

## **The Ethics of Intercultural Dialogue**

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## **Abstract**

Intercultural communication aims to educate people towards open positions of dialogue with others from different spaces within the supranational public sphere. This paper addresses three issues arising from this: the possibility of an emancipatory transformational consciousness; the existence of a transcendental moral signified against which ethical judgements can be measured; and in the absence of this, the consequent projection of intercultural dialogue towards cultural relativism. We argue (after Levinas and Derrida) it is through responsibility that 'non-normative' ethical judgements become possible. This entails determining whether putting a particular discourse or set of discourses into practice might lead to a silencing of open alternatives. These enable intercultural communication to locate itself in opposition to practices of closure and intolerance, while simultaneously exercising reflexive support for more open alternatives.

**Key words:** relativism, totality, presence, transformation, truth, responsibility

## **Introduction**

Over the past 20 years the relationship between communication and culture has been of increasing importance within the domain of language education and professional communication. This has become known as 'intercultural communication' and the attribute of being 'skilled' in communicating with interlocutors from 'foreign' cultures is often referred to as 'intercultural competence'. A person who possesses these attributes has been dubbed the 'intercultural speaker' (after Kramsch, 1992; Byram & Zarate, 1997). The concern with the role of culture in language education emanated in part from foreign language teaching in the UK (Byram, 1989) in which a mandatory part of degree programmes required undergraduates to spend a year in countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Concern with wider cultural matters was also taken up in English language teaching in the US (Kramsch, 1992), and latterly in the UK as well as worldwide (Corbett, 2002; Holliday et al, 2003) .

The discourse of intercultural communication seeks in particular to raise awareness of how language permeates, mediates and constructs national and supranational identities and cultures through 'linguaging' or 'linguicism'. This includes not only committing to a radical intercultural pedagogy (e.g. Sharifian, 2001; Diaz-Greenburg & Nevin, 2003; Solé, 2004; Belz, 2005; Gonçalves Matos, 2005; Atay, 2005; Shi, 2006; Crosbie, 2006; MacDonald et al,

2006); but also imagining the possibility of a 'transcultural self', a multicultural <sup>self/</sup>other who navigates the transnational terrain in openness, understanding, and tolerance of the other (Jordan, 2001; Crawshaw et al, 2001; Holland, 2002; Liu, 2002; Parry, 2003; Monceri, 2003, 2005; Strümper-Krobb, 2003; Turner, 2003; Pan, 2004; Glaser, 2005). However, the discourse of intercultural communication also seeks to be interventionist (Tomic & Kelly, 2001, 2002; Tomic & Thurlow, 2002, 2004; Phipps & Guilherme, 2003; Giroux, 2003, 2006; Jack, 2004). It participates in the transnational arena of public debate in the belief that such interventions may help to reduce conflict, promote cooperation and increase intercultural understanding. In this respect the discourse of intercultural communication draws critically from the well of global injustice and human disenchantment a desire 'to confront and resist [...] the inequalities of cultural and economic capital' (Tomic & Thurlow, 2002, p. 82; see also Tomic and Lengel, 1999).

This paper addresses two questions that arise in relation to the discourse of intercultural communication and the praxis of intercultural dialogue. First, the term intercultural implies a 'going between', and the 'traversing' of an implied 'gap' or 'space' between two or more collectivities. Therefore, the project of intercultural communication must necessarily interrogate two phenomena: not only the nature of the space between cultures thus expressed (the 'inter-cultural'); but also the implied homogeneity of the cultural groups between which this space opens up (the 'intra-cultural'). This concern asks the question 'what?' of intercultural communication; and leads us to an ontological investigation into the nature of self and other, and the relations that exist between them. Secondly, there is necessarily a reciprocal relationship between any ontological definition and an ethical claim. How we define the ontological conditions of self and other necessarily impacts on the nature of the incitement to communicate; and the nature of this incitement leads to a different constitution of the two entities which are doing the communicating. We therefore also ask the question 'why?' of intercultural communication: what is the aim of our will to communicate with the other? This will be addressed as an ethical concern, an axiology.

### **Transformation, Truth and Transcendentalism**

One convenient reason for engaging in the project of intercultural communication is to empower people, to raise their awareness about exploitation, manipulation, prejudice and abuse, and to *move* them to act upon this awareness; in other words, to provoke a

*transformational* response. One of the more substantial voices arguing for such an agenda is Henry Giroux:

Intellectuals have a responsibility not only to make truth prevail in the world and fight injustice wherever it appears, but also to organise their collective passions to prevent human suffering, genocide and diverse forms of unfreedom linked to domination and exploitation [...] Such a stance not only connects intellectual work to making dominant power accountable, it also makes concrete the possibility for transforming hope and politics into an ethical space and public act that confronts the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance and the unending project of democratic social transformation (Giroux, 2006, pp. 170-71).

But not everyone is entirely comfortable with the idea of doing this. Many teachers, for example, do not see it as their role either to radicalise their students or to disturb their carefully sedimented subjectivities. In this respect, it is necessary to probe into a set of second order grounds on which it is possible to construct propositions about justice, equality and prejudice in relation to intercultural communication; and in particular how it is possible to claim the truth that one wishes to prevail is the *correct* one.

From this perspective, it can be posited (after Lyotard, 1984) that the discourse of intercultural communication is simply another meta-narrative, a grand theory for explaining the totality of the 'real' and for restructuring it in another 'truer' way. Problems arise when the meta-narrative does lead to a process of personal transformation only to come into conflict with those whose own discursive ontologies entail them being less amenable to its discourse. Relative to liberal interculturalists, these might include neo-conservatives, nationalist political parties, anti-abortionists, and traditionalist groups with seemingly strict religious or cultural beliefs. In these circumstances the avowed commitment to openness and tolerance inherent in the discourse of intercultural communication finds itself in a performative, self-contradictory double bind – an aporia. Either interculturalists must give ground and tolerate the seemingly intolerable, or they must assert a privileged claim to truth – one which overthrows and silences the claims of the conflicting others which confront them. It is moot to ask in this context on what grounds the silencing of these others is legitimated; that is, on the basis of what privileged ethical claim to truth? The claim of interculturalists must be a privileged one if it is to be preferred, and we characterise this, following Derrida (1981), as based on an appeal to a transcendental signified. That is, a Kantian *noumenon*, or moral theism, existing outside human experience against which truth claims can be measured and judgements of truth can be made. Kant saw the operation of the noumenon as *a priori* to

the world and distilled it in his work in terms of a faith that it was there, but impossible to see or know or experience. This has certain appeal, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that by making recourse to the transcendental signified the discourse of intercultural communication is one which relies on maintaining that its truths are the correct truths without being able to explain why this is so. If the discourse of intercultural communication is unable to ground itself other than by appealing to a-historical and a-discursive transcendentals, its truth appears unable to rise above that of an opinion. This leaves interculturalists unable to adjudicate between different truth claims and to decide which ones to support, respect or condemn.

### **Intercultural Consciousness and the Politics of Presence**

A *politics of presence* is stalking the corridors of intercultural communication. This is an Enlightenment desire for plenitude, for the satisfactory repletion of ideas and outcomes, and the resolution of difference. In other words, it is the desire we as interculturalists have for fulfilment and *purity* in the concepts that we employ in our work and in the consequences which they portend; and so there is a desire for justice, equality, understanding, openness, truth, etc. – an organic ordering of the intercultural whole, in which these elements are all neatly ordered and arranged.

In the discourse of intercultural communication the desire for plenitude translates into a desire for a transformational change in the consciousness of the intercultural speaker. This has frequently been expressed within IALIC as the aim of an intercultural pedagogy relating to the learning of foreign languages, e.g.:

Intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures (Meyer, 1991, p. 137).

The intercultural speaker is someone who crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values (Byram & Zarate, 1997, p. 11).

We may therefore claim to have an epistemologically reasoned basis on which to assert that cross-cultural competence implies a certain kind of linguistic competence...and that such linguistic competence implies having acquired, not simply a new way to represent ideas or to get things done, but – above all – a new way of being (Boylan, 2000, p. 174).

These pedagogic aims appear to entail a weak claim and a strong claim for the development of an intercultural consciousness. The weak claim is that the intercultural speaker is enabled

to recognise difference in the beliefs, attitudes and values of the other, and to tolerate this difference. The strong claim is that the intercultural speaker recognises difference in the beliefs, attitudes and values of the other, and actually embraces them in order to become a 'transcultured self' (Monceri, 2006). This then marks a move towards a hybridization of consciousness and identity. The logical endpoint of the strong claim would be the development of an integrated universal consciousness, and it is this which provides the strong claim's politics of presence. Here the project of intercultural communication seems to be retreading the philosophical journey of the nineteenth century.

In the *Philosophy of History* (1822) Hegel presents the view that the history of humankind involves the transformational development of Mind, or *Spirit*, towards full consciousness.

World history merely shows how the spirit gradually attains consciousness and the will to truth; it progresses from its early glimmerings to major discoveries and finally to a state of complete consciousness ... The principles of the national spirits in their necessary progression are themselves only moments of the one universal spirit, which ascends through them in the course of history to its consummation in an all embracing totality. (Hegel, 1822/1999, p. 404).

Mind/Spirit is a collective consciousness, and may be equated with the *cogito*, Reason. It is through the exercise of reason that the full consciousness of humanity is attained. Until this time each individual subsists as an 'unhappy consciousness' – unfulfilled, confused, and alienated. This alienation is experienced as an incomprehension of the world the unhappy consciousness inhabits and as a sensation of separation from the other:

The Unhappy Consciousness itself *is* the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself *is* both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature. But it is not yet explicitly aware that it is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both. (Hegel, 1807/1999, p. 104; original emphasis)

In other words, the unhappy consciousness is not aware that its identity, its understanding of its self, is dependent upon and only established through the existence of the other. The alienation of the unhappy consciousness is resolved by humankind's eventual realisation that the self and the other are one and the same, that there is no difference between them. This occurs as a staged awakening of Mind through history, that is, as an exponential transformation of consciousness and awareness through time towards absolute knowledge and understanding. This full rationalisation of the world marks the culmination of human history.

### **Totality and Terror in Intercultural Communication**

The 'politics of presence' comes in for sustained critique by Nietzsche (1968), and later by Adorno (1973, 1977) and Foucault (1980, 1981, 1984), who all see 'presence' as totalising. For Nietzsche, presence is articulated as a will to power – 'A kind of lust to rule [which] would like to compel all other drives to accept it as a norm' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 267). For Adorno, the desire for presence is termed 'identity thinking', that is, a type of thinking which posits reconciliation of the whole. To Hegel he says, 'A mind that is to be a totality is a nonsense. It resembles the political parties in the singular which made their appearance in the twentieth century, tolerating no other parties beside them [...] The whole is the false' (Adorno, 1973, p. 199; 1978, p. 50). To Marx he says history guarantees us nothing – 'No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one which leads from the slingshot to the megaton bomb' (Adorno, 1973, p. 430). Foucault adopts a Nietzschean view of the desire for presence as a will to truth, and asks, 'What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify, in the very instance of your demand?' (Foucault, 1980, p. 85). For all three, the desire for presence masks a potential violence, a terror, because it must involve the suppression of other kinds of thinking if its truth is to prevail.

The violence of presence is nowhere better elaborated than in the work of Derrida (1976, 1978, 1981, 1988). Indeed, *presence* is his term. Derrida first draws our attention to presence in the logocentric workings of the Saussurean sign. Here the union of the signifier and the signified seems to satisfy, in the first instance, a desire for a certain type of fulfilment, that of having a sound or mark which can be used to refer to a concept. But having seemingly named the concept, we find that the concept has no meaning except in its difference from other signs, as there are no self-identical words or signs. He gives this the name *différance*, a neologism for how the sign is never truly fulfilled. *Différance* entails that there are no *pure* signs – 'there is no experience consisting of *pure* presence' (Derrida, 1988, p. 10). For example, the 'inside' can never be a *pure* inside, because it is dependent on there being an 'outside'. For this reason Derrida demonstrates how the essence of the signified must be formally prior to the sign, and that fulfilment, or *full presence*, cannot be claimed except by making recourse 'in favour of a meaning supposedly antecedent to *différance*, more original than it, exceeding and governing it in the last analysis. This is [...] the presence of [...] the 'transcendental signified'' (Derrida, 1981, p. 29) – the signified to which all signifiers ultimately refer, where meaning can come to rest in itself. If the transcendental signified is

prior to the sign, it is, like Kant's *noumenon*, a-discursive and a-historical, outside our experience, unknowable. The transcendental signified is the object of the human longing for fulfilment and plenitude – a craving for the unfulfilled unity of the sign itself.

To claim that we *know* what justice, or truth, or understanding is, is therefore a deceit, and a violence to these concepts, for by attempting to fix them we close them down. We also run into the danger of arrogating to ourselves the belief that we have privileged access to the noumenal signified, the signified *outside*, and this is dangerous, for in claiming such entitlements, truth becomes an organising principle against which 'lesser' truths might then be measured. When truth becomes an organising principle, it finds itself in conflict with these lesser truths, and reacts with violence towards them.

### **The Ethical Aim of the Self**

For a first step in articulating an ethical praxis which tries to avoid the aporetic pitfalls of the transcendental signified, let us turn to the hermeneutics of Ricoeur. For Ricoeur (1992, p. 170) the "ethical intention" is "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions". Each of the three terms of this proposition – 'the good life', 'with and for others' and 'in just institutions' – have a powerful resonance for those of us who are engaged in the project of intercultural communication.

After Taylor (1985, p. 45) Ricoeur maintains that man is a 'self-interpreting animal', in as much as he is continually submitting his praxis to interpretation. In this respect 'the good life' unfolds as a narrative of selfhood which oscillates back and forth between our ideals and our practice. On the ethical plane the capacity of interpreting oneself is in a dialectical relation with self-esteem: the capacity for self-interpretation becomes self-esteem; and in turn self-esteem emerges from a continuous engagement with interpretation. It is in this hermeneutic circle that one can *attest* to being who one is when "the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts becomes the certainty of judging well and acting and a momentary and provisional approximation of living well" (p. 180).

According to Ricoeur, this 'heart of selfhood' is also the location of our experience of otherness (1992, p. 318). Rather than the constitution of 'otherness' being stated explicitly in a discourse of ontology, which can merely posit foundational grounds for the existence of Self and Other; on his argument, the 'other in the self' emerges more implicitly from the

discourse of phenomenology. Here, the conjunction of otherness and selfhood is attested to by three diverse domains of human experience: the relation between the self and the external world of materiality and praxis mediated by one's own body; the relation of the self to the other realised through the manifestation of intersubjectivity between persons; and the relation of the self to itself realised through 'conscience' (pp. 317-357).

Here, the relationship between the self and the other which Ricoeur describes is positioned between two extremes on a realised on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum (and anticipating Levinas, 1997, below) the other is entirely separate and exterior to the self. In this relationship, the other takes the role of a master who commands and instructs. The self, like the subject noun, is metaphorically positioned either as an object in the accusative case, or as the recipient of a passive verb who is "summoned to responsibility" by the other. However, for Ricoeur, this is more of a moral relationship than one of ethics, which he seeks to describe. At the other end of the spectrum lies sympathy from the self in relation to the suffering of the other. This 'suffering' is defined by Ricoeur as "the reduction...of the capacity; for acting...experienced as a violation of self-integrity" (1992, p. 190). Here there is an inversion of the relationship between self and other, whereby the self is the (active) giver of sympathy; and the other is its (passive) recipient. However, each end of this spectrum results in an inequality of relationship between self and other, which requires a certain corrective. On the one hand, in response to this other-initiated summons, equality becomes (re-)established through the recognition by the self of the other's authority. On the other hand, where an initiative is expressed from the loving self towards the other, it a relationship of equality can be re-established through jointly admitting each other's vulnerability and mortality.

It is from the midpoint of this spectrum, on Ricoeur's argument, that 'friendship' emerges as a relationship between equals based on 'solicitude'. This mutuality of relations arises not merely through an 'obedience to duty'; but rather, in keeping with the ethical aim of the self, it is "that of *benevolent spontaneity* related to self-esteem within the framework of the good life" (p. 190). If self-esteem is the outcome of the ethical project of living the good life, a consequence of an ethical relationship between the self and the other is solicitude'. In this respect, solicitude is closely related to self-esteem, and constitutes its dialogic dimension: for 'self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected upon one without the other' (180). Solicitude is based principally on the exchange between *giving* and *receiving* (188) in relation to which the self occupies a spectrum in relation to other, a spectrum in which equality plays the pivotal part.

However, the relation between the self and the other is also constituted within wider collectivities. Ricoeur uses the term 'institution' to refer to 'the structure of living together as this belongs to a historical community – people, nation, region, and so forth – a structure irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with these...(p. 194).' This 'institution' is none other than that what we can recognise as a 'culture', loosely defined. Moreover, for Ricoeur the defining feature of institutions/cultures is a unity of shared ethical purpose, or 'mores': 'what fundamentally characterises the idea of institution is the bond of common mores (p. 194).' On this argument, the good life is not confined to interpersonal relations but broadens out to the public sphere, with the institutional/cultural correlative of the interpersonal ethic of solicitude emerging as justice. Justice in many ways goes beyond the ethical requirements of solicitude to incorporate equality as the ethical realisation of distribution, here not confined to the economic sphere but also incorporating a distributive justice. Within a just institution or culture, the self will become determined by equal apportionment to each: 'From this twofold inquiry will result a "new" determination of the self, that of "each": to each, his or her rights' (p. 194).

### **Thinking-of-the-Other**

While Ricoeur accords a certain primacy to the self in its relation with the other, for Levinas the encounter with the other subverts the ontology of the self. In this respect, the self is inextricably bound up with the other: 'The self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world within the ontology of sameness' (in Kearney 1984, p. 75). On this argument, Levinas presents two interdependent dimensions of the other:

the ontological and what we will term, after Phipps (personal communication), the incarnational. From a more familiar ontological perspective, humans are seen 'as citizens, as individuals, as a multiplicity in a genus' (Levinas, 1997, 205), each one interacting with others within an historical ethical design. This 'interhuman relationship' already disrupts the ontology of presence by always preceding it and provides the grounds for ethical relations between human beings. However, it does this by being presupposed by the incarnational:

The interhuman relationship emerges with our history, without being-in-the-world as intelligibility and presence. But it can also be considered from another perspective – which transcends the Greek language of intelligibility – as a theme of justice and concern for the other as other, as a theme of love and desire which carries us beyond the finite Being of the world as presence. The interhuman is thus an interface: where what is "of the world" qua phenomenological intelligibility is juxtaposed with what is "not of the world" qua ethical responsibility (Levinas in Kearney, 1984, p. 74).

The ethical relation is therefore established by means of others 'of the world' and an ethical incarnational other which is 'not of the world'. This incarnational other is God. It is by going towards the human other that one goes towards God. This ethical movement towards the human other is for Levinas always preferable as difference than as unity: 'sociality is better than fusion'. Love, to take an example, is not perfected by two persons becoming one. The worth of love, or respect or tolerance for that matter, is in the two remaining irreducible to one – that is, in the *asymmetrical* obligation of the self to the other, and the ontological separation of one human being from another.

The irreducible and incarnational other Levinas calls 'the face' and our approach to the face is for him 'the most basic mode of responsibility'. Arguably, the face of the other summons the 'I' through a dialogical relationship.

Ethical subjectivity dispenses with the idealising subjectivity of ontology which reduces everything to itself. The ethical "I" is subjectivity precisely insofar as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call of the other. For me, the freedom of the subject is not the highest or primary value. The heteronomy of our response to the other, or to God as the absolutely other, precedes the autonomy of our subjective freedom. As soon as I acknowledge that it is "I" who is responsible, I accept that my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other. (Levinas in Kearney, 1984, p. 78)

The incarnational ineffability of the face therefore challenges the anthropological, sociological and social psychological invocations towards interculturalism and multiculturalism where the multiplicity of selves are yoked together into hypothetical cultures

of ontological unity and oneness. However, while there are clear implications for Levinas's thought in relation to the aporetics of totalism, those attached to moral judgement, the limits of tolerance and the impossibility of transcendence appear open and unresolved.

### **Towards a Discourse Ethics of Responsibility**

Despite these issues, it is the case that the ethical core of Levinas's philosophy arises from a 'non-reciprocal relation of responsibility' (Bettina, 2008), extended by the self to the other. For Derrida also, if judgemental truths are caught up in the metaphysical complicity of a signed universe which cannot be critiqued without recourse to the sign itself (1978), the motivation and rationale for critique has to be derived from within a system of signs in which ethical concepts are not dependent upon a transcendental signified. For this reason, Derrida also posits that we have an infinite responsibility to the other, for without this responsibility, 'you would not have moral and political problems, and everything that follows from this' (Derrida, in Critchley, 1999, p. 108; 2003).

In other words, it is through responsibility, rather than through the foundationalist presuppositions of presence, that the discursive terrain remains open, and that questions of 'non-normative' ethical judgement become possible, and indeed necessary. Without responsibility, the hope which is carried in the possibility of the other that, for example, things might be different one day, as well as the praxis which such hope implies, would be denied. By focusing on our responsibility to the other, and therefore on our responsibility to openness in opposition to closure, the point is to determine not whether different truths are good or bad, but whether putting a particular discourse or set of discourses into practice might lead to a silencing of open alternatives, and therefore also a turning away from the other. That these alternatives should be open makes it possible for intercultural communication theoretically to locate itself in opposition to perspectives and practices which interculturalists normally would associate with closure and intolerance, while simultaneously seeking to practise a dialogic engagement with more open alternatives - not because we know it is right to do so but because we know that not to do so would be an act of irresponsibility.

A praxis of intercultural communication which leads us out of the *telos* of tolerance, understanding and reconciliation is a praxis which must reach a new (and ever-renewable) accommodation with the other, one which moves the dialogue with the other on without

reaching a conclusion. This entails not that we must automatically forgive in the moment that we are summoned to forgiveness; but rather that we must consider whether our forgiveness might entail a sanctioning of the other's practice, and a closure and acceptance of eschatological finitude. Why are honour killings and other such (inter)cultural acts of the other unacceptable; and why should interculturalists not tolerate them as they tolerate other acts of the other? First interculturalists should not succumb to tolerance, because as Derrida puts it, 'tolerance is a form of charity': it declares to the other that his/her acts are being entertained under sufferance, and that these acts are at one and the same time subject to a privileged hegemonic order of the self:

If I think I am being hospitable because I am being tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and maintain control over the limits of my "home," my sovereignty, my "I can" (my territory, my house, my language, my culture, my religion, and so on). (Derrida, 2003, p. 128).

The *extremis* and aporetic acts of the other which are in conflict with an intercultural discourse that feels obliged against reason to countenance them are for us unacceptable. They are unacceptable because of the way in which truth is employed to justify their perpetration. The employment of truth as an organising principle leads to an iteration of certain types of practice which in time call themselves 'tradition'. People who subscribe to the concept of tradition will often tell you, 'It is our tradition that we do this; it is part of our custom; our practices have been given to us by God'. Scientists employing a similar logic will tell you that science is the privileged signified to which all epistemologies must defer. In this parallel discourse it is science which provides the grounds of truth for the abolition of the alterity of the other. If God is a delusion (and we have no idea if God is), then science is a delusion of a similar magnitude. Both totalise in the interests of truth: God/Religion by claiming moral foundation in tradition and science by claiming an unquestioned, self-legitimizing universality.

The development of tradition is the justification of the 'here' by means of the not here (God), and the development of science is the classification of the 'here' by means of the claim to discursive universalism. In both cases a privileged signified is employed as truth, and by this means each closes itself off from public interrogation. What this suggests is that tradition in intercultural communication should never be accepted as having any form of privileged status as a justification for cultural practice, but should always be rigorously questioned,

problematised and deconstructed. The closing of debate through the truths of tradition and measurement poses intercultural communication's greatest threat and danger. In what Phipps rightly terms 'the struggle to make meaning', it is necessary to struggle not to finish with just *the one* – while all the time keeping a reflexive eye on *the many*. That way, the radical otherness of the other is preserved and the debate and the questions continue. A critical intercultural praxis keeps the radical otherness of the other open in expectation and hope without ever needing arrival and acceptance. In intercultural dialogue we are obligated to sustain an incitement to responsibility and all that entails, because as Derrida puts it, 'pure unity or pure multiplicity ... is a synonym of death' (Derrida, 1997, p. 13). In the quest for intercultural knowledge we thus favour the multiple over the singular, the variable over the stable, and the mess over the arranged.

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