CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix
Introduction xi

Part I. Prelude to Phenomenology and Comparative Philosophy
Chapter 1. Enlightenment and the Question of the Other: A Postmodern Audition 3

Part II. Transversality, Phenomenology, and Intercultural Texts
Chapter 2. Transversality and the Philosophical Politics of Multiculturalism in the Age of Globalization 15

Part III. Transversal Linkage between Phenomenology and Asian Philosophy
Chapter 3. Wang Yang-ming and Existential Phenomenology 37
Chapter 4. The Unity of Knowledge and Action: A Postscript to Wang Yang-ming’s Existential Phenomenology 56
Chapter 5. Jen: An Existential and Phenomenological Problem of Intersubjectivity 72
Chapter 6. Confucianism and Existentialism: Intersubjectivity as the Way of Man 87
Chapter 7. Heidegger’s Way with Sinitic Thinking 102

Part IV. Phenomenology, Literary Theory, and Comparative Culture and Politics
Chapter 8. Reading/Misreading the Sinogram: From Fenollosa to Derrida and McLuhan 129
Chapter 9. Ernest Fenollosa’s Etymosinology in the Age of Global Communication 141
Chapter 10. The Joy of Textualizing Japan: A Metacommentary on Roland Barthes’s Empire of Signs 163
Chapter 11. Revolutionary Dialectics:
Mao Tse-tung and Maurice Merleau-Ponty 179

Part V. The Fleshfold of the Earth: Green Thought, East and West
Chapter 12. Merleau-Ponty's Transversal Geophilosophy
and Sinic Aesthetics of Nature 211
Chapter 13. The Greening of Postmodern Philosophy:
The Ethical Question of Reinhabitng the Earth 229

Notes 249
Bibliography 321
Index 393
INTRODUCTION

Questioning is the piety of thought.
—Martin Heidegger

We all stand only together, not only all men [and women], but all things.
—Henry G. Bugbee Jr.

If we keep on speaking the same language together, we’re going to reproduce the same history.
—Luce Irigaray

This book of thirteen selected essays spans almost half a century from 1965 (chapter 3) to 2009 (chapters 9 and 13). Many, if not all, of them are experimental and exploratory in nature. Since they are meant to be a transversal linkage between phenomenology and East Asian philosophy, Part III, which contains five essays, constitutes the kernel of this collection. Chapters 3, 5, and 6 form a triptych with an emphasis on the lifeworld (Lebenswelt) as a sociocultural or intersubjective world. Chapter 4 is a rejoinder on chapter 3 in which the idea of sincerity (cheng) is suggested and emphasized as the moral soul of East Asian peoples. In the late 1960s, we lived on the Moravian campus. When my oldest son, Michael, was four years old, somebody asked him what his dad taught. With a clear voice and without a moment of hesitation, he answered, “My dad teaches existential phenomenology and philosophy East and West.”

Chapter 1 auditions the major agenda of Enlightenment thought, which is paradigmatic to Western modernity. Kant institutionalized and valorized the autonomy of reason and reason alone. While privileging the authority and autonomy of reason for alleged human progress and emancipation, he marginalized and disenfranchised the (reason’s) other whether it be the body, femininity, nature, or the non-West. J. G. Herder raises a critical question
concerning the universal formulation of reason as “the single summit and purpose of all human culture, all happiness, all good” and challenges the unitary vision of Enlightenment rationalism with a question: “Is the whole body just one big eye?”

Chapter 3 stands out as the earliest exploratory attempt to show an affinity between the Chinese philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) and existential phenomenology and hopefully to open a meaningful dialogue between Chinese philosophy and existential phenomenology in particular and Western philosophy in general in the twentieth century (see further chapters 5, 6, and 7 in particular).

Chapter 2 advances the concept of transversality, which is central to the main themes of this book. It begins with a critique of the notion of universality in modern Western philosophy. It targets Hegel—the modernist incarnate—in particular, who had a dark view of the non-Western world, particularly China and India. His overarching Eurocentric universality is founded on the fallacious assumption that what is particular in the West is made universalized whereas what is particular in the non-West remains particular forever. As the Martiniquan francophone Edouard Glissant puts it succinctly, however, thinking about “One” is not thinking about “All” (or “Many”). Eurocentric universality is outmoded and thus has no place in the globalization of the multicultural world. It simply ignores the reality of interlacing of multiple lifeworlds. Eurocentric universality is nothing but a form of what Roland Barthes calls “Western narcissism” (see chapter 10).

The concept of transversality is symbolized in the Maitreyan Middle Way. The image of the new emerging face may be likened to the famous rustic wooden statue of the Buddha at a Zen temple in Kyoto, Japan, whose face marks a new dawn of awakening (satori) or signals the beginning of a new global regime of ontology, culture, politics, and ethics. From the crack in the middle of the old face of the Buddha, there emerges an interstitial, liminal face that signifies a new transfiguration and transvaluation of the existing world. The icon of the emerging new face symbolizes the arrival of Maitreya (the future “Awakened One”) or Middle Way—that third enabling term of transversality that is destined to navigate the stormy waters of intercultural, interspecific, and interdisciplinary border crossings. Transversality means to overcome and go beyond (“trans”) the clash of ethnocentrisms both “Orientalist” and “Occidentalist” as a result of “essentializing” (to use Edward W. Said’s phrase) the Orient or the Occident. We are warned not to take it simply as a middle point between bipolar opposites. Rather, it breaks through
bipolarity itself (theory and practice, philosophy and nonphilosophy, mind and body, femininity and masculinity, humanity and nature, Europe and non-Europe, etc.). What must be recognized as important is the fact that transversality is the paradigmatic way of overcoming all polarizing dichotomies and ready for the conceptualization of “world philosophy.” The end product of transversality in the fusion of cultural (and disciplinary) horizons is hybridity or creolization. Viewed in this way, what is traditionally called “comparative philosophy” is not just a neglected and underdeveloped branch of philosophy, but it is poised to transform radically the very conception of philosophy itself. Furthermore, this new philosophy of hybridity renders the American intellectual Francis Fukuyama’s thesis of the “end of history” on the one hand and his Asian-Singaporean counterpart Kishore Mahbubani’s thesis of “essentializing” China on the other.

The three previously cited epigraphs permeate the spirit of this book. First is Heidegger’s notion of thinking as questioning. Second Bugbee captures that Deleuzean-Guattarian “geophilosophical” principle that embraces all matters of the earth as a whole. The incomparable American pioneering ecologist Aldo Leopold calls the land “a biotic community.” With a touch of Kantian deontological ethics, he speaks of a “land ethic” that entails human obligation to nonhuman beings and things on earth. Bugbee also uses the befitting expression the “sacrament of coexistence” among all earthly beings and things both human and nonhuman. The expression combines the artistic renditions by the noted French sculptor Auguste Rodin’s Cathedral that depicts interhuman existence and the Dutch lithographer M. C. Escher’s Verbum that geometrically details what we might call the ecological continuum of Being or simply Interbeing. At the early stage of my environmental writings that began to celebrate the first Earth Day in 1970, I used the expression “deep ecology” in the footsteps of its founder, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. Like geophilosophy, it means to be holistic. Nonetheless, geophilosophy defines the contours of the earth more comprehensively and inclusively than deep ecology (see chapters 12 and 13).

The principle of the interconnectedness of differentiated elements in the cosmos is called “synchronicity” in the Yijing (the Chinese Book of Changes), whose calculation in terms of trigrams and hexagrams is based on the binary system of yin and yang as supplementary. The American pioneering ecologist Barry Commoner calls synchronicity the “first law of ecology” in which everything is said to be interconnected to everything else in the universe, and nothing exists or can exist in isolation (compare the so-called
butterfly effect). It refers to the structural patterns of asymmetrical reciprocity. But for graded differentiation there would be no genuine reciprocity. To be is to communicate; but for difference there would be no genuine communication because there would be nothing to communicate or no need for communication. Here Heidegger’s play of *Differenz* as *Unterschied* is most suggestive because it signifies both difference and the relational at the same time. The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo intimates that the postmodern is “an adventure of difference(s).”

What I call “relational ontology” characterizes the distinction of East-Asian thinking and doing: what Being is to Western thought from Heraclitus to Heidegger, Interbeing is to East-Asian thought from Confucius to Mao Zedong. Sinism (i.e., Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan/Zen Buddhism, which is a hybrid religion of Indian and Chinese cultures) is this-worldly, practical, concrete, specific, and particular. It is a species of relational ontology, including its language (ideography or sinography). It is predicated upon the conception of reality as social process. This social process is always already embodied. Also for the Romans, it should be noted, the idea of pietà (piety) signifying absolute reciprocity was something spiritual and bodily at the same time. Speaking of the relational ontology of Sinism, it is noteworthy that the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas is an ethical celebration of the other (alterity) or, to use the neologism of Mark C. Taylor, “altarity” that places the other on a place higher (altar) than the self. The primacy of the other in Western relational ontology is a recent discovery by Ludwig Feuerbach that may be hailed as the “Copernican revolution” of social thought. Be that as it may, dialogue for Levinas cannot afford not to be ethical, while for Bakhtin, dialogism is a celebration of the other or alterity. Recently I came across Rainer Maria Rilke’s short verse that is inscribed in one of the “American Greetings” cards (made in China!). It reads, “I am so glad that you are here. It helps me to realize/ how beautiful my world is.” The content of the inscription is simply beautiful. It may be called the aesthetics of asymmetrical reciprocity or relationships.

The eighteenth-century Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico judiciously formulated the idea of complementarity of the body and the mind as “the inseparable dancing partners” (Roy Porter’s phrase) in opposition to the Cartesian bifurcation of res cogitans and res extensa when he writes, “If there is no mind, there will be no body, and if there is no body, there will be no mind.” In fact, the body is the ontological factum of our very Interbeing in the world. It cannot be otherwise. The body, in short, is a social inscription
in the world. As an authorial inscriber of the world, it “authors” the world before “answering” it. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body and the world are made of the same stuff. Moreover, to be alone is not to be: existence is coexistence. The “I think” is inherently egocentric or monological. Because to be social is necessarily to be intercorporeal, the “I think” scandalizes sociability. Following Norbert Elias, we can describe speech as nothing but social relations turned into sound. Similarly, sexuality too is nothing but social relations turned into carnal contact. The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips raises the most interesting question: why can’t we tickle ourselves? Because it is a contact sport, that is, it requires the tactile enactment of the other. Its pleasure cannot be had in the absence of the other.

The French literary meijin (famous person) Roland Barthes declares that the human is his or her language (l’homme, c’est le language). He confesses that he can function only within language but not outside it. His Empire of Signs is an expression of his fascination with the vast network of ideograms and sinograms or a galaxy of signifiers (see chapter 10). It is, as Susan Sontag puts it, “the ultimate accolade” of semiology. If the city is an ideogram, the country Japan is an empire of ideograms or ideographic metropolis after the fashion of Ludwig Wittgenstein who wittingly likens language to a city. Vico has a keen sense of linguistic anatomy. Not only does he define man as “only mind, body and speech” but he also locates speech as standing somewhere “midway between mind and body.” As he writes, the carnal principle of etymology is that “words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to signify the institutions of the mind and spirit.” Many sinograms are the dramatic personae of corporeal movements as kinesthetic performance. As a matter of fact, every sinogram is the metaphor of a thing human or natural. It is a gesture and as a gesture it is “mute speech.” A cluster of sinograms is “a conversation of gestures.” When Samuel Beckett remarks that in language as gestures the spoken and the written are identical, he is speaking of sinography even if he was unaware of it.

Gestures animate language or are an animated language. They are the roots of language. Without it language becomes petrified. As language and thought are interconnected, the body plays the midwifery of both. Rodin’s sculptural masterpiece The Thinker leads us to believe that thinking is always embodied, and the idea of disembodied thinking or the Cartesian cogito is a fiction. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, what language is to thought, the body is to the mind. Thus Paul Valéry speaks of the dance as the “intense festival of the body in the presence of our souls,” while Stéphane Mallarmé calls the dance
“corporeal writing” (*écriture corporelle*). There is a Chinese dance troupe that performs calligraphic dance or “writes” in the form of calligraphy.

In the Sinic world view, culture and language are inseparable: they are correlative. Thinking tied to language is related to culture. Culture is a superset, and language and thinking are subsets. Richard Rorty is impeccable when he uses the expression “philosophy as cultural politics.” Language is a product of culture as much as it is an agent of culture. Fenollosa’s “etymosinology” is the expression that assumes the intrinsic relatedness or correlativity of language to Sinic culture. As a matter of fact, philosophy of the Cartesian cogito runs counter to Sinic relational ontology. From a Sinic perspective, in fact, language is relational ontology par excellence. Heidegger cannot be faulted when he regards language as the “relation of all relations,” that is, all human relations are rooted in language. It is worth noting that the Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky contends that the development of thinking as a function of language (speech translated from *rech* in Russian) occurs not from the individual to the social, but rather from the social to the individual.

In closing, let me quote the dialogical philosopher Martin Buber when he says with humility about his endeavor as erecting “bridges,” not building “towers.” The aim of transversality, too, is to build bridges that would promote and facilitate cross-cultural, cross-speciesistic, cross-disciplinary exchanges as well as globalization toward the creation of planetary thinking. Neither globalization nor cosmopolitanism intends to create “one world” with “one government.” Globalization as glocalization is the process in which the global and the local are blended together: the global is rooted in the local. Transversality advances the cause of cross-cultural fertilization or hybridization as well as cross-disciplinary engagement in which truth as communicability privileges, and is monopolized by, neither the West nor philosophy alone. For truth’s center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere.
Thank you for your interest in this Ohio University Press title.

This book is available for purchase online at our website or through other ebooks vendors.