

# THE TRANSPACIFIC TRAVEL FROM INDIA TO CANADA

in *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel  
and Its Link to Transculturality and Transdisciplinarity

## 1. METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

The choice of staying within the confines of a discipline or traversing beyond its limits is demonstrative of certain scientific positions but also of decisions and desires that are based either on valorization of an orthodox and normalized discourse or on a junction of concepts or discourses that entail reflexive continuous actions in relation to alterity. This is what Carlos Sandoval García invokes in his criticism of *nacionalismo metodológico*, which made a lot of researchers neglect the implications of multiple relationships and full-scale influences of encountering alterity (Sandoval García, 2007, xv). This is what Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller insist on when speaking about ‘the iron cage of nationalized states that confined and limited our own analytical capacities’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002: 302). They go on by showing that ‘Almost no thought was given to why boundaries of the container society are drawn as they are and what consequences flow from this methodological limitation of the analytical horizon—thus removing trans-border connections and processes from the picture’ (307). Remembering these thinkers and reading a novel like *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel will help us see the connection between disciplinarity and culture, because the relationship between Pi, the main character in *Life of Pi*, and the tiger, who share a raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, will allow us to deconstruct traditional conceptions of disciplines and their linkage with a particular conception

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of the nation and of the relationship between alterities. It will also lead us to reconsider any conception of American Studies based on nationalism by concentrating on an analysis emphasizing theoretical reflections focused more on anthropological consideration than on sociological ones. The Americas were historically enclosed in dualism and in legitimated processes of exclusion. Nowadays, they call for theories that can take on the complexity of transcultural relationships in their multiple dimensions and networks, which are constantly changing. Does this mean that theories and the example chosen here from the novel *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel lead to utopian thinking? Not in our perspective, because the particularity of the Americas is that it has attracted people from all over the planet and continues to attract them. It is simultaneously a real territory and a dream territory and therefore a territory that covers the globe. As Oscar Wilde suggested, a map of the world that would not include a utopia would be of no interest since it would have left out the only country where humanity constantly ends up. So, the Americas are both a place where one pragmatically fulfills a concept of self and a place of utopia. What we are going to study is the difference between a utopia of closure and homogeneity, that is, a nationalist state, and that of openness and attraction towards alterity.

## 2. DISCIPLINARITY

Disciplinarity contains a small number of concepts and units that are formalizable according to different logical, mathematical, or syntaxico-discursive procedures that allow for the invention of a field of study. However, Montuori reminds us that ‘disciplinary fragmentation is not just a *response* to knowledge, it actually *frames* knowledge [...] *disciplinary fragmentation creates blind spots by framing the world in a discipline-driven way that actually prevents certain subjects from being “seen”*’ (Montuori, 2008: xv)– subjects, in particular, that have been changing their way of life depending on their migration and their encounters with different people and cultures. It is this type of relationality that Michel Espagne has in mind when he states that Franz Boas studies the Amerindians from the point of view of ‘transferring objects,

myths and languages rather than from the angle of a vertical classification occupied with origins' ('transferts d'objets, des mythes et des langues plutôt que sous l'angle d'une classification verticale renvoyant à des origines') (Espagne, 2004: 66). This perspective leads to a vision that is not linked to universal and essentialized forms but to a history of forgotten encounters. This is what we observe in examining the Nantudi lace of the natives of Paraguay, considered the authentic expression of a *savoir-faire* that defines their identity. The Nantudi lace production techniques originated with the Moors, who passed on their knowledge in Spain; the conquistadors then transferred this knowledge to certain natives in the forests of Paraguay. The Moors and the Spanish have forgotten the techniques. Thus, different conclusions about essentialized identity or the image of the self in networks have been proposed following disciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives. On the one hand, we see the authentic identity pertaining to pure origins. On the other, we observe relational identities in the context of forgotten transfers. As Michel Espagne stipulates, 'We can talk of a certain Marranism brought up to the level of historiographic category' ('on pourrait parler d'un marranisme élevé au rang de catégorie historiographique') (Espagne, 2004: 66). As Marcos Aguinis emphasizes in his novel *La Gesta del Marrano* and as Afef Benessaïeh mentions (in her comments about Ortiz and transculturation.), just like the case of the Spanish Jews converted to Catholicism, the impact of cultural accumulations are shared as much among those who live the acculturation as among those in the host society.

### 3. INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Michael Finkenthal defines interdisciplinarity as 'the correct use of concepts belonging to one discipline in another' (Finkenthal, 2008: 90). According to this definition (and contrary to more static ones), by reducing the concept to mere transfer of certain terminologies from one discipline to another, we go further than merely establishing bridges between two disciplines; we move toward transdisciplinary. These concepts are used in the context of two disciplines, in a practical rather than a metaphoric sense. The latter sense consists of concepts transformed into

jargons that are useful for a group or in an aestheticized rhetoric, where the borrowing discipline remains confined within its limited functions and fails to generate new knowledge issued from an effective comparative reflection. The interdisciplinarity is in this sense closer to the concept of interculturality<sup>1</sup>, which often relies upon establishing temporary bridges between cultures in order to understand the other but also to better understand oneself (and forgetting the other), as the known cliché goes.

#### 4. MULTIDISCIPLINARITY, PLURAL MONOCULTURALISM, AND ESSENTIALIST BUREAUCRATIC MULTICULTURALISM

Multidisciplinarity for Basarab Nicolescu ‘concerns studying a research topic not in just one discipline but in several at the same time’ (Nicolescu, 2008: 2). Nicolescu uses the example of art history, of Giotto for example, who can be studied through the history of religions, the history of Europe, or that of geometry. We can also add the chemistry of the pigments if we want to distinguish a real Giotto from a fake one. However, all these disciplines remain dependent on the main discipline, art history. We can then see an affinity between multidisciplinarity as defined by Nicolescu and the concept of plural monoculturalism defined by the governor of Canada (1935–1940), Lord Tweedsmuir (Imbert, 2009: 15–66). We can also see an affinity between multidisciplinarity and the first-degree multiculturalism criticized by Neil Bisson-dath in *Selling Illusions* (1994), where separate entities—ethnic groups—are gathered in a dominant element, in the way that Canada is controlled by people of British origin. However, according to Wolfgang Welsch, plural monoculturalism, or bureaucratic

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1 This position should however not be confused with interculturalism, which is a Québécois position where the acknowledgement of the other is paired with a requirement to integrate the Québécois values, notably that of learning the French language. Interculturalism is thus differentiated from the first-degree multiculturalism that promotes a juxtaposition of cultures. See in this regard the article by Afef Benessaïeh and Patrick Imbert, ‘De Bouchard-Taylor à l’UNESCO: ambivalences interculturelles et clarifications transculturelles’ (with Afef Benessaïeh) in *Canadian Studies: The State of Art/Études canadiennes : question de recherche* (Klaus-Dieter Ertler, Stewart Gill, Susan Hodgett, Patrick James eds.), *Canadiana* 10, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 393–413.

multiculturalism, is based on a fundamental problem: 'the presupposition of cultures as homogeneous islands or enclosed spheres' (Welsch 1994/1995: 19). This presupposition approaches the concept of multidisciplinary, according to which disciplines are understood on the basis of their procedures without interpreting it.

Stephen Kline, however, perceives multidisciplinary differently. He defines multidisciplinary as the study of the ways in which one can compare the disciplines and the validity of these disciplines without forgetting the method of generating results in the disciplines of our interest. Multidisciplinary helps 'disciplinary experts better understand the connection of their own field to the whole of human knowledge' (Kline, 1998: 3). According to Kline, we live in the anguish of not being able to perceive human knowledge as a whole even if we participate in a global interconnected brain (Lévy, 2007). We can then follow Kline in saying that, in practice, multidisciplinary helps contextualize research and produce comparisons that, in the complexity of contemporary relations, can lead, as Michael Finkenthal suggests, to emerging properties. For Kline, multidisciplinary entails the sort of reflection that is based on comparison and that leads to a certain distance from the *a priori* relations that govern one discourse or one discipline.

We can then confirm that Kline's definition draws close to the concept of a multiculturalism that emphasizes encounters and gives priority to the study of influence between groups or individuals, which in turn leads to an emergence of properties that are realized in a new context. This can be seen in the comments made by Sabrina, a new Algerian immigrant in Montreal. Her desire is to realize the potentials that had to be repressed in other contexts: 'Sabrina says that in the company where she worked in Alger, there were only two unveiled women. "The second one too has come to Montreal!" She has serious concerns in seeing veiled women here. "I haven't come all the way here to live what I lived down there." ('Sabrina raconte que dans l'entreprise où elle travaillait à Alger, elles n'étaient que deux femmes à ne pas porter le voile. "La deuxième est aussi rendue ici, à Montréal !" Elle se pose de sérieuses questions quand elle voit des femmes

voilées ici. “Je n’ai pas fait 6000 km pour vivre comme là-bas”) (Elkouri, 2009: 3). This is also Neil Bissoondath’s wish in *Selling Illusions*, whose objective is to set in motion transformative dynamics because the encounter linked to emerging propertieess leads to new processes of legitimizing the codes and the limits of systems that govern the socio-economic-cultural relations of different groups.

##### 5. TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND RELATIONAL MULTICULTURALISM

Transdisciplinarity corresponds to a ‘harmony between inner being and outer knowledge’ (Nicolescu, 2008: 2) regarding the relation between the outer world of the object and the inner world of the subject, which leads to a third terminology: a triangulation combining the two entities. Transdisciplinarity proposes going beyond the dualism of the individual/object that exists in traditional science. It is imperative to understand that observation, in certain contexts, radically modifies the position of the observed element, a position that cannot be exactly measured but can only be established in terms of probabilities. This scientific position where the undetermined and the probabilities are combined is of great use in the humanities, particularly when it comes to transforming relations between alterities. This is the main reason that an increasing number of researchers avoid thinking in terms of dualism and static perspectives and aim at managing complex power relationships. Relational multiculturalism, or transculturalism, suggests going beyond the dualism of individual/society, as proposed by Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka, 1995). As an example of multiculturalism, the minority Francophone of Canada is raised with the collective values defended by the group in order for the Francophone individual to be able to assert him/herself against the majority Anglophone. The important thing then is to asymmetrically assert the rights for external protection of the group and the individuals against the majority and the rights of internal protection of the individual against the minority group, assuring him/her the right to leave the group if he/she desires.

The multicultural politics, whose defining principles are rejection of dualism and invention of asymmetric regulations

(considered inequitable in certain centralized countries where equality and difference cannot be combined), succeed in setting in motion a dynamic in which the Francophone minority can compete with the Anglophone majority without being caught in a relation of dominance, as criticized by Homi Bhabha and symbolized by his famous expression of *not-quite* (Bhabha, 1994). The individual can then have access to the socioeconomic position available to members of the majority, that is to say, the individual can have access to power, for he/she is like many Francophones in Canada, usually bilingual in a place where the mono-nationality thinking that prefers the often non-bilingual Anglophones is no longer privileged. This is nowadays more so because, in the context of glocalization, the knowledge of several languages in addition to English is important if one aims at efficiently competing against others. In the new global context, the dualist antagonism within the national territory is redefined. This asymmetrical relational multiculturalism allows, up to a certain point, minorities to find their place effectively in a pluralist context. This is what has been highlighted by La cité collégiale, the Francophone technical college of Ottawa: 'FRENCH speaking students BILINGUAL employees' (*Ottawa Business Journal*, 2000: 11).

What is envisioned in this case are the relations to the other as invented by subjects who, surely enough, construct the other in their own image but who are themselves, as Frederick Barth mentions, multiple subjects, constructed by others in cycles of accumulated retroactions that lead to conceiving the other as being in the self and the self as being in the other, according to the point of view of Emmanuel Lévinas (Lévinas, 1961). Relational multiculturalism in this sense rests on dynamics similar to transculturality.

## 6. TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND TRANSCULTURALITY

### 6.1. TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

'Transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines' (Nicolescu, 2008: 4). Its objective is to understand the contemporary world in need of a unity of knowledge (64).

Transdisciplinarity concerns dynamics corresponding to the simultaneous manifestation of different levels of reality (67). We should first explain what we mean by the world's need of a unity of knowledge. If it signifies recycling the dream of a unity in reaction to the profound anguish of facing the natural chaos of the world that needs to be controlled through access to an all-encompassing unity, we are right to think that Nicolescu is caught in dualism and illusion. However, we think that the objective of transdisciplinarity does not aim at generating a unity of knowledge. Its starting point, on the contrary, is diversity (which is what distinguishes it from the kind of multiculturalism that assumes an essentialized identity to begin with) in order to reach new diversities in a non-ending dynamics of recontextualization. The disciplinary combinations could indeed lead to new disciplines in the sense of Gregory Bateson, who proposes a reading of all informative functions as a system of difference that creates differences: 'A "bit" of information is definable as a difference which makes a difference' (Bateson, 1972: 75). Is not a discipline an informative system controlled by special procedures, neither the all-encompassing syntheses nor a unity in transdisciplinarity but rather a constant production of the new, through-combined differences establishing original connections and producing something different? The production of differences from differences is then only an example of indefinitely renewing dynamics that can be understood through a metalanguage capable of managing the ever more complex operations in a continuum going from molecular interactions to elaborate symbolic systems.

As for the levels of Reality, Nicolescu defines them as follows: 'I designate an ensemble of systems that are invariant under certain laws: for example quantum entities are subordinate to quantum laws, which depart radically from the laws of the physical world' (Nicolescu, 1966: 4). What this signifies is that, where there is an important discrepancy in comprehension of fundamental concepts, like that of causality for example, the levels of Reality are different. But what does Reality signify for Nicolescu? 'By Reality (with a capital 'R'), we intend first of all to designate that which resists our experiences, representa-



tions, descriptions, images or even mathematical formulations' (Nicolescu, 2008: 4).

Transdisciplinarity that goes beyond disciplines concerns the capacity of reaching beyond the classic logic of exclusive third defined by the axiom of identity: A is A, that of non-contradiction; A is not not-A; and that of exclusive third, there exists no third term T that is at the same time A and not-A. Transdisciplinarity, on the contrary, attempts to reach a level of Reality, T, that is at the same time both A and not-A. We should keep in mind that Nicolescu is influenced by the logic of Lupasco, who specifies that if A is actualized in a predominant way, not-A is potentialized in a non-predominant way as well and vice versa, without having one or the other disappeared (Lupasco, 1947). As Brenner points out about Nicolescu,

the T-state resolves the contradiction at another level of reality. His now "classic" example is the unification in the quanton T of the apparently contradictory elements of particle A and wave non-A. In contrast to the Hegelian triad, the three terms here coexist at the same moment of time. The logic of the included middle does not abolish that of the excluded middle, which remains valid for simple, consistent situations. (Brenner, 2008: 158)

## 6.2. TRANSCULTURALITY

Transculturality leads to a rereading and a recontextualization of perspectives. First, the belief that there is an origin. To believe in an origin is to believe in a primordial unity of a consensual Edenic world that is to be found again and that defines the group in its particularity, while the others are different and often considered antagonists in the wrong. In other words, transculturality is an opening to future through a present that aims at creating practical personal and institutional relationships that lead to different people having effective, positive influences on each other. Transculturality is expressed as a place of encounter that in the Americas can be understood as a promise. Transculturality is not linked to a world view dominated by the established culture that is itself linked to an institution, a church or a nation-state that projects a stereotypical identity on people. It is a performative act of language that creates relations that are less conflictive, more attentive, and more based on listening to others (Austin, 1962).

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Speaking of transculturality is negotiating a dialogical relationship as an act that, just like enunciating the words 'I love you', creates a real and new situation where the concerned parties are modified by the linguistic act. In the contemporary context, transculturality seduces. The important thing in this seduction, other than the development of new situations, is the promise of more seduction as a desired, positive, and renewed experience. A fictional example is the character François/Frank in Ferron's novel, *La Nuit*, which takes place in Montreal. The character is at the same time Buddhist, communist, and bank manager in his day-to-day private, professional, and economic life. These different images of the self make him a creative and effective character in different milieus at the same time that he does not appear as transparent in any of them, that is to say, as defined by an essentialized identity caught in stereotypical behaviors.

A number of contemporary researchers study these transcultural perspectives. Among them, Ulrich Beck mentions Louis Schein's study of the diaspora of 25 million Hmong people scattered on the planet:

The surprising result of this study is that the expected opposition between national and transnational was not only not confirmed; rather the USA and China are using the transnationality of this Asian diaspora culture to redefine their own nationalities. I want to draw attention to a pernicious zero-sum logic (Imbert, 2013a) that portrays transnationality and the 'nation-state' as mutually exclusive and as locked in competition for pragmatic primacy. (Beck, 2006: 63)

The belief in zero-sum game, where one's loss is the other's gain, is the basis for perspectives that are closed to both transdisciplinarity and transculturality (Imbert, 2013a). Ulrich Beck further proposes a transnational nationalism where an ethnic, historicized identity could have an active role in national, transnational, and cosmopolitan domains and whose possibility relies upon a decoupling of the state and the nation.

7. TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND TRANSCULTURALITY IN TRANSACTION:  
YANN MARTEL'S *LIFE OF PI*

Now let us examine how all of this can be presented in a post-modern/postcolonial novel manifesting contemporary relational

dynamics corresponding to a legitimation of geographical and symbolic displacements. Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) is the story of Piscine Patel, a young man whose parents own a zoo in India and want to emigrate to Canada. While Piscine wishes to be Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim all at the same time, he observes the territorial instinct of animals that are confined within their small territories that separate them from each other as the humans are separated by national borders symbolized by different colors and marked by black lines in atlases. Piscine's family decides to take some of their animals with them to Canada on a boat that sinks in the middle of the ocean. Piscine ends up on a raft with a tiger, a monkey, a hyena, and a zebra, all of them soon to be devoured by the tiger.

What should Piscine do to survive the tiger and the ocean? He should use his transdisciplinary knowledge, combining different levels of Reality linked to ethnology, anthropology, and history. The levels of the Reality that confront him are the following: on the part of the tiger, there is the behavior of dominance, as Henri Laborit explains in his study where the dominant eats first and takes the females in his possession while the others are content with the left-overs (Laborit, 1976). So the dominant entity eats the species that come his way, as we see the tiger eats the zebra on the raft. What Piscine has to do now is to make himself appear more dominant to the tiger and then function effectively according to the level of Reality A of the territorial tiger. But Piscine also knows another level of Reality, that of mimesis of appropriation explained by René Girard, according to which hominization and assertion of self as an individual subject ends in a violent competition connected to the fight of all against all so as to obtain the object of desire, which is determined by the one that occupies the position of the model (Girard, 2008). The latter shows to the others the object of desire—money or spirituality, depending on the kind of society one wants to invent—and, above all, the power to indicate what is desirable, what should be done and what should not, or, in other words, a homogenous social order. This other level of Reality not-A is based on the democratic struggle of all against all, who all want to control a finite amount of wealth, as is also the wealth

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in level A, that of dominance. However, Piscine knows another level of Reality, T, where the violence of domination (A), as well as the violence stemming from the mimesis of appropriation (not-A), is domesticated by a logic that is no longer dualist but ternary. This is the logic of the knowledge-based society that can create an infinite amount of wealth, because new knowledge can always be produced. This knowledge-based society is different from the territorial-based society where the wealth is always finite. This logic of the knowledge-based society operates simultaneously with the other levels, A and not-A, on the raft shared by Piscine and the tiger. These levels of Realities depend in turn on the Reality, that is to say, on that which resists our experiences and our representations, as Nicollescu explains. These experiences, René Girard insists, are based on the sacrificial violence connected to an otherness transformed into a scapegoat, excluded and condemned to death, a death that becomes an undeniable<sup>2</sup> point of reference resisting all forms of representation.

Since Piscine has no immediate way of killing the tiger, his survival on the raft depends, on one hand, on convincing the tiger that he is the dominant, and on the other hand, on combining the level of Reality A, marked by dominance, with that of not-A, which is the mimetic appropriative violence based on the dualism of self/other that can lead Piscine to kill the tiger the first chance he gets. But Piscine goes rather to another level, T; having observed the zoo as a child as well as the reactions of the religious orthodoxies living according to the rules of the mimesis of appropriation (whence his wish to be Muslim, Christian and Buddhist all at the same time) have taught him to live a life linked to the knowledge-based society and to create new wealth and knowledge from mixing cultures. Hence, he modifies the logic of domination by feeding the tiger, which is not consistent with the behavior of the dominant that only leaves what he cannot eat. Piscine divides the narrow space of the raft into two, because the tiger keeps his logic and lives according to A. He neither seeks to kill the tiger nor to leave

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2 Many authoritarian states try to deny this death through the use of words like 'desaparecidos' (disappeared persons).

it behind on the floating island they both explore. He then modifies the appropriative mimetic logic of not-A that necessitates the elimination of the rival-model. One of the reasons invoked is that, in order to survive hundreds of days without losing his sanity, he needs an interlocutor, even if it means living with the a radical other who can destroy him, either as the dominant (based on the level of Reality of an ethnological reading of the text) or as symbol of murderous, appropriative mimetic nationalism, illustrated by the zoo (in the level of Reality of an anthropologic-historic reading of the text). Piscine combines A and not-A to create the level of Reality T that rejects the dualist stasis of A/not-A. He then lives the hyper-dynamism of an open space symbolized by the ocean, the new global frontier that recycles, in the liquid, the frontier of the Americas, this historical paradox of a territory open to an infinite amount of wealth. Piscine is then engaged in a transdisciplinary level of Reality that involves ethnology, anthropology, and the semio-pragmatism of knowledge-based societies that manage their territorial relationships in an effective and non-exclusive manner, that is to say, according to a transcultural perspective.

#### 8. LEVELS OF REALITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

We read that the tiger disappears as soon as they arrive in Mexico without leaving any trace or without even turning back to give a last look to Piscine, who has fed him fish during their trip. The social capital managed by the changes in the level of Reality and defined as 'help[ing] people to advance their interests by co-operating with others' (*Social Capital Outcomes of Adult Learning and Literacy Initiatives*, 2010: 2), a logic that is temporarily created on the raft, relies upon a *bridging* relationship for Piscine, that is to say, a relationship with beings from different backgrounds and pasts, and a *linking* one of hierarchy for the tiger. The cause and consequence relations are therefore different for each one of them.

Coincidence of being gathered on the raft has remained incomprehensible for the tiger while it has become significant for Piscine, entailing particular cause and consequence relations in his transdisciplinary approach that has led him to directly

live a transcultural practice in his everyday life with the radical otherness of the tiger. This experience has taught him, arriving in Toronto, to live a life of dynamic transactions in different networks producing social capital 'for a purpose maintained by supportive and productive interactions' (Nicolescu, 2008: 19).

Piscine has reached a principle of relativity that Nicolescu explains as follows: 'no level of Reality constitutes a privileged place from which one is able to understand all the other levels of Reality' (Nicolescu, 2008: 5). That is what Piscine notices when the Japanese insurance agents visit him in the hospital in Mexico to obtain information about the shipwreck. Piscine gives an account of his adventure with the tiger that cannot be understood by the representatives of the insurance company who are used to bureaucratic, factual, and plausible stories. He then gives another account of the story, this time with human actors, more in line with the expectation of the employees. He knows how to adapt to the perspective of the Japanese culture as well as a bureaucratic culture that demands a true story. Piscine asks, 'You want words that reflect reality?... Words that do not contradict reality? [...] That will confirm that you already know' (Martel, 2001: 365). He refers to a privileged rhetorical/national/positivist place of managing significations that makes use of the stereotype of mimesis of appropriation to give a victim-based reading of a text, or as Girard puts it, a mimetic appropriative reading, where the message of Jesus saying love the other as you love yourself and the level at which it is propagated is not understood. Hence, Piscine tells his new story, that of his mother and the chef on the raft, and then gives the account of how, according to an acceptable logic based on mimesis of appropriation, they have all killed each other. He relates how the object of desire, the knife with which Piscine kills the chef, is taken from the hands of the chef, the model, the supplier of food: 'The knife was all along in plain view on the bench' (357). Nonetheless, after the Japanese representatives admit to not being able to determine which of the two stories, the unrealistic animal one or the more historic and official story, is true and which is fictional, they confess to having preferred the story with animals: 'The story with animals is the better story'. To which Piscine

replies: 'Thank you. And so it goes with God' (352). The Japanese bureaucrats do not have the necessary capacity of reflection to distance themselves from dualism and reach another level, T, that includes both A and not-A. They are 'a-T', contrary to Piscine, who is conscious of what is sacred and of the force of the new in the New World, carrying the promise of a new and better life based upon the recognition of otherness in a series of multicultural processes.

This access to a metareality that escapes dualism sees the day in contemporary scientific theories and is quite different from traditional positivism, as Fritjof Capra elaborates in *The Tao of Physics* and as we see it in Alicia Rivero's work, 'Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in Contemporary Spanish American Fiction' (Rivero, 2005: 252–266). This access is also observable in the hippy movements that turn to oriental philosophies as is the case with Alan Watts in *The Way of Zen*. It opens to a new consciousness that surpasses all state institutionalisation of religious orthodoxies.

#### 9. THE AMERICAS OF COINCIDENCES: ENCOUNTER OF INDEPENDENT CAUSES

In this parabola of glocalization, legitimacy of displacements, and call of the Americas that is *Life of Pi*, Piscine demonstrates the link between transdisciplinarity and transculturality. These perspectives open access to diversity in a planet that requires complex networks that can domesticate violence through reflection on the possibility of living with the other by adapting to different contexts<sup>3</sup>. These different levels overturn the relationship between fiction and reality, because the reality of one can be the fiction of the other, as we see with the Japanese insurance agents and in magic realism works such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. In this novel, García Márquez accentuates the absurdity and delirium of the realities of dictators that lead to murders, torture, and genocides

3 We see this perspective in numerous advertisements in the Americas where the population is invited to interpret images and texts in their own way or to invent multiple scenarios. Patrick Imbert, *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines*, Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2004, p. 233–250.

for such absurd reasons as not submitting to the total dominance of the dictator. We see another example of that in Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo el supremo*. The Reality is what resists representations constructed by the group that has educated us. In the case of the magical realist writers, as well as with Yann Martel, what resists is the undeniable fact that people were living and now they are dead. The causes of shipwreck remain unclear or multiple, and the causes for the fortuitous encounter between Piscine, the zebra, the monkey, the hyena, and the tiger on the raft are still more incomprehensible. This coincidence manifests the meeting of independent causes. It is this meeting of independent causes, of incommensurable pasts, that gathers the people in Americas in adjacent spaces not yet impacted by long histories like those of Europe. From then on, since the relation of cause and consequence does not constitute the basis for the structure of shared narratives, as specialists like Greimas explain, a new narrative is to be invented to make sense of this encounter. That is what Piscine does by proposing two narratives, the story of a successful encounter between two levels of realities and the story of a founding murder, the level of Reality corresponding to non-A of mimesis of appropriation. It is the story with exclusive and mimetic appropriative violence that corresponds to the historical canons of nation-states of the planet, and it is this dynamic of exclusion that Piscine Patel rejects.

Let us not forget that this coincidence in adjacency, symbol of the invention of the Americas, is also in line with the dynamic of glocalisation. In fact, in the contemporary context that is no longer connected to the invention of nations in the Americas, as it was in the nineteenth century when the dualism of barbarism/civilisation was dominant (see Sarmiento, 1986). Rather, it is the progressive invention of networking and a planetary brain; as Pierre Lévy states, historicism, the basis of research from a nation-state perspective, is ineffective for producing significations (Lévy, 2007: 115-175). In other words, the transdisciplinarity/transculturality created in *Life of Pi* links the invention of the Americas to its planetary influence in a parabolic fiction. The Japanese consulate in Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul* underscores



this point: 'America's great and lasting significance is its existence in the mind' (Iyer, 2000: 229). The Americas and North America in particular, are, for the planet, the dream of being better. They are the utopia to be realized in South America, as we see in writings of the magical realist writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Laura Esquivel. In this coincidence of the encounter between Piscine and the tiger, the world and the self are reorganized in a scientific, fictional, and emotive productivity taking place at the level of T that includes both A and non-A. This level allows for the production of new significations, themselves producing new significations through an infinite interpretance, in the Peircian sense of the term (Peirce, 1982), which in turn allows for a temporary and effective life with the other in inclusion and creativity.

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#### CONCLUSION

*'The mere fact of living is the ultimate happiness'.  
(Le simple fait de vivre est le bonheur ultime'.)  
Pierre Lévy, Le feu libérateur, Paris, Arléa, 2006, p. 255.*

Transnationalism, derived from transculturalism, is defined by Janet Paterson as something that implies:

a process according to which the formation of identities, traditionally confined within the political and geographical borders stretch beyond the national borders to produce new identities. There is a break away from certain narrow identity discourses in favour of rupture, heterogeneity and movement. (un processus selon lequel des formations identitaires traditionnellement circonscrites par des frontières politiques et géographiques vont au-delà des frontières nationales pour produire de nouvelles formations identitaires. Il y a une mise à distance d'un certain discours identitaire restreint au profit de l'éclatement, de l'hétérogénéité et de la mouvance.) (Paterson, 2009: 15)

Paterson specifies that, contrary to the migrant subject, the transnational subject 'rejects the notion of a formed identity based on criteria of race and place of origin to privilege a complex and fluid identity that is often multicultural and outside of the frames of memories' ('rejette la notion d'une identité formée à partir des critères de race ou de lieu d'origine au profit

d'une identité complexe, mouvante souvent multiculturelle et hors de l'enclos des souvenirs') (16). As Frederick Barth suggests, there is no original homogeneity or purity, but only relations (Barth, 1969). Identity is therefore an unstable syncretism of different images of the self produced in relation to the other.

What is important then, as Ying Chen points out, is that 'my true country is where I become what I want to become' ('Mon véritable pays est là où je deviens ce que je veux être') (Chen, 2004: 12), which implies the development of potentials including new images of the self. In this dissociation from what some call identity linked to the origin, chameleoning is positive and has nothing to do with the dualist opposition between appearance and authenticity. Chameleoning is the desire to recreate oneself, to be reborn in the New World, as Yvon Rivard writes in *Le Siècle de Jeanne*: 'The New World is probably not possible unless we are able to perceive both the beginning and the end of the world at the same time. And to do so what better exercise [...] than to see [...] the immobile center of all movement, the hub of the wheel' ('Le Nouveau Monde n'était peut-être possible que si nous arrivions à percevoir à la fois et en même temps le début et la fin du monde, et pour cela quel meilleur exercice [...] que de voir [...] le centre immobile de tout mouvement, le moyeu de la roue') (Rivard, 2005: 348). Chameleoning is the metaphorical expression of transculturality along with hybridization, as the Canadian Métis Doucette suggests: 'The Métis Nation is really what Canada wants to be [...] We're multilingual. We're multicultural—we're based on blending. We're a symbol of where Canada is trying to go' (Abley, 2009: 66)<sup>4</sup>. This chameleoning is expressed with an ironic tone in Douglas Coupland's *The Gum Thief*:

Speaking of biology, I think cloning is great. I don't understand why churchy people get so upset about it. God made the originals, and cloning is only making photocopies. Big woo. And how can people get upset about evolution? Someone had to start the ball rolling; it's only natural to try to figure out the mechanics of *how*

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4 See also what is more precisely stated: 'In many parts of Latin America, by contrast, mestizos make up a majority of the population---and enjoy much higher prestige than *indios*' (Abley, 2009: 66).

it got rolling. Relax! One theory doesn't exclude the other. (Coupland, 2007: 7)

Bethany thus asserts that life is not a zero-sum game, that the logic of the excluded third is no longer effective in our world, even if the territorial logic of the excluded third is validated in the case of the division of planet in finite territorial resources that are named countries.

The creation of the world by God then does not contradict the theory of evolution as the orthodox creationist and evolutionist like to believe. Chameleoning, in Coupland's way or in Martel's and his character Piscine's, joins the idea of transdisciplinarity and transculturality whose consequence, that is to say important signification, is to lead to production of new knowledge in the ever growing complexity of human cultural and economic relations. In a nutshell, according to Piscine, escaping the methodological nationalism that forces everyone in predetermined boxes and homogenous masses, just like the narrow territory of a zoo given to animals, leads to the prevention of a reactivation of the victimizing process. Escaping the boxes also leads to an exploration of unforeseen encounters in a calm and active spirituality, while sharing the territory and knowledge through a constant dialogue and a permanent adjustment where everyone can have a place and invent his/her own story with others. This is in keeping with the dynamic of the Americas. They are constantly producing new stories about the continent and the world. In the 19th century, these stories were based on the dualistic paradigm barbarity/civilization. Now they are linked to multiple fluxes valorizing encounters and transculturality (Imbert, 2014). The Americas are in progress and in process. They are relational rather than territorial, which explains their capacity to generate flows of information and research based on world networks rather than on national affinities<sup>5</sup> conflating nationality and scholarly research.

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5 However, one should note that this transnational turn is contested by many Native American theoreticians. See: Robert Warrior, 'Native American Scholarship and the Transnational Turn', *Cultural Studies Review*, Volume 15, Number 2, September 2009, p. 119-130.

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