it is inevitable to eliminate those factors that hinder the achievement of the goal that we set out for ourselves; we obscured the polyphony inherent in any reality up to the point that we now do not even recognize it anymore; we have dropped our anxieties in the seemingly calm, but very dangerous horizon where synthesis is replaced by elimination. War, even though difficult to recognize, is not an accident within the tortuous path of progress (although we believe so) but is, dramatically, the only way we've found to make up for and cope with the loss of memory of who we are: animals that talk in an overwhelming concert of voices. To build an artefact of beauty is, in the end, the virtue of civilized man who knows how to recognize and give space to all the voices that compose him. Transdisciplinarity is, therefore, the new episteme and new *tekne* of civilized man.

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