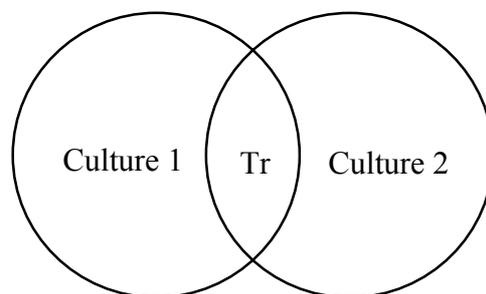


Intercultures and the Interface with Nationalist Culture

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Abstract: Accepting that intercultures comprise relations operative in the intersections or overlaps of cultures, a review is offered of features that might help the concept become a research tool for comparativists. Intercultures are held to be defined by professionalism and secondness, and possibly by features such as diverse provenance, reversed agent/principal relations, and growth with technologization. The problem is then to model relations between the monocultural and the intercultural in the age of the modernist nation. Discarding oppositions such as pure vs. hybrid or sedentary vs. nomadic, some credence is given to trust vs. calculation as required by neoclassical cooperation theory, and to the semiotic distinction between the iconic and the symbolic, where the iconic reduction of complexity would be more operative in the national than in the intercultural.

The term ‘interculture’ here refers to beliefs and practices found in intersections or overlaps of cultures, where people combine something of two or more cultures at once (Pym 1998a). As such, interculturality is not to be confused with the fact that many cultures can be found within the one society or political unit--the term for which might be ‘multiculturality’--, nor with the fact that various national societies can belong to the same cultural group--such were ‘intercultural communities’ in the sense used by Durisin (1989)--, nor indeed with the fact that things can move from one culture to another--which could be referred to as ‘cross-cultural’ transfer. The basic idea of interculturality can be represented graphically as follows, where an interculture is assumed to be operative in the overlap of Culture 1 and Culture 2:



As such, the notion is strictly operative, designed only to synthesize data on the sociocultural positions of mediators who assist in cross-cultural transfers. Our discourse on intercultures has no ontological pretensions; it does not proclaim the

universal presence of any particular form of mediation; it does not account for the discursive position of mediators in texts. It should be seen as a modest proposal developed out of diverse empirical work (cf. Pym 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1998b, 2000a). Its main intellectual virtue stems from the way interculturality may cut across debates between universalist and relativist positions, providing an alternative basis for the writing of cultural history. Yet our ideas have so far had more to do with actually training people to work within intercultural spaces, and with the ethics of their interventions. Our purpose here is to assemble and extend the concept so that it might indeed address a more general cultural history, without embracing all cultural history.

What is not an interculture? To produce a usefully restrictive definition we have elsewhere proposed two simple constraints.

The first is that an interculture be related to some degree of professional status. This means that intercultural groups should depend on cross-cultural transfers for some measure of their livelihood, usually in terms of exchange (money or prestige in exchange for text transfer). In some cultures, selection for intercultural positions is rigidly controlled on the level of birthright or clan allegiance. There may be a handing down of official trust from generation to generation (as in the case of the *Oranda Tsûji* in Japan), or there could be implicit selection rites of social class (as in the interpreters at the Nuremberg Trials, mostly drawn from the friends and families of diplomats). Modernist cultures, however, have few such restrictions and allow for considerable vocational meandering. Interculturality can now be found underlying a vast array of offices, from what are now called relocation experts, localizers, multilingual managers and the like, through to the language workers associated with multinational scientific research, perhaps along with various diplomats, mercenaries, spies, and most obviously the social paraphernalia of direct and indirect marketing. Those ranks might also include many writers, readers, critics, translators and teachers whose literary work, even when irreducible to commerce, has no *a priori* reason to be separated from the rough and tumble of general intercultural life.

Our second restrictive criterion is that interculturality should depend on an apparently more primary cultural division. That is, an interculture must have some hierarchical quality of 'secondness', in the sense that it is felt to be secondary to a primary division of cultures. The work of these professionals is thus only intercultural because it assumes there is a line to be crossed and that something is to go from one

culture to another. As soon as the line between cultures becomes non-operative, as soon as there is no functional barrier to be overcome, interculturality may lose its derivative status and become indistinguishable from general cultural practice. Of course, the intercultural itself normally establishes the line in the first place. Secondness nevertheless remains part of the intercultural's self-definition and is thus a feature of its specific status.

That is as far as bare definition has taken us. For us, interculturality requires professionalism and secondness. Beyond that, there remain many hypotheses to be tested. Let us just mention the following:

The provenance paradox: The diversity of individual provenance *reinforces* the professional identity of the intercultural group, whereas the effect would be the opposite in monocultural positions. One might think here of the editorial board of an international journal, where different members are selected precisely because of their background in different cultures. If the journal were not in some way intercultural, such differences would tend to unravel identity rather than strengthen it.

Agent-principal reversal: Most interculturalities begin as groups of agents, representing principals in client nations (e.g. diplomats at the United Nations). However, as the intercultural develops its own institutions, the agents assume a position of greater power with respect to their principals, to the point where they themselves may become the principals (e.g. the institutions of the European Union issue directives to member states).

Growth with technologization: Specialized communication technology accelerates the shift of effective decision-making power to expert interculturalities, over and above any reversals in agent-principal relations. Interculturalities based on the manipulation of the complex codes needed for cross-cultural communication will thus necessarily accrue power, simply because the codes are too complex for their clients to work with directly (cf. Frow 1995). It follows that the nodes of communication, the technological cities of our day, are now the privileged places for interculturalities, quite independently of national geographies.

Extension and loss of secondness: Intercultures may be classically narrow (e.g. a handful of missionaries in the Americas in the early sixteenth century). But they may also grow to the point where they lose secondness (e.g. the bilingual communities trained by those missionaries in the following centuries). And from there the interculture may further develop into a national culture (those same communities once they entered the core of national Spanish-speaking cultures). To radicalize the hypothesis, we might more neatly say that all cultures stem from intercultures, which lose secondness as they expand.

The problem of the nation

As might be seen from the general trend of our hypotheses, we are far from proclaiming the death or irrelevance of the non-intercultural. The latter would embrace the national cultures of the modernist age, and much more as well. National cultures do indeed exist; their workings are by no means annulled by the growth and power of the intercultural. Indeed, their boundaries are often the primary lines on which our criterion of secondness depends. We have no urgent desire to get rid of such things.

The persistence of national cultures nevertheless raises a fundamental challenge for the theory of intercultures. The problem is basically as follows: If an interculture is indeed a kind of culture, in what way is it different from a national culture?

Some answers to that question are already given in our definitions: an interculture is professional (membership of a national culture may be based on blood or territorial location, but not professional background), and an interculture has secondness (a national culture in turn has illusory primariness, even when of intercultural origins). But those are no more than unfalsifiable definitions. More specific answers arise from the jumbles of historical analysis, since the relation between nation and interculture often seems so contingent as to be ungeneralizable with any degree of confidence. However, our problem here is to be solved neither by definition nor by the renouncing of thought. We are, let us say, concerned with the cultures of the modernist era, and particularly with the nationalist cultures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (such are our current research problems). Within

that frame, then, and accepting our necessary definitions, how might one conceptualize the relations between nation and interculture?

A series of standard oppositions can be brought to bear on the interface. In each case we would tend to assume the first term to be national, the second to be intercultural:

pure vs. hybrid
sedentary vs. nomadic
trust vs. calculation
iconic vs. symbolic

The first two pairs are fairly archetypal representations, although equally identifiable as facile abstractions. As much as a national culture might aspire to pure essence, few nations would claim not to be hybrid mixes of anterior ethnicities (Koreans, we are told, mythically claim to have all come from the one hole in the ground, but no modernist nation would project such autochthonous status). Indeed, the admixtures of past values add to the very definition of the national culture (the Hispanic may be Latin-Christian or Judeo-Islamic, but never simply Hispanic). The multicultural nation is thus recognized as a norm rather than an exception. A standard teaching trick in sociolinguistics is to ask how many countries in Europe only have one standard language (the answer: Iceland and Portugal). The norm for modernist national cultures is plurality and mixes.

Similarly naïve would seem assumptions that national cultures are sedentary, leaving intercultural some kind of exclusive right to nomadic thought or indeed art (variously after Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Many national identities have survived diasporas, whether by defeat or internal imperialism, and the loss of territorial unicity has in some cases strengthened rather than weakened identity structures. Some national cultures, generally those of *jus solis* (the French preference), will sense displacement as a loss and seek their labyrinths in the territorial past. Yet there are also the cultures of *jus sanguinis* (the Germanic, for example), and many mixes in between (religious belonging and years of residence may figure alongside territory and blood), all of which allow for meandering in the world without any necessary embedding in an intercultural. There is thus no unambiguous choice to be made between a national and nomadic status. Although the intercultural has every right to

reclaim the primacy of nomadic thought (as argued in Pym 2000a), it has as much right to the term 'culture' as well, no matter how much 'cultivation' may etymologically refer to the tilling of land. Both the nomadic and the sedentary are cultural, and national cultures have recuperated both sides of that divide. As if nomads, we must look elsewhere for our specificity.

Our thought on these problems has drawn much from neoclassical negotiation theory. Since Adam Smith, many great minds have found something magical in the idea that two sides can seek mutual benefit through cooperation, without any naïve assumption of equal standing either before or after the negotiation. Cooperation between cultures would thus offer a general aim for what intercultural relations should be achieving (cf. Pym 2000b). Indeed it would present a way out of the determinist machines of the biological, as recognized by Dawkins (1989: 3, 202-233). At the same time, the universalist pretensions of negotiation theory are manifestly ethical rather than ontological, and are thus highly suited to the kind of training issues with which we have been dealing. The shortcomings of neoclassical negotiation theory lie mostly in the kind of subjectivity it assumes: the rationalist egoist is difficult to locate in history or indeed in most of our descriptive endeavours. This is not particularly because of capitalist egoism (altruism can only enhance the chances of cooperation). The problem is the assumed rationalism, as if historical subjects were able to calculate probabilities of possible outcomes or the long-term success of certain strategies. The fact that some social agents become better negotiators than others may or may not involve a strict rationalism (this is not clear in Axelrod 1997), but it does involve a necessary complexity that, according to social analysts of all kinds in recent decades, must be reduced in order for social life to proceed. The reduction of complexity thus touches anything from neuro-psychology (cf. Damasio 1994) to systemic sociology (cf. Luhmann 1968); it must be seen as a part of general negotiation theory.

This is the point where the theories might help us with our problem. Cooperation certainly exists both within cultures and between them, and the latter mode is hopefully organized by and through intercultural agents. But the difference between the two modes should have much to do with the ways in which complexity can be reduced. Relative monocultures, such as they are, contain myriad mechanisms for promoting mutual recognition and the extension of trust: suprasegmental inflexions, dress codes and corporeal backchanneling are sure signs that you and I come from the same culture, share the same aspirations, and can cooperate with each

other without much further inquiry into our respective identities. Within an interculture, however, such mechanisms are far more reduced, almost by definition. In their stead we will find a greater propensity to calculate the actual complexities, to analyze the codes, to mistrust the unknown. That, after all, is the basis of intercultural power: the professionals are there precisely because they are able to deal with the complexity of codes. An Irish reader of Joyce, to take a throwaway example, might interact with the text because it is Irish, with resonance beyond the memory of experience, to the extent that the text is constantly given the benefit of the doubt. But a foreign translator of Joyce will have to trace those references one by one, analyzing and locating before recreating them, mistrusting each unanswered question, calculating each necessary guess. The intercultural will tend to deploy reason in places where the monocultural would rely on trust.

We thus propose that trust is more operative within national cultures, and that the reasoned calculation of complexity tends to be a feature of intercultures. The opposition is admittedly precarious, perhaps as unstable as those we have already discarded, yet hopefully engaging enough to stimulate further thought. It might explain, for example, why intercultural agents are so often mistrusted (*traduttore traditore*), to the point where their institutions have as their main aim the creation of trust. We might think here of the secular discourse of the translator's fidelity, technologically converted into modes of equivalence, and then into numerous training institutions designed to guarantee such things through the formation and reproduction of intercultural norms. Trust, in this sense, could become one of the highest values in the translator's deontology (cf. Chesterman 2001). Yet it is only there because, we submit, the translator's intercultural position is based precisely on a fundamental lack of trust.

Let us pursue this distinction just one small step further. Let us suppose it is possible to distinguish between (nationalist) relations that reduce complexity and (intercultural) relations that calculate and manipulate complexity. What would be the semiotic difference between these relations? One candidate for the position would be the Peircean description of the iconic sign, to be distinguished from the symbolic as such. We are told that Peirce considered a sign to be an icon when it 'may represent its object mainly by its similarity' (in Eco 1977: 195). Eco wanted to get rid of iconic signs (1977: 216-217), showing that they are indeed constructed by degrees, by thought, and that semiotics thus remains a domain of reason. However, social life

readily accepts iconicity as similarity; we constantly by-pass the explicit encoding and decoding operations on which the conventional symbol depends. And this iconic reduction would seem to be a key tool for the building of trust as cultural belonging.

Here we might think of the geneticist's argument that social relations are based on like helping like, since similitude is based on the sharing of genes. The other's body and physiognomy is converted into an icon of the self. We thus protect our families, our clans, our tribes, the images of our nations, just as we distribute trust according to the same relations. Such might be the determinism of the group, against cooperation at any level of pure reason or deontology. Yet that kind of iconic bond, undoubtedly intense at affective levels, cannot be dominant at the intercultural level, simply because multiple provenance means that the social actors in an interculture do not look like each other.

The symbol, being ruled by convention, may yet be transformed by reason. If East and West are to be reversed, as Engels envisaged, pure agreement may change the names and the world will turn regardless. However, if whole national cultures are seen as constructs of symbols, systems if you will, all based on conventions and thus on reason, could thought alone overturn them? Do the arguments of intellectuals transform the spirits of states, move fashion, or attract masses? Clearly not. Princes and politicians exist for such things. The kinds of principles we direct at intercultures should thus not expect to operate beyond their mandate. And this, in sum, is why we should invest thought in the distinction between nation and intercultures, leaving the iconic to those who know its own modes of manipulation.

Postscript: The War on Terror

The attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 were not organized by a nation or by a national culture. The ideological response to that attack, formulated as a 'war on terror', has brought nation-states into an unequal alliance by which they defend their sole right to be the protagonists of war, and thus to regulate cross-cultural relations. This is a rear-guard defence. The international distribution of information and expertise is such that nation-states no longer retain all the mechanisms of power, and national cultures no longer define the geometry of world conflicts. The 'war on terror' is a very coherent reaction to this challenge. It distinguishes between legitimate conflict, wrought by nations with states and armies,

and illegitimate conflict, known as terror, wrought by stateless groups using intelligence and individual action. The Israeli state is thus justified in using tanks and fighter planes, whereas Palestinians, a nation without tanks and fighter planes, are terrorists deploying no more than the ideological nobility of suicide. Fighters captured in Afghanistan are not legitimate prisoners of war because they were not fighting for any particular nation. Such distinctions, maintained by countless national flags and the iconic profiling of enemies within, will not hold for long. Postmodern power is not the preserve of the nation state.

Of course, terrorist networks are not strictly intercultural groups as we have defined them (the criteria of professionalism and secondness would seem not to apply). Yet their sources of technical power are similar to those of intercultural groups, and some of their members are surprisingly professional in the calculation and manipulation of complex codes. Such groups are part and parcel of the weakening of national control over postmodern power. Sooner or later, they too must find a place within the theory of intercultural groups. For the moment, though, let us conclude with a convenient platitude: Terrorist networks are the dark face of the intercultural; they are what happens when professional intercultural groups do not work, when ignorance and neglect of the non-similar replace the rational priorities of cross-cultural cooperation.

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