

isolation, such illegal crossing deserved to death. If arrested, he would be executed. But the young Japanese badly needed direct information about Western countries. He simply wanted to "study". The Americans who interrogated them about their purpose were strongly impressed by their "intense desire for information" and found the Japanese "an inquiring people" who risk their life "for the sake of adding to their knowledge" (Francis L. Hawks, *Narrative of The Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Sea and Japan...*, Washington, 1856: 420-423). Shoin risked his life for the sake of his "will to know the truth." In this choice (if not in this historical figure who was going to die tragically), Igarashi found an example of "negative capability", worthy of being followed (Igarashi 1989b: 175-7; cf. Igarashi 1991: 168-77).

## Commentaries and Discussion of Sessions V and VI

### INTRODUCTION

*We had an exceptional group of excellent Commentaries in these two sessions, by Ivan Karp, Benjamin Lee, Kyoko Inoue, Alain le Pichon, and A. K. Ramanujan. We, unfortunately, can only include Kyoko Inoue's, Alain Le Pichon's and Raman's commentary in full. But we will briefly summarize the thrust of the other comments here below.*

*As a Research Associate of the Smithsonian and a Curator of its Ethnographic Museum, Ivan Karp perhaps more than any anthropologist has experience of cultural politics vis a vis the display of materials from other world cultures. And he detailed for the conference some of these misadventures. Most interesting, in light of the subsequent papers, was Karp's use of Carlos Fuentes' distinction between "central" and "eccentric" cultures to point up the center-periphery dilemma in reciprocal understanding.*

### Ivan Karp's Commentary

There is a history which distinguishes between cultures we could call "cosmopolitan" and "local," and that we mistakenly could call "great" and "little." The history of area studies is affected with this kind of scheme of classification, particularly in terms of the East-West axis, an axis that defines certain cultures as exemplary "civilizations." This classificatory scheme is opposed to the North-South axis, which incorporates notions about political economy, dependency, distribution of power, etc. One way to think about this, and I'm going to give you an extensive quote here, is a distinction that Carlos Fuentes has developed in terms of writing between what he calls the "central" and the "eccentric." This is so wonderful an article that I have to read at some length:

The wily old dictator Porfirio Diaz, who ruled my country for over three decades, and who did not delete his expletives, once remarked, 'Poor Mexico, so far from God, so near to the United States.' My purpose tonight is to offer some random reflections on what I call central and eccentric writing, and what I would call cultures, on writers or cultures who are either near to God or far from the Devil, or the other way around. A writer born in Poland or Mexico, so far from the gods and so near to the devils, realizes before he is out of knee pants that it is one thing to write from within a culture that deems itself central and another thing to write from the boundaries of eccentricity, an eccentricity defined by the central culture's claim to universality. The central culture tends to believe that it speaks with the words of God, or at least, that it has a direct and open line to the ear of divinity. With the voice of Jupiter, Whitman spoke of Democracy with a capital "D," Sartre argues as though he were the proprietor of dialectics, Galsworthy wrote his novel as though he were the final arbiter of good manners, not to mention that imperial Atlas, Rudyard Kipling, who regarded three fourths of the world as the white man's burden. In this way, the central culture is seen by the marginal cultures as offensive, self-serving, devouring, one that imposes its own values and is scornful of any values that are alien to it. Hence, if we have developed a defensive stance, it is because of the offensive one of the central cultures, which has put us in the situation of a scalded cat. We are wary of boiling water.

There has been a lot of wariness of "boiling water," a lot of attempts to grapple with the very nature of the sedimented history of cross-cultural dialogue and understanding in contemporary academic discourse today. The kind of sedimented history that de la Peña has is both enabling and constraining at the same time. Fuentes ends by invoking Locke's famous children, madmen and savages, in whom reason is imperfectly developed – the idea that somehow the universality of cultural history is manifested only in a certain set of cultures in pure form:

To be universal meant to be part of the dominant classes, conditioned by the limited geography, the linear time, the future-oriented, and progress imbued culture, the commercial and industrial West. Demanded Montesquieu, how is it possible to be a Persian or indeed a Nigerian tribesman – a question asked in the context of universality – a Peruvian peasant, a Chinese Cooley, a Mesopotamian soothsayer, and also aspire to the true universal and human condition, as embodied by the well-bred croquet players on a well cut Persian lawn.

Since there is more than one hegemonic tradition, I do not think Montesquieu's question is necessarily bad, provided it is asked in

precisely the terms Fuentes asks it: in terms of the social situations both of the questioner and the subject of the question itself.

If we care about communication across cultural boundaries, and, as we have been arguing in the seminar, in that area between the boundaries, how do we get outside of our own habits of perception and structures of experience to be able to appreciate and know another form of life? It's the classical methodological question of anthropology, and yet, one in which we are all fundamentally experienced at one level. We all have experience of being an alien growing up in our own societies. We learn about our society both at first hand and in terms of what C. Wright Mills once called "second-hand worlds." Still we are shocked sometimes when we discover that other peoples' second-hand worlds are not the same as our second-hand worlds. It becomes very difficult, in fact, to imagine what indeed are the contours of experience outside the parameters of our knowledge. We seem sometimes to move between two poles: on the one hand, the relativist assertion that true communication between groups is not possible, that cultural worlds are incommensurate, or on the other, that in fact it is possible fully to know another set of experiences. The qualities of sympathy and imagination do not necessarily mean that understanding and knowing about another form of life is the same thing as living as others do. It's a "second hand world" issue. Rosemary Firth wrote a very perceptive essay on fieldwork in anthropology. She described a nightmare that she had over and over again in the field, that she really was a Malay woman, squatting over a smoky fire. She wasn't a Malay woman. Her experience could only be second hand. These are second hand worlds and second hand experiences.

These complex aspects of our imagination of "otherness" require us to formulate our accounts in such a way as to be corrigible in the light of experience. This position, that we may know otherness without owning it, that we must be asked to justify these claims to knowledge, is made as a defense of pluralism in a world that merely acknowledges the simple fact of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is a universal feature of human existence, but

diversity can be organized in terms of a hierarchy between cosmopolitan and non-cosmopolitan cultures, as the world often does. Pluralism is not the only imaginable alternative. Relativism is also a possibility. Relativism argues that cultures are incommensurate, separated from one another, and centered on themselves. I am thinking of two sweatshirts I've seen recently. One says, "It's a Black thing. You wouldn't understand." The other says, "It's a Black thing. Let me help you understand." There are different attitudes to dialogue involved there. Any basis for constructing identity allows for the possibility of claims for exclusivity. Any viable alternative which denies hierarchy and avoids relativism must be founded on a pluralistic conception of a cultural polity. This acknowledges the pluralistic insight that people may seek different ends, live in strange worlds, and still be fully human. And some people do come to understand one another. Pluralism asserts that there is value to be derived from immersion in multiple traditions, but it does not assert that we need to give up a critical stance, either to our own or to other cultures, and even to the concept of culture itself. But it does argue that no cultural tradition is exempt from criticism, especially one's own.

Communication and criticism make cross-cultural understanding possible. They also have the potential to modify the very objects they seek to understand. By attempting to understand another culture, one comes to stand outside one's own. Once a terrible thing to experience, it is currently celebrated as something called "the border," and "border culture." Hybridity, I think, is a fundamental feature of globalization.

\*\*\*

*Benjamin Lee's discussion also benefited from his considerable experience as a Foundation Director made well aware in that task of the relation between such international activities as our International House Conference, foundation support for them and the vicissitudes of international politics. He offered a number of illuminating vignettes concerning that relation.*

## Kyoko Inoue's Commentary

*Kyoko Inoue's Commentary derived from her long professional experience analyzing the writing of the post-war Japanese constitution under American supervision. Her linguistic and cultural study was surely an experience of "negotiated understanding."*

As chair of this session, my role is to introduce our two speakers, Professor Shigemi Inaga of Mie University in Japan and Mr. Alain Le Pichon of TRANSCULTURA. I have also been asked to talk about my own work on the making of the Japanese Constitution. I have not had the opportunity to read Mr. Le Pichon's paper, so I am not sure how it relates either to Mr. Inaga's paper or my own work. So, following the procedure we have been following at this conference, I, as Chair, will speak first. Then, I would like Professor Inaga to read his paper before the break. After the break, I would like to have Mr. Le Pichon give his presentation, and then have Professor Ramanujan's commentary before opening the floor for discussion.

I would like to begin by highlighting two important themes from my own work, which also emerge in Professor Inaga's paper in relation to the topic of mutual understanding between nations, particularly between Western countries and non-Western countries. First, ideas and institutions developed in one nation inevitably change their meanings and significance when they are introduced to another nation. In this process, *misunderstandings occur inevitably*. Second, the role of the mediator or interpreter of ideas and concepts between cultures is an extremely difficult and complex one. It is not simply a matter of taking a detached viewpoint and presenting one side to the other.

Let me begin with some remarks on the first theme. When one nation, in particular a non-Western nation, adopts a political or social idea that has deep historical roots in Western culture, it inevitably acquires new meanings that are much different from the ways in which Westerners interpret it. Particularly when the culture and values of the recipient country are vastly different from

# The Conditions of Reciprocal Understanding

A Centennial Conference  
At  
INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

The University of Chicago  
September 12-17, 1992

---

---

**With TRANSCULTURA**

---

---

**SELECTED PAPERS  
And Comments**

**Editors**

**James W. Fernandez & Milton B. Singer**

With the assistance of  
Robert Albro & Marko Zivkovic

**THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

**EVENING TALK**

Gananath Obeyesekere: Western Mythmaking in the Understanding of the Other .....	165
Discussion .....	190

**Session IV: THE LOGIC OF THE SCIENCES AND THE LOGIC OF THE HUMANITIES IN RECIPROCAL UNDERSTANDING .....** 194

Milton Singer: Crossing Cultural Frontiers With Boole's Symbolic Algebra .....	196
John MacAloon: Humanism as Political Necessity? Reflections on the Pathos of Anthropological Science in Pluricultural Contexts	206
Ashis Nandy's Commentary .....	236
Louis Kauffman's Commentary .....	243
Lois Kuffman: Boolean Algebra .....	249
Discussion .....	256

**EVENING TALK**

Carmelo Lisón-Tolosana: Notes on the Anthropology of the Stranger .....	258
Discussion .....	271

**Sessions V and VI: LOGIC, DIALOGICS AND POLITICS IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION.....** 274

Guillermo de la Peña: Nationals and Foreigners in the History of Mexican Anthropology .....	276
Shigemi Inaga: Negative Capability of Tolerance – the Assassination of Hitoshi Igarashi .....	304

**Commentaries and Discussion of Sessions V and VI ..** 367

Ivan Karp's Commentary .....	337
Kyoko Inoue's Commentary .....	341
Alain Le Pichon's "The Sound of Rain: Poetic Reason and Reciprocal Knowledge" .....	348
Discussion .....	352
A. K. Ramanujan's Comments .....	356
Discussion .....	368

**Concluding Session: PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTER-NATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY .....** 372

Russell Hardin: Straddling Lines .....	373
Ashis Nandy's Comments .....	389
Dismas Masolo's Comments .....	395
Concluding Reflections .....	421
Discussion .....	428

**Bibliography .....** 437

Appendix I: Original Conference Outline/Schedule
Appendix II: Contributors and Participants