

**About the Philosophical Proposal of the Liminal Being
(An interview with Eugenio Trías Sagnier)**

Fernando Gómez Herrero
(IE)

To Joanne Elizabeth, who saw potential in the Baroque in Britain

Brief Context and Introduction

I must have become aware of Eugenio Trías Sagnier (1942-2013) by the year of 1999 when I was finishing my PhD at Duke University in the U.S. There was no graceful mediator, handy protocol or easy etiquette. No go-between institutionality brought him close. I must have read his articles in the press, but this was a chance encounter in some library exhibit with a good selection of Spanish-language materials, perhaps in the philosophy section across the Atlantic. Or was it in Mexico? Be as it may, here we are.

I defend that Trías is arguably one, if not the most important philosophical voice coming out of Spain in the second half of the 20th century. Such voice reaches us in the new, disorienting century arousing memory and desire for “philosophy” and “history” against all odds. It is perhaps ironic that one’s distancing from a certain timespace (call it Spain for short) sometimes “comes back” to hit you on the head, boomerang-like. But life is messy and many explorations or readings have happened and continue to happen. If history is radically open and the present remains brutally uncertain, the future can still take many turns, philosophically also. Yet, this is a road not for the many, so it appears, and Trías explicitly says so and defends the choices made.

From the mid-1990s onwards, the American past included the discourses on postmodernism and postcolonialism (Fredric Jameson and Walter D. Mignolo are two names), also globalization and cultural studies among others (“philosophy” was always there somewhere, mostly in the continental-European Franco-German tradition from the Enlightenment onwards, and also Latin American criticisms of an imperialist and colonialist Eurocentrism, Enrique Dussel is one outstanding name here). These ideas were circulating, never easily, inside “Romance Studies” at Duke, but also outside in fields of “English” and “Comparative Literature.” On the European side of the Atlantic, Trías was already doing his own thing, also combining French and German schools of philosophical thought, more the latter than the former as the conversation makes clear the gradual moving away from Deconstruction. We are parachuting into the sombre reading rooms of bearded gentlemen of Germanic stock! Yet, there are also vindications of modernism and harsh words for postmodernism (postcolonialism is missing in action).

“Borders” were often mentioned back then in the East and West campuses of Duke University in the city of Durham, perhaps less so now. It was often metaphorical code for mixtures in direct relation to the American simulacra, to use Baudrillard’s terminology. The similarity between “borders” is superficial: the tight synthesis of Trías’s project, “liminal or border reason,” that is, in his own words, *sui generis* and has little in common with these postcolonial options. His project comes out of a timespace, again Spain, that is, in his own explicit words, not propitious for philosophical reflection. Already in the 1990s, Trías was following his own predilections irrespective of schools of thought in the “Americas.” I simply register the mutual disrelationship.

So, we are now neither here nor there, and it is fine and I still wish to retrieve Trías's work, a decade or so after he has left the stage. I have never encountered Trías's work in the American classrooms. Nor do I see his ghost in the British classrooms in the "field" of "the languages," where Spanish –and Catalan even more clearly-- are stowaways. I do not generally see an awful lot of good things happening there and "philosophy" is mostly invisible (wo)man in the "Hispanic" vicinity (Spanish, Latin, "Iberian," etc. make no difference) or other vicinities. Empiricists, pragmatists or utilitarians –those who speak of academic "viability" – never really had the proper vocabulary for good self-definitions. Trías –and many others with him-- cannot possibly be in this company. I attest to the ignorance and hostility to "Hispanic philosophy" that will not go away tomorrow (but the quotation is brutal shorthand; Latin American philosophy is an identical predicament, and the general European horizon is in peril in the Brexit island). Will "America" be anything better now? I leave the question hoping for the missing institutional tooth that will bite into the texture of this dense thought project, Trías's, articulated in the foreign tongue. cursory look at the British Library holdings reveals few philosophic holdings, Trías's main books are not there, there are very few translations of his work, no major works and it is better not to ask about standard holdings in university libraries. There is no immediate reward for this type of hard work, and here we are offering this conversation about the cognitive mapping of philosophy in the Spanish tongue inside the European horizon of the West, Spain inside Europe and "America" within the Americas. Trías's native Barcelona is here too.

I think I began the acquaintance with his beautiful book *La Razón Fronteriza* [*Border or Liminal Reason*] (1999) in the final year of the Duke program. I continued reading Trías in the San Francisco area after I transferred to assume the quirky post of "Transatlantic Literature" at Stanford University (there will be a narrative of it in due course). I read Trías with some intensity, also because he did not fit into the immediate circumstance. I was westbound. He appeared resolutely eastbound. I reached out to him and the result of those efforts is now included here (love's labor's is not lost after all). The conversation is, if I may say so, "a feast of the intelligence," as he puts it in relation to another subject. His are the massive singulars (Age, Spirit). This is good foreign humanities, nomothetic and idiographic in one tight knot. Our Barcelona philosopher is the main protagonist: his words remain moving, enriching and provocative (the original cassette tapes are still kept in a box in a closet space under key and lock somewhere).

This is a conversation of two, "tanto monta, monta tanto, Eugenio como Fernando," please add the light touch: the matters are serious and I am glad to say that we are not alone. There are many proper names and many localities are summoned. The reader will see many explanations, clarifications and further insights about Trías's work. There are predilections and repudiations in his trajectory and he is candid about those. There are many references to art and literature, cinema and music. There are also some blind spots (the sign "America" summons these swiftly). A tremendous generosity of spirit will reach the reader of these pages, should there be any.

The conversation remains genuine, intense, dense, erudite, rich, varied, angular, evocative, provocative. There are celebrations and there are castigations. I think we can all sense the honesty of purpose, the intensity of focus, the seriousness, ambition and a sustained life-long dedication to what he calls "original or first philosophy," which is also

synthesized by “liminal or border reason.” The conversation helps explain a few things about such philosophical adventure. Earnest engagements will require many evenings.

There are early memories of Barcelona in the 1950s and travels in Latin America in the 1970s. Our Catalan, no Catalanist intellectual --and there is a difference-- speaks to me in Spanish and writes his books in Spanish and speaks equally in Spanish and Catalan. He calls himself a “disaster in the languages” and he is surely not alone --John Bull and Uncle Sam point fingers at each other and conclude “me, too.” Our philosopher highlights the Enlightenment period, German idealism, as the period of consolidation of European thought, with grand music going along. Trías does not hide his Germanocentrism in philosophy and music --why should he? There are some references to the difficulties of survival of the always uncomfortable discipline of philosophy in contemporary Barcelona inside the larger Spanish context. Other environments are equally difficult. He addresses the “slow gestation of the liminal concept,” and the uneven relationship of the intelligence and the “torn subject” (*sujeto desgarrado*) as developed in his books (the bibliographic list includes twenty-four items).

There is an open critique of the Hobbesian monstrosity in our global predicament (the interview took place two years after the 9/11 attacks; i.e. pre-global economic crisis, pre-Brexit, pre-Covid, pre-Black-Lives-Matter, pre-Trump, pre-Russian War in Ukraine, etc.). Such unipolarity has engendered this interregnum. There is a severe assessment of the crisis of modernity (or postmodernity) in the vicinity of the towering figure of Hegel, one name among many others in the field of philosophy (Kant, Rorty, Habermas, Ortega y Gasset, Zubiri, Severino, etc.). The discourse on postmodernism appears to have subsided somewhat and “postcolonial” has mutated into the “decolonial,” and I will address these changes in another space. The conversation includes sociologists, psychoanalysts, classical composers, artists, writers, film makers... (Weber, Freud, Schoenberg, Duchamp, Unamuno, Hitchcock, Nabokov, Buzzatti, etc.). Our public intellectual seeks refuge in aesthetics and he makes his “aristocratism,” which finds its way into his thinking and writing which reach moments of great concentration, care and beauty. Here, the Spanish language acquires a demanding, rare density as it freely roves the range of variation, distance and field disrespecting the typical conventions of Area Studies frames of intelligibility and academic-labor divisions allocated in the mainstream Anglo Zone. I would personally like to see more of it in the (foreign) “humanities.”

The ghost of our Barcelona philosopher encourages us not to be afraid to use the language of “Being.” He defends “ontology” and does not fail to approach the “black beast” of metaphysics against a certain (postmodernist) orthodoxy that makes slight of certain traditions. These efforts may well be “metaphysical remnants of the modern” (Jameson). They still, however, revolt against post-Nietzschean Enlightenment visions that the noted literary critic calls “most glorious.” Before and after U.S. hegemony, “reason” must feel the push and pull of the ancient traditions of the great religions and walk towards an “ecumenical gathering,” as Trías puts it, that must at least bring some “cultural relativism” to any claims of a hegemonic centrality, Anglo-American post-modernist post-structuralism among other varieties (some would automatically dismiss Trías as yet another form of European thought, but this distancing would be unfair). There is conviction and determination in the affirmation of an abstract conceptual thought practice historically of European provenance that emerges inside the power-knowledge peak of the last five centuries, perhaps until the mono-polarity of one decade ago

impersonated by the United States of America (1950 signals the migration of the “West” to the hegemonic “liberal” U.S., which appropriates the civilizational label (West) and the continental sign (America) for itself). Yet, there is contestation, also here, and the Hispanophone world sits uneasily in between partitions (will “it” hold?; who will cut the Gordian knot?). Trías recreates, he tells us, the variations of the European horizon of philosophy in its German core, yet he also “goes back” to the symbolic densities of the history of religions and moves forth –and forward—towards an ecumenical gathering on a theoretical equal footing. His claim is that of an original recreation of a singular project that still wants to call itself, philosophical. Is Trías recuperation of philosophy, a “properly metaphysical survival,” also a “supreme historical symptom of the technocratization of contemporary society”? (Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991): pp. 334, 339). More thought is needed and there will be other occasions.

Trías’s construction of an immanentist philosophy has increasingly moved away from seductive disseminations in the 1970s to enter the conversation with the history of the great religions (Islam is one of them and let us not forget the immediate setting of the interview!). Calling for an ecumenical gathering of these great traditions, he still defends his heterodoxy and “perversity” to a still perhaps conventional Eurocentrism of philosophical thought, which is never the norm in Anglocentric circles. Not wanting to give up on “reason,” Trías clings to the “properly philosophical” vis-à-vis a critical engagement with variations of the tradition he calls his (“variation” he takes from the musical domain). Trías gives vertigo an ontological preeminence and there will be moments of vertigo embedded in these many interrelations among his major works such as *Edad del Espíritu*, *Los Límites del Mundo* and *Razón fronteriza*. Many other texts by many other authors are summoned and the feeling of admiration is mine and it is genuine. I trust the readers will join me here. Conventional “Anglo” readers will find the additional healthy surprise in this vindication of the Western tradition that is not your typical approach in the “liberal West.” These are expansive vistas, but there are limitations and “nobody’s perfect” (the reader may recall the final scene in Billy Wilder’s Some Like it Hot; I use light humor about the seriousness of this “American” blind spot).

Still, Trías is better than most who may show up in the classrooms. The interview took place in the flat of Eugenio Trías Sagnier in Barcelona the days of 23-28 of October 2003. I think there were not two, but three sessions. A section of the Spanish original version came out in *Ciberletras*: “Sobre la propuesta filosófica del ser del límite. Entrevista con Eugenio Trías Sagnier” (*Ciberletras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura - Journal of literary criticism and culture* (La literatura y cultura españolas de fines del siglo XX, Issue 12 / January 2005): pp. 220-245. This portion is no longer available online. What follows is the totality of the interview translated by me and polished by the editors of *eHumanista: Journal of Iberian Studies*. This interview is part of a larger project titled *Hispanic Misnomer in the Anglo Zone: Public Conversations (2001-2023)* that will see the light of day some day. Trías is one of sixteen other interlocutors covering the academic and intellectual landscape of the hegemonic “Anglo Zone” (i.e. mostly the United States, but also Britain) in the last two decades.

The education of Eugenio Trías.

Fernando Gómez Herrero: What would you like to remember of the early years in Barcelona in the 1950s (Trías was born in 1942), the city where you have lived all your life, as something relevant to your philosophical calling? I ask this after having read your autobiography *The Tree of Life* [*El árbol de la vida*].

Eugenio Trías: I talked about it at great length there. There are four parts in this book. It has a musical structure that I call movements. The first I name “agitations of memory.” It is devoted to the first sixteen years of my life. It is an attempt to approach the limit of my memory by way of highlighting some relevant facts in my education and the making of my vocational calling and my sense of self. The 1950s are very present in a special manner since I was and still consider myself to be shy and a withdrawn type of person and the Jesuit school environment [where I was] was not very stimulating. It was a setting profoundly marked by the National-Catholic ideology of the period and its imprint in the [Catholic] religion. I devoted myself to very private adolescent vices, one of which was [the making of] a collection of film advertisements, one of the few lively things I discovered in a press that was subjected to an implacable censorship. [The thing changed] as soon as you reached the pages devoted to film releases. [There] things got exciting. This [collecting habit] developed into a great liking of cinema that I had already started cultivating in those years, to which I added a second hobby, music. [Music] has since left its imprint in my personal philosophical and intellectual adventure in almost all my books. I started to get to know the great composers and the great musical tradition of the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Romantic and post-Romantic periods. Almost in a flash, I can remember an exhibition of Wagnerian themes here in Barcelona, a cultural wasteland in the early 1950s. [This was] suggested by one of my grandmothers, who was perhaps the closest person I had at that time and the most responsible for my training. [She] was Ecuadorian from Guayaquil and had arrived in Barcelona in the 1920s. I had not yet entered the *sancta sanctorum* of the [Opera House in Barcelona, the so-called] “Liceo” [in Spanish used by ET, “Liceu” in Catalan]. The Wagnerian tetralogy was brought here. All the windowshops in Paseig de Gracia were competing with each other around Wagnerian themes such as the Walkirie, the God Wothan and the rest, horns and all those things. This had a great impact on me. And, I suppose that it definitely pushed me in the direction of this vocation. Music and film were for me two great facts coming from the 1950s that have lasted my entire life. I mention this in great detail in the book because it is a special kind of book. [This period] lasted [well] until I was thirty-three-years old, which coincided with the death of Francisco Franco (1892-1975). Indeed, I have built this account in an almost novel-like style. Many people who have read it had forgotten that I was the subject and that this is something like a *bildungsroman*, almost a *Werkmeister* [artificer, craftsman]. The second chapter is called, “learning years.”

FGH: What would you like to remember about your University years, the 1960s at the University of Barcelona, with fast visits, I imagine, to Navarra (Pamplona), Madrid, Bonn and Cologne?

ET: These were disorienting years with a constant change of places. Each scenario was very different from all the others. Coming out of the Jesuits, the Barcelona scene of the first year represented an early contact with an already politicized world, a

very anti-Franco atmosphere [that was] very different from the school and my family. My father was very close to the Franco regime. This was the first true and real contact with a critical environment, almost clandestine, coming to me from many angles, above all through my immense fondness of cinema. To be sincere, I spent more time in cinemas than in classrooms learning from unfit professors. I spent my days in cinema clubs and forums, in which with little money and sometimes even for free you could see a bit of the entire history of cinema, at least silent films. What you could not do was watching the latest films that were not allowed by the censorship. But still, I saw the entire [Italian director Roberto] Rossellini's film production (1906-1977), the Italian neo-realism, German expressionism, the best of American Westerns, [the Austrian-American] Billy Wilder's (1906-2002), the great comedies of [Ernst] Lubitsch (1892-1947). I saw a lot of films. I remember entire days in which I could see five or six films. A tremendous thing. We were a small society. In the book I reminisce with certain irony and love about the fact that the girls were all communist and we, the boys, were not of athletic build and spoke in an affected and pedantic manner. I describe some things that made an impact upon my entry into a University that was critical with the Franco regime, aware that the regime was some sort of mistake, combined at least in my case with a big hobby for cinema. This is a hobby I have not actively cultivated since, but it even tempted me at the time with getting involved in film making. But my personal characteristics were not ideal for that, because leadership skills were needed and these were not part of own sense of self. Indirectly, I have continued exploring cinema in books such as *Vertigo and Passion [Vértigo y Pasión]*, *The beautiful and the sinister [Lo bello y lo siniestro]* with regard to films by [Alfred] Hitchcock (1899-1980), or recentl regarding *Citizen Kane* (1941) by Orson Wells (1915-1985). Truly, cinema has always been very close to me.

FGH: What about philosophy? When does it emerge? How does that interest grow and develop?

ET: It is a curious thing compared to cinema and music, of which I have a clear memory when they emerged and both became a genuine hobby for me. My sense of a taste for philosophy comes more via external testimonies such as the letters of other people who saw me as a philosopher apprentice than through my own personal recollections. What I do remember is when I started writing --I was thirteen years of age and the non-stop vice has continued since, given my long list of written books-- I realized that I was leaning towards essay writing over narrative and fiction. [I would start writing] an essay and I would establish connections ("trabaciones," sic, in the original). Even when I tried to write a novel, it would come out allegorical, in the style of the [Baroque writer Baltasar] Gracián (1601-1658). It was obviously not Gracián, but something of an extraordinary naivete of which I have now little proof cause one day I destroyed it. So, I can only refer to my memories. At any rate, I still keep the testimony of many notebooks that include many questions. The subject of philosophy in secondary school ("bachillerato" in the original) and, of course, at University had already summoned me. I mention Leonardo Polo (1926-2013) in *The Tree of Life [El Árbol de la Vida]* who in the second year in Pamplona, Navarra and in a surprising manner impressed me much. This Opus Dei professor [religious denomination within Catholicism founded by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975), explanatory note, FGH] is still alive [at the time we are

having this conversation]. Independent of his religious affiliation, he was an exceptional professor of philosophy. I remember his philosophy lessons in which he had an immense ability to recreate the various philosophical traditions from their original standpoints, [he was] Platonic when he was explaining Plato, Hegelian when addressing Hegel... I still remember his three lessons dedicated to Marx, when he turned Marxist, being an Opus Dei member. He would dive deeply into the various philosophical systems and would communicate well the reason why those individuals and those philosophies held the importance they did. He would then of course critique them and frame them inside whatever else he wanted. But the initial impulse was to recreate them. This had such an impact on me. I am convinced that that provide me a form or style I discovered later in some of my own ways of approaching philosophical issues, above all when I approached the history of philosophy. I already saw that it was philosophy the subject that was the most tempting, [the place] where the desire for creativity and expression I had since I was thirteen-years-old could grow. I always realized that my major passion was philosophy through writing. It was a long and hard road for me to get used to the pedagogic exercise of philosophy [in the classrooms]. That is why I have always said that I am more Platonic than Socratic. What tempted me was to write philosophy. When I was seventeen, [Miguel de] Unamuno (1864-1936) was an influence. I read with great pleasure the great essays by Unamuno, *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho* [*La Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*]. [José] Ortega [y Gasset, 1883-1955], too. I think Ortega is a strong influence in my writing. Later, [Xavier] Zubiri (1898-1983) for his rigor as well as intellectual and conceptual tension, and above all in the hope to strengthen my writing in Spanish, which I suppose will be a theme that will come out [soon in this conversation].

FGH: With regard to these restless minds of the “South,” did they have to spend some time, a couple of years in your case, in Germany? I think of Ortega, Zubiri and others. This is less the case, isn't it?

ET: I would not say it was an absolutely inevitable situation because other people could still do the same in other settings, but Germany was then and managed to continue having, despite everything else, political tragedies included, an institutional strength that made it enormously attractive. I went to Germany as soon as I could after learning the language. I learned German and I passed my exams in German in two months, something certainly surprising, given that I am a disaster in learning languages. [But] I was very enthusiastic about it. It was extremely important for me in all aspects to familiarize myself with philosophy and with German culture in general. Germany represented for me the attraction of the two things I loved most: philosophy and music. I had them together and criss-crossing sometimes, for example in the case of [Friedrich] Nietzsche (1844-1900), [Arthur] Schopenhauer (1788-1860), etc. That is one of the major reasons why these episodes of Nineteenth Century philosophy, so specifically German, had left their imprint in me in the manner they did. It was truly an important part of my training. I only regret that it was a brief period of two years. There was a strong reason for the interruption of those studies. Instead of going to Germany after finishing the degree, which was the logical thing to do, I had the chance of doing it in the middle of my university degree. I even went with the mindset of doing the entire degree in philosophy in Germany and I completed three semesters. What happened was I was short by two courses and had to return to Barcelona to complete them. Afterwards things got

complicated from all points of view and I did not return to Germany. The regret remained in me that two more years would have been very good indeed.

FGH: How come you went to Latin America in the early 1970s?

ET: We must put the period in context. It was a very special time, very different from today. You could “travel,” even the notion of “travel” or “journey” had very special connotations. I belonged to a generation that at that time had long hair and a very hippy mentality...

FGH: Yes, I have seen some photos (laughs).

ET: True. There are photographs that attest to that (laughs). I had already written books that were created small scandals. I had built for myself a certain image of a philosopher *terrible* (“filósofo maldito” in the original), an *enfant terrible* at least in the local settings of Barcelona and Madrid. I saw that my early books were also known in Latin America. I am talking about *Philosophy and Carnival* [*Filosofía y Carnaval* (1970)], *Theory of the Ideologies* [*Teoría de las Ideologías* (1970)], *Philosophy and Its Shadow* [*Filosofía y su Sombra*] (1969), *Methodology of Magical Thinking* [*Metodología del Pensamiento Mágico*] (1970). I have written about the first and most adventurous part of this journey, Brazil, which entailed a series of diverse circumstances during a period of almost four months. I have written about it in some detail in *The Tree of Life*. I still think that these pages are the most elaborate and literary pages in the text, including humor, as the account is done from the distance of the passage of time and age. I became mendicant. I reached Buenos Aires and there I realized that people knew about my work, that my books were read. I found groups that were trying to establish links with some Spanish philosopher who would write this type of books, particularly [I should mention] a psychanalyst, Germán García (1944-2018), still living in Buenos Aires, with whom I am still in contact [by the time of the interview, FGH]. I stayed in Buenos Aires almost a year. It was the city in last moment of splendor, we could call it that, the same year that [Juan] Perón (1895-1974) died and disaster begins. That is to say, the process of the disappeared begins with [José] López Rega (1916-1989) y [Perón’s second wife, Isabel] María Estela [Martínez de Perón, 1931-). I would have stayed longer, but I saw that the friends who helped me get two University offers were already packing their suitcases. I returned to Spain. The transition was beginning to take shape two years later.

FGH: How does the philosophical intelligence of Eugenio Trías relate to institutional and bureaucratic structures? You have been affiliated to the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona since 1976, linked to the Faculty of Humanities in the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona since 1992. I now see you in the Vice-Presidency of the Patronato del Museo Nacional de Reina Sofía in Madrid...

ET: I should clarify that I am not in the said Patronato. I have found some form of agreement with the universities. This is something interesting and worthy of note. There are peculiarities that have to do with my thinking and also with my early professional years that belonged to a Franquista university system. This is something worth mentioning and it is that, as soon as I finished my degree, I started teaching at the Universitat Central in Barcelona and then I continued as a teaching assistant in the Autònoma Barcelona in Saint Cugat. I was already known since 1975 because of some

publications I have previously mentioned. I went to the Escuela de Arquitectura and since then I have never returned to a Faculty of Philosophy, nor have I ever had any desire to return to those Schools. The explanation is that philosophy was damaged by Franquism. I suppose history and the other disciplines were damaged too, but these other fields did not [perhaps] touch the ideological nerve of Franquism the way philosophy did. In my years of university training, Scholasticism was the official philosophy [of Franquism], Thomist or voluntaristic, more on the side of Saint Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274) or Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274). That was very depressing, which does not mean that there did not exist some interesting philosophers. Here in Catalonia, I run into Jaume Bofill [i Bofill, 1910-1965, [Jaume Bofill i Bofill – filòsof, 1910-1965 \(jaumebofillbofill.org\)](http://jaumebofillbofill.org)], a Thomist [philosopher] who helped me much. He was the one who put me inside the University system. It was sad that the poor man died two months after lending me a hand. It was such a bad fortune mainly because he was a very esteemed individual. The truth is that the general model was asphyxiating. While it is true that there was a renovation at the end of the 1970s, the university scene, particularly in the field of philosophy, was extraordinarily rarefied and corrupted. And it remains so to a certain degree. It remains so because Spain has kept a very strong clerical imprint in its university recruitment particularly in the philosophical field. There are many people and some of them may be valuable, but the general scene has not entered the necessary secularization of modernity that exists in other places. I wanted to do rigorous philosophy in the line of those Hispanic cultural creators previously mentioned and to put them on the international scene by building a dialogue between them with and [representatives of] French and German philosophy.

From the very beginning, my strong personal idea was not to be considered an epigonal representative of French structuralism or the Frankfurt school. It was very important to me that my philosophy grew atuned to modernity and above all that it incorporated my own interests and likings, in dialogue with art, literature, etc. I think that in philosophy all roads lead to Rome. You can go there via mathematics, physics, anthropology, like [Claude] Lévi Strauss (1908-2009) demonstrates, or from the history of sexuality and the scenarios of power as in [Michel] Foucault (1926-1984). I have always said that my own particular laboratory is the aesthetic domain, literature, above all cinema and music. That is to say, the general domain of art is not restrictive to me, because I have felt the need to have dialogues with religion and the great religious movements as I do in the *Age of the Spirit [Edad del Espíritu]*. [It is not restrictive either when I] do philosophy in the strictest sense of the term as in *Border [or Liminal] Reason [Razón Fronteriza]*. The true thing is that I have always felt very uncomfortable within the institutional spaces assigned to philosophical pursuits [in Spain]. This has generated a very tense relationship with the philosophical profession that, until very recently, ignored me, although things are now changing. I have had a better reception among poets and film-makers or within a very reduced circle, simply because the work I do is for special people who like philosophy, but also need a high cultural level, which automatically means that such work finds a very restrictive reception in Spain. [My work] has never had a proper or just reception in the philosophical professional guild in part due to this initial disagreement. I repeat that the situation is changing now. A second point [worth mentioning] that created this incomprehension is that I have tried to do an exogamous [type of] philosophy. An internal comentary of a self-centered tradition one considers

one's own does not interest me. Better said, it interests me in so far as it is certainly a valid philosophical historiography. I doubtlessly admire the people who devote themselves to such a task and I try to keep abreast of what these [colleagues and scholars] do. But to think of philosophy exclusively in those terms is to me a regrettable curtailment. Some of it is at the core of this tradition itself, I believe, and it is one of the reasons for the strong rejection assumed by too wide a spectrum of possible readers and interpreters towards philosophy. I do not think that such rejection can be overcome having a general projection, because then some will think that philosophy is easy, something that is false. It is not easy. Instead, I would follow a more complex strategy, which is more satisfactory to me, although it generates a lot of incomprehension, and it is the aforementioned exogamy. That is to say, having a dialogue with cinema, music, the great spiritual and religious movements from many traditions as I do in *Age of the Spirit [Edad del Espíritu]*. And in a different another way, doing philosophy in such a way that seeks inspiration outside itself. Of course, you can do that only if your knowledge is firmly grounded (“asegurado” in the original). I do it, above all because I come out of a deep training in the history of philosophy and perhaps this is noted indirectly. There are also historiographic works of mine which are *sui generis*, very heterodox. I recently contributed some thoughts to the reflection on Nietzsche, but they are not to be understood in the conventional sense of the term either.

About the relations between intelligence and non-intelligence and the tearings and rippings of the subject (“desgarraduras del sujeto”).

FGH: What is the relationship between the intelligence and the non-intelligence, or between the intellectual and the non-intellectual sides of your life, if a few words may perhaps suffice?

ET: The very title of the book *The Tree of Life* is indicative of what I have defended and continue defending. I use the title for various reasons. One is the film *Reintree County* (1957), a kind of new remake of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) based on a very famous [namesake 1948] novel [by Ross Lockridge Jr.]. For me, to simplify matters, the tree of life is more important than the tree of science. This is one [fundamental] premiss. The philosophy I have constructed follows a bit the rhythm of the vital experience (“va al compás”). It is a life, or its mysteries, the one that is guiding and marking [limits]. If you don't start from your own “grounds,” I think that philosophy denaturalizes itself. Such “experience,” in the widest possible understanding of the term, which includes the powers of the imagination, is what gives vitality to the philosophical project, which is a linguistic elaboration in writing.

FGH: I asked this previous question because you speak of the tearings and rippings of the living and empirical, the speaking and writing subject in *Border [or Liminal] Reason [La Razón Fronteriza]*, pp. 381-393). I do not know if this perception may relate to what you have previously mentioned about the discomfort you feel not only with the philosophical guild in a peninsular context, but also with other institutions. I wonder if such tearings and rippings (“desgarradura” in the original) continue now, whether one must assume them and even “celebrate” them.

ET: I believe that such tearings and rippings have, of course, to do with the internal and external worlds, the soul, and the city as I have written in various texts, and also of course with the institutional insertion of the process of creation of thought. [These tearings and rippings] are ontological in the last instance. They respond to a torn reality that is not in vain since it is a certain way or form of history, an epoch, a period, a moment in which we live when a myriad of factors enter into play. We are not going to go into this now. But I already mentioned some of it in text like *Border Reason* that I had half forgotten...

FGH: This is in part a rescue operation.

ET: It is a rescue operation because it is a text that I would not really know how to make it fit. I am nonetheless still very happy with the manner and the content I wanted to express with “border reason.” It is an idea that in reality I had begun to formulate in a previous text of mine at the end of the *Meditation on Power [Meditación sobre el Poder]* written in the 1970s. But in *Border Reason* I gave it a new formulation also in relation to the torn subject and its own consciousness. I was suggesting that such torn condition [is] inevitable in a certain sense, and what one has to do is not to try to finish it off, because I think it is inherent to life, but instead it is much better to know how to situate oneself in relation to it [such torn condition and do so] in such a way that it might or would be productive. In so doing you would even avoid certain aspects of pain, although some pain may also become, like birth pains, productive. [The desire is at any case that] such pain were not in vain. That is a bit the main idea in those signalled pages.

FGH: What is the relationship between the figurative-symbolic model that you consider a constitutive part of your proposal of “border or liminal being” [“ser del límite” in the original] and other expressive modes that one may find out there? I am considering the beautiful pages in which you develop an interest and a preoccupation with conceptualizing “symbol,” especially in *Age of the Spirit [Edad del Espíritu]*.

ET: I am going to explain in short the staging genesis of the three books that follow each other. I sometimes speak of them as a trilogy, *The Logic of the Limit [La Lógica del Límite]* is the first, *Age of the Spirit [Edad del Espíritu]* is the second, and *Border Reason [Razón fronteriza]* the third. The third one was not altogether planned, but in a sense it complements the previous ones. When I affirmed that “border or liminal being” (“ser del límite”) had a symbolic figuration, which is what I establish in *The Limits of the World [Los Límites del Mundo]* and also in *Age of Spirit*, it is as though a third piece were missing. In my last book, *City upon City [Ciudad sobre Ciudad]*, I draw a triangle. I even formalize it in terms of an ideal city, which is also the border or liminal being as its center of gravity, in ontological terms. [I call upon] “border reason” as the form of reason or logos that corresponds to that and the symbol or symbolic figuration as a supplement that balances things out because border reason is border [in a double sense] because it wants a supplement and needs a clarification (“esclarecimiento” in the original) that gives meaning to philosophy, because, deep down, what was missing was a piece that gave meaning to philosophy qua philosophy.

Thus, I give great importance to *Border Reason* in the sense that it completes something that was not delineated in *Logic of the Limit*, but it was only implicitly suggested. I would say it was [already there] in a fallow state (“barbecho” in the original)

in *Age of Spirit*, but still needed an explanation. It is this border reason, or logos perhaps, that in essence is no other thing than the idea of philosophy that I do have, the one that is in some sense acquiring conceptual status via this symbolic dimension in all its possibilities. It is still important to clarify that the symbolic dimension exceeds it [such exercise of reason]. I say that the symbol has an ultimate transcendent, yet impenetrable nucleus.

FGH: Insisting on the same question, how (with what good reasons) would border reason (or logos) relate [to such symbolic figuration]?

ET: I would say it is simultaneously a stimulus and a corrective. That is, border reason would set up an insuperable limit to an overbearing reason (“razón prepotente”) under any form whatsoever, a sovereign reason for instance. What I present –and even pretend-- is a rational option that is aware of the limits of its own reason. I would say that I go along the Kantian and the Wittgenstein lines. I do not want to give up reason. This is also what gives meaning to my trajectory, but it is also that generates a lot of incomprehension, because you will find rationalists who only see logical-linguistic [structures] everywhere, and you will also find “symbolist” people, with its proper quotation marks, the School of Eranos ([Eranos - homepage \(eranosfoundation.org\)](http://eranosfoundation.org)) for instance, the profound psychology of [Carl] Jung (1875-1961), those that the only thing they want to see is the metastasis of symbology invading all cultures, etc. at the level of an interculturality taken to extremes that I do not find satisfactory.

I have tried those intersections in relation to a certain rationalism that I do not wish to renounce, and I will never renounce, yet with a very clear consciousness going along a series of domains that exceed a certain or narrow rationalism, typically a Cartesian tradition. On the other hand, the dialogue I seek with something “beyond reason” is not only via religion, although there is some of that too. It is primordially in my case via art. I thus seek an intersection, which is not a subordination, with art and religion, that may render good fruit. My incursion in art is something else. It is an incursion in art in its big latitude in the specificity of the world of religions and its double interconnection with [different] forms of rationality.

FGH: What is the relation between the border reason with the non-rational and the non-border [dimension]?

ET: I would say that border reason is a cure of humility for certain overbearing or arrogant (“prepotente”) ideas of reason, the Hegelian reason for example, and, if you press me, I would even add the communicative reason of [Jurgen] Habermas (1929-), which, on the other hand, dialogues but little with art, literature, etc. Mine is the opposite. Some may berate me from dialoguing little with the sciences, the philosophies of language, etc. Well, my disposition and interests take me in other directions. Yet, it is curious to see that these [interests of mine] are outside the scope or range (“ámbito”) of reason. I rescue these [domains and areas] for reason. There are many artists and musicians who know that music is a form of gnosis or sensorial knowledge, that the poetic adventure is a knowledge adventure, which does not detract from being an elaboration of the emotions. I want to make a philosophy that does not break with these domains or areas that are normally called irrational. [Mine is a philosophy that] chooses these domains or areas through which your typical philosophy normally walks on tiptoes.

This is my case from the very beginning. For example, Love-Passion, the great theme of poetry and literature, and how scarce is it instead in philosophy when it is not to say that Love-Passion is a defect, obstacle or hindrance, something that blinds and dazzles us (“obnubila”!), etc.

About assigned spaces that are assumed as one’s own.

FGH: How would you circumscribe the territory that you call your own? Where would you synthesize your work that is following, in your own language, the “principle of variation” within the Western philosophical tradition? You speak of our “Graeco-Christian Western tradition” in *The Logic of the Limit* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, [1990/1?] 2003). When you imagine your own knowledge universe, is this your [fundamental] panorama or horizon of vision?

ET: Yes. [I am insisting] on what in my latest books I call “thinking together” (“pensar en compañía”) and I am above all assuming what is foreign, strange, together with the philosophical tradition, but tradition [has to be understood] in a wide sense of the term that includes art, literature, music, spiritual and religious movements. This is done in a search of a project that is innovative. I do not know if I achieve it, but my desire is that an innovative project remained, impeccably within the traditions of modernity and postmodernity. I would rather call the latter term “modernity in crisis” or “critical modernity.” At the same time, I do so with a great, active and loving piety towards the best of our traditions. That is, [this philosophical project is done in the manner] of a convocation of the best traditions. There is a poem that illuminates my journey inside this principle of variation that you have well mentioned. It is the synthesis of my philosophical idea, which is the border or liminal being (“ser del límite”), that recreates itself in the form of variation. These variations give it a dynamic version. It is the poem “Les Phares” [“The Beacons”] in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) of Charles Baudelaire. Similar to the immense attraction I feel for music and cinema, the French poet had this immense, infinite vocation for the critique of painting. He summons the best painters. He describes them in quartets and Michelangelo, Titian, Delacroix, Goya, etc. come out in a marvelous luxury of expressions and forms. Baudelaire is saying that through them we hear moans and groans, wails, cries and shouts, but that these guide us. I would like to do something like that: to invoke a whole series of characters in a genuine ecumenical sense.

The Age of the Spirit [La Edad del Espíritu] is perhaps the most ambitious book, the one that gives the most meaning to what I do. It is ecumenical in this sense. It includes an Islamic author of the XII century from the province of Murcia in Spain who dies in Baghdad [in Irak], Jewish Kabbalah, we pass through the philosophy of the Italian Renaissance, which has always guided me a lot, in regards to the ecumenical spirit *avant la lettre* in authors such as [Giovanni] Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), etc. But there are also figures such as [the French painter and sculptor] Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), [the Austrian-American composer Arnold] Schoenberg (1874-1951), or the most emblematic figures of the Modernity and even of Postmodernity of the 20th Century. That is to say, this is a kind of ecumenical convocation of peaks of creativity in domains of literature, the arts, music and religion, the latter being the one I have lately chosen as the privileged space of dialogue.

About the stimulating tears and rips of the Hispanic space.

FGH: You speak with well-deserved harshness of the “Hispanic” context –let us always put the term well in quotation marks—in the sense of adjacent periphery or bordering marginality with its deficiencies, shortages and also possibilities about philosophical expressivity, also in *Border Reason* [*La razón fronteriza* (pp. 372-74, 393)]. You have previously mentioned not to want to become or fall into the condition of epigone or epitome. We must make do. There is no other way around, is there?

ET: It is a devastating thing (“desgarradora”), also stimulating. It is very strange (“muy rara”). It is something that goes along with me (“me acompaña”) and I do not think it is just [my own] character. It is destiny [understood] in the [larger] sense of the “destiny of the Hispanic place,” which is, on the one hand, a hopeful thing, that is perhaps missing among the French or the Germans, I do not know, who may already have everything behind and where it is there not easy to find your way and say something a bit different, diverse and innovate, even from a linguistic standpoint. The feeling is that Spain is still in a “constitutive period” (“período constituyente”), let us accept the expression, in the domain of philosophy. That is, there are people that one recognizes in its variety. I have mentioned [Miguel de] Unamuno (1864-1936) and [José] Ortega [y Gasset, 1883-1955]. I could add María Zambrano [Alarcón, 1904-1991] and Xavier Zubiri (1896-1983), independently of my agreement with them. For example, the ontological conception of Zubiri is in the antipodes of mine, but my respect for him is enormous. I also put him among others in this “constitutive period” that as mentioned is ongoing.

On the other hand, it is true that the Spanish cultural context in regards to philosophy is absolutely depressing and continues being so. I mean: there is very little sensibility because there is little tradition. Even among people who are supposed to be cultivated and have high academic credentials, philosophy is not understood at all. I sometimes compare the situation of philosophy in Spain with the most elaborate music. There are people who do not go for it no matter what, no push, shove, still “no way, José.” I don’t know. You may try as much pedagogy as you wish but there is no way to go into the game of dissonance or serialism in music. I have the feeling that some of the same happens with philosophy. Nobody appears to know why that is. And I am not talking about people [without humanistic university education]. Sometimes you run into modest people, someone working as a bank teller, an economics student [who do follow suit by contrast to] people who should have greater receptivity where one finds amazing incomprehensions. I am not about trying to make philosophy difficult per se. What happens is that the difficulty is in the thing itself (“lo que pasa es que la dificultad es de la cosa”). But [we are badly caught in a bind], between those who think that philosophy is ornamental, innocuous, unnecessary and [those who say silly things such as] “philosophy does what the human sciences or the social sciences already do.” I think it is something else, radically different. There is a [greater] mental clarity in regards to philosophy, not in regards to gross numbers, in more settled environments such as France, Germany and without going far also in Italy. They understand these things better. Here, there is a kind of endless lamentation (“treno” in the original) that shows up suddenly at the end of *Border Reason* [*Razón Fronteriza*]. In some other texts, *Thinking in Public* [*Pensar en Público*] for example, I do a characterization that may reach [certain levels of] cruelty towards the philosophical domain and the [general] atmosphere in this country. It is a

complaint towards the difficulty in interacting [with a reading public]. At the end of the day, a person who writes is a person who interacts with a certain public. In truth, if there were no public, I would not publish [a thing]. But it is truly a very restricted public that only time may perhaps widen.

About the Catalan dimension.

FGH: There is an additional dimension that is very near that has not been talked about yet. We are speaking in Barcelona. It is the Catalan dimension. I am sure that your case is diglossic in relation to your thinking and discursive production that is in Spanish. This writing is careful, detailed, vital. Yet, Catalan aspects are latent too. Do you put these under the [same] peninsular wasteland [previously described]?

ET: It is a complicated wasteland because as soon as you see a ray of hope you also see a horrendous shadow close to it (laughter). I am not going to officiate as a Catalanist, but it is true that Catalonia has had something important that is also well-known. It is an end-of-century cultivated bourgeoisie, from the 19th century onwards, because otherwise phenomena such as *Modernismo* linked to a name such as [Antoni] Gaudí (1852-1926) are not understood and all the literary movements of the avantgarde [note of clarification: it is important to understand that the term *modernismo* in Spanish precedes conventional frames of “modernism.” The Spanish(-American) term is born in late Nineteenth Century around the emblematic date of 1898 and crosses over the Atlantic to join the avantgarde movements in the early decades of the XX century on the European side of the Atlantic, Trías refers to that early “modernism/modernism” in the specific context of *modernista* Barcelona, FGH].

[Barcelona] was still very provincial at a certain level. I am now going deeper into musical themes of [the Hungarian composer] Béla Bartók (1864-1936), a certainly surprising figure. The Budapest [of his time] resembles the Barcelona of the turn from the XIX to the XX. There is still today, and publishing houses will tell you, and in fact, the main ones are all here, that the levels of a reading public are without exaggeration higher in relation to a cultivated middle class than in the rest of Spain. It is true that the theme of the linguistic doubling is also here and it sometimes creates problems. It has created them to me some time ago above all by the logical zeal of the restoration of Catalan as the official language, etc. I am radically an author in the Spanish language. I speak Catalan perfectly. I communicate well. I have had some of my texts translated [into Catalan]. They have to translate them for me. I do not know how to write well in Catalan. Let us say that it is an additional difficulty that does not bother me anymore. In general terms, I would say that it is a common wasteland. Spain undergoes nationalization in its worst aspects. In its defects, we are a “big and free country” (laughter) [clarification note, Trías is bringing up, mockingly, the old motto of the Franco regime to contemporary situations, FGH].

The ontological construction of an immanentist philosophy.

FGH: For Trías, philosophy is fundamentally ontology, not transcendental, but immanentist, a “first philosophy” that enunciates everything that is. This primacy would

consist in your case in emphasizing the centrality of liminality, or the limit, or the frontier, or borders, no?

ET: You have said it perfectly. This is the peculiarity [of my ontological proposal], because ontologies are more normally made out of [invocations of the Absolute]. I am attacked sometimes in having a will to system (“voluntad de sistema”) but this is absurd because [Absolute] is understood in the old-fashioned, Nineteenth century sense of the term “system” [“decimonónico” in the original, FGH note]. Instead, I say that these imputations [of a misguided absolute system] are those relating to the Absolute Spirit or that of Reason in capital letters. They write them in German and think about them in capital letters. A proposal for the ontology of the limit such as mine (“ontología del límite”), no matter how ambitious, cannot be that. Mine is constructivist. It is a kind of construction of something as *sui generis* as the limit, the border, etc. I open up the semantic field to thus discover an entire new continent.

No need to be frightened by “Being.”

FGH: Something is happening at the discursive level: the erosion of historical and philosophical sensibilities, which I feel perhaps more strongly in the U.S. context. “Philosophy” is something like “life style” [even a brand of clothing, “Philosophy” is truly one brand of clothing!, rather than a series of emblematic authors read with gusto in the classrooms]. If you were walking up and down the Passeig de Gracia, and someone came up to you and asked, “very well, Eugenio Trías, if philosophy is ontology, what does that mean?”

ET: In my courses I typically say that we must take the fear or the apprehension out of the word “Being” (“el Ser” in the original). I tell [the students], “look, read Parmenides because Parmenides is not only talking about Being, but also about Being and Nothing. So, translate that into “to exist and not to exist,” life and death, if you wish. In such a way, we have clarified half the word. That is, this is about something that is related to life and death but in a radical sense and without renouncing reason or logos. We are not giving up on finding a sense or [a meaning].” How? Well, that is when the concepts, or the meta-concepts, come out of me such as border reason, symbolic figuration, etc. But we are in front of the great mysteries of Being and Nothing, Eros and Thanatos, and we can even say that these forms and ways of expression are intelligence’s own forms and ways. [Our intelligence] is capable not only of formulating interrogations, [but also of proposing] tentative proposals and many other things that cannot be verified in a [narrow positivist] sense or through methods that are not forms that cannot be subjected to further dialogues, discussions, etc. that must be fought over, refuted, etc. I will tell her then, “look, ontology has to do with “to be or not to be,” o.k.?”

About the formative Germanocentrism of Trías’s generation.

FGH: I make explicit something of a strategy that I will be pursuing on from time to time in this interview, which is to bring your discourse “down” to a more “plebeian level,” i.e. to sociologize it. If someone said at the street level, “o.k. very well, what happens when I read about ontology in Eugenio Trías is that I feel it is something like a recreation of what the Germans have done.” Yet, in another way, “very well, the thinking of Being and

Nothing, life and death, Eugenio Trías is taking me to a German tradition that could be placed at the turn of the last century” [and perhaps one could add the geopolitical frame of this philosophy of the limit in the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Congress of Vienna of 1814-50, the Bismarckian Prussia, the philosophical legacy of post-1750, of Kant’s Enlightenment, Hegelian culmination, etc. the end of the XIX and early XX centuries, the foundation of art schools, etc.].

ET: I also dialogue with the Greeks...

FGH: Yet, this imaginary geography would be the central point out of which connections emanate. Mine is a purely descriptive impulse. I do not wish to attempt an axiological value.

ET: I would then say it is true. It is like music. You see: I am in love with [the Hungarian] Béla Bartók (1881-1945), [the French Claude] Debussy (1862-1918) and [the American Charles Edward] Ives (1874-1954) and other North-American composers, but in truth the best, for me, are all German, and above all Viennese. What a coincidence! We can think of the Vienna School and in between, not to forget anything, we can include [Richard] Wagner (1813-1883), [Johannes] Brahms (1833-1897), [Johann Sebastian] Bach (1685-1750) and [Karlheinz] Stockhausen (1928-2007). About other things, one must go to the United States. In philosophy in the U.S., one has [Charles Sanders] Peirce (1839-1914). Peirce is a good philosopher. I have him as one among the great, best ones. William James (1842-1910) does not have the depth of Peirce, but I respect him and I read him a lot with pleasure and I like him. Or John Dewey (1859-1952). The most recent ones, I like less, although they are fashionable. I like only one book by Richard Rorty (1931-2007), [*Philosophy and the*] *Mirror of Nature* (1979), which is splendid. The rest he could have kept inside the drawers. I also think that German philosophy has undergone an exhaustion. I have the impresión that Jurgen Habermas (1929-) was the last one. The young ones remind me more of French philosophy than anything else. I should not give out names. It is the case that I find myself holding dialogues with philosophical traditions. [The situation] must be similar to someone who likes literature and has conversations with [James] Joyce, Dante, or T.S. Eliot. My case is that I like to dialogue with Kant, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Adorno. It turns out that almost all are German. To be just, there we [also] see Hume, Descartes, Spinoza, Ortega y Gasset, Benedetto Croce, etc. When one thinks about the great moments of philosophy, my mind travels in the direction of the Athens of the Sophists, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and then to the Germany from Kant to Nietzsche. For me, there is nothing quite like that.

FGH: If someone called you Germanophile or Germanocentric, Eugenio Trías would say, “thank you very much.”

ET: Yes (many laughs).

FGH: Your intelligence finds very little inspiration [in general in] France, England, the Anglo-American world, the Iberian peninsula, Catalonia included, if we were to speak in nationalistic terms. There is virtually nothing or almost nothing that comes from the American continent [clarifying note, “América” is one continent in Spanish and not two in conventional English on both sides of the Atlantic and the identity between “América”

and the United States is still atypical and rare, unlike it is in English, FGH]. I am setting up the [theater or table of thought operations].

ET: I am perfectly aware of it and I know it is unsatisfactory. It may have something to do with my own constitution in terms of education and perception of things. The French had a lot of influence in the early moment of my writing, because the structuralist and post-structuralist moment marked me a lot and definitely so [early on]. There is a trace of it in my most crucial concepts. I always say that the principle of variation comes to me via Schoenberg's music as well as his writings. Besides him, there is the overture which delights me and I always cite, which is *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) by [Claude] Lévi Strauss. His reflection on music and his idea of the variational logic of mythology is built up to reach the concept of structure. Some people say [my work] is Deleuzian. No, I would say better that [Gilles] Deleuze (1925-1995) is a spiritual son of the same sources that also feed me, because it was not in Deleuze where I found these, but in the initial "movement" (sic) out of which structuralism is constructed. I always say that Lévi Strauss is the strongest influence among the structuralists, much more than Deleuze, and well above [Jacques] Derrida (1930-2004).

What happens is that one continues reading and [covers] those authors too. But [my project] is another thing. Now, for me, the structuralist moment was very important. It was something of an opening ("brecha" in the original). My early training was in the post-war existentialist philosophies. I read with passion what one had to read back then: [Jean-Paul] Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and [Martin Heidegger's] *Being and Time* (1927) of course [clarification note: *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, (1943) in French *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*), sometimes published with the subtitle *A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*; and *Being and Time* (German: *Sein und Zeit*). I was never fully satisfied with this type of work. I did my incursion in Marxism. Although it attracted me enormously, it also left me enormously dissatisfied. Another incursion was into the Freudian traditions, which captured me very much. Psychoanalysis has to be very present, for example in *The Trace of Lacan [La Huella de Lacan]*, at the personal level. [Sigmund] Freud, very much too at the beginning, since I was very young. This is the moment when French thinking is close to me, closer even German thinking. But the truth is that I feel more at home with the Germans of all traditions. I have always seen analytic philosophy with great distance, as you may have observed and I have always been critical of it. Their critiques of metaphysics almost strike me as very superficial. My project is the opposite of the attempts of analytic philosophy which I mostly consider enemies.

About the inevitability of Eurocentrism with its treasures and other horrendous things.

FGH: The perspective of Eugenio Trías is Eurocentric in dialogue with other perspectives and it is so in the normality of being ("ser" and "estar" in Spanish) in Europe, which is surely different from the second or third-hand Eurocentric attitude that one may witness or live [through] in the United States. Would this sound like a declaration, an imputation?

ET: I would say two things. On a certain plane, I would say, "wonderful." There are treasures in Europe and what I am doing is taking them out and as far as I can I will make diadems of and with them. Of course, I cannot do without Kant, Hegel, etc. My life would be worse off without Beethoven, Schoenberg less so. I would not say

“Eurocentric.” I would make very clear that Europe has [also] invented horrendous as well as incredibly beautiful things. It is a similar reflection to those people who reproach me for not being interested in religion. I cannot do without someone like Saint John of the Cross [Juan de la Cruz, secular name Juan de Yepes Álvarez, the mystic poet of the Carmelite order, 1542-1591]. Again, religion is the mother of many horrors but it is also the source of many things of incredible beauty.

[Take another example in] Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), a thinker who enthuses me in her work about Stalinism and National-Socialism: her roots are European. Evidently, racism and anti-Semitism and similar things that continue existing are of European origin but it is also Europe that produces Freud, Marx, etc. whom I cannot do without and who still today are among those best of presences that help me make sense of the world in which I live. Therefore, the first thing I would say is that I try at any rate a reconstruction, a term which I like better than deconstruction, of a Europe that is more in agreement with my own inclinations and my own desires. The second thing [I would say] is that [such imputation of Eurocentrism] is not so. The intention in my book *Age of Spirit* [*La Edad del Espíritu*] is to attempt a project that [the German poet Friedrich] Holderlin (1770-1843) would call “a travel to alterity.” There is a serious attempt in this book, and I am aware that many would not [instantly] like what I am going to say, and they express disgust as soon as they hear it, is to have a dialogue with the best of spiritual Islam.

There is a deep dialogue with the great cultures of Antiquity. Not only have I wanted to break in this book with a kind of story that generates tedium in me, which is the one that says the thinking is born with Thales of Miletus (624/3-548/5 BC) and ends in [Jacques] Derrida. No. I have wanted to get started in [the Prehistoric Caves of] Périgord Noir in Sarlat in France and the proto-history and see bifurcating paths towards ample sectors in the early cultures of India, Jewish and the Bible and of course the Greek-Latin [worlds], and breaking a bit the type of conventional linear narrative. [By contrast] you have [the Italian philosopher] Emanuele Severino (1929-2020) someone whom I respect very much, who in his history of philosophy gets started with the Pre-Socratic and reaches Plotinus (c. 204/5-270) in the Hellenistic tradition, and then says there is no philosophy in the Middle Ages and in the next chapter he turns to [René] Descartes (1596-1650). I do not accept such *modus operandi* because my idea of philosophy only ratifies or validates itself (“se convalida” in the original) in dialogue with alterity, religion, etc. *Age of the Spirit* is the proof [of the pudding]. The model is ecumenical. I do not know if I achieve it [fully or not], but I mention that the concept of “Spirit” comes from certain traditions. What I attempt is a kind of convocation that is intended to be as wide as possible, but it is not fully, sadly. My Mexican friends cry a lot because I do not speak of the Pre-Colombian cultures; well, I [also] have my limitations.

The disquietude for the situation in the global city and the preeminence of the Hobbesian idea of security.

FGH: Correct me if I am wrong but your native immediacy of Barcelona is neither philosophical nor aesthetic, at least in explicit fashion in your texts...

ET: I believe more in impregnation (“impregnación” in the original). The truth is that I have found few footholds (“puntos de apoyo”). The authors I have mentioned are

not Catalan. I am more comfortable with other types of authors. Eugenio D'Ors [i Rovira, 1882-1954] is an excellent character. I have vindicated him many times. He has many good ideas. He is [however] tremendously lazy. At the end of the day, he did not elaborate [those ideas]. And that is lethal in philosophy.

FGH: There are some references of a visit to New York in *Limits of the World* [*Los límites del mundo* (Barcelona: Destino, [1985] 2000; pp. 24, 264-278), in which you present yourself like a solitary pedestrian in the great global city in the existential manner. No one is going to accuse you of Anglophilia, how do you see the contemporary situation, if only in relation to those pages written [more than two decades ago] in the Hegelian manner of post-war survival. Now, we should remove the prefix (the “post”). In other words, your immediate peninsular wasteland must be inserted in a world situation that shows up [its colors] in a tremendously unsettled manner. There are no alternative contemporary utopias.

ET: It is a curious thing. This is a book that includes the expressions of “Terra” and “Antiterra” that come from [Vladimir] Nabokov (1899-1977). He was Russian-origin and lived in the United States which he knew well. What I never imagined, and I don't think anyone did, is how such polarity was going to change as rapidly as it did. It is a little a reflection on the bipolar model of the Cold-War world with the Atom power as the transcendental instance as I define it there. At any rate, this book has a feeling of its period and the political context has changed drastically. After the last and only trip I made to Russia, I then went to the United States, [although I was] only [in] New England. I was absolutely struck by New York City. I have returned a few times since. In an acidic manner, it is still a little homage to those attractions, even in the harsh aspects. These would connect me to *The Beautiful and the Sinister* [*Lo bello y lo siniestro*] together with the whole social and political issue at bottom. When I wrote *Limits of the World* [*Los Límites del Mundo*], people were not talking of global world, which is now more of a descriptive expression [than anything else].

I am quite restless, more so than in the last few years. If I put the life of my generation in the balance, [I will say that] I come from a hopeful period, which was the post-War reconstruction, the culmination of the 1960s coming out of the famous political movements and the great changes achieved in sexual behavior, the importance of Freud, the masculine-and-the-feminine interrelation, the so very meritorious and passionate fights in the United States carried out by minority groups and the traditions heading those struggles, etc. All of that was of course received here in code or it was assimilated in the struggle against the personified ghosts of the awful regime that was perpetuating itself in an amazing manner. I would say that it was a hopeful epoch. I reread the books of that time and they are marked by hope, *Philosophy and Carnival*, the very *Philosophy and Its Shadow*. Then, there are accommodations to a world with its own peculiarities that I have tried to describe. In this point I am Hegelian.

There is a line in Hegel that moves me [powerfully], which says that philosophy is conceptual elaboration or tries to give a conceptual figuration to its own epoch. I have always tried [to do so], for good or ill, with good or bad fortune, with the handicap that is being part more of the periphery of the empire than empire itself, but keeping the dialogue with such contemporaneity. This is what has taken me to have a certain presence in the mass media and the press, and I continue doing so, because it is tonic and

necessary for me. Besides, such [dialogue] is the mission of a thinker and the [public] intellectual or [even] the [task of the] common man who can do it. Those are the articles that I have collected in books such as *Thinking in Public* [*Pensar en Público*].

I insist that I am very restless with the world as it is showing up in this second millennium. You will know it instantly in relation to the recent event in the Twin Towers in New York City [the interview took place in 2003, clarification note]. I am assembling some of these [occasional writings] in conferences and courses. It is a matter of bringing others that are [still] in the background. I am very restless. To understand it, one would have to write something like “politics and its shadow,” that would have to include three or four ideas that regulate discourses: first, the idea of happiness or the goodlife; second, the idea of Liberty in the ethical and political environment; third, the idea of justice and fourth, the idea of the real city imposing itself over the ideal city as a priority that could generate very dangerous dynamics. This [latter] idea is one that if you disregard [or neglect] it, happens what happens, and if you do not do so, but leave it alone as the only one, will absorb the previous others.

And it is the idea of security. The protagonist of such idea is [the English political philosopher Thomas] Hobbes (1588-1679). I have written some articles, some of them coming out in the [Spanish newspaper] *El Mundo*. It is the core of some conferences I gave last year in a graduate course. I am very restless because I am painting a world in which this concept [of security] wins over the others.

About Hobbesian barbarism.

FGH: [Influential] individuals close to the current American administration [of George W. Bush, 2001-2009] cite Hobbes exclusively [in the Seventeenth Century horizon] as some kind of simplified and simplifying singularity. I am thinking of the book, more a pamphlet really, that one could find in unpretentious bookshops such as Barnes and Noble, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003)[by Robert Kagan]. It is never about recreating the historical world of Hobbes, let alone the texture of his thinking, but instead of putting in circulation the [security] soundbite that is applicable to all circumstances. It is barbarism.

ET: Yes, it is barbarism. I do a bit the opposite operation, whilst accepting that it is a historical challenge. That is why I call it “politics and its shadow.” It is as though there was a big forgetfulness of the foundational discourse of modernity in political thinking. What happens, and it is [a] curious [thing], is that modernity founds those ideas, but these are already perverted. That is, Hobbes founds the contract, but what type of contract is it? The contract of the Leviathan! Another version of this contract [emerges] if you follow other authors: Locke, Rousseau, etc.

[Hobbes] founds everything on the idea of fraternity that is the [creation] of the French Revolution. And yes, it is clear that it is near the fratricide as the inherent tendency in all human beings. That is, such [thing] is at the root and this is a supremely powerful discourse that acts like a corrective to certain illusions perpetuated for too long by modernity and above all by postmodernity. I also use these illusions in the conferences “politics and its shadow” aforementioned. To me, the only good thing coming out of [this Hobbesian insertion] is above all that postmodernity is deflated as some kind of happy and weakened thinking with its own kind of frivolity enshrined. But the thing that such

thinking as you mention sits down in a reduced horizon removing [all] others is [most upsetting].

About the slow gestation of the central concept of limit.

FGH: Inspired by the Hegel citation, how would you relate these disquieting decades from the 1980s onwards to your own conceptualization of liminal being and border reason?

ET: I always insist on the following: I think that the “operations” I do with the limit are rather peculiar. There are also very rigorous. They stick to the etymology and the meaning of the concept. What happens is that sometimes [some of] this gets lost: the limit is not only restriction or negation, but also a domain susceptible of affirmation and habitation [or dwelling]. In so doing, [I am projecting] an ontological concept about an idea of what or who we are, i.e. our condition, whilst re-elaborating an idea of the subject. But “limit” also has the sense of a healthy corrective in relation to any “disorder” of reason (“desvaríos de la razón”), of passion or any other.

In a certain sense I say that I belong to a generation that makes the most of the consequences of the collapse of the Faustic myth of indefinite [development] or indeterminate growth. The idea of the limit forced itself upon me also in this regard. The consciousness that there are determinate boundaries [set up] also in relation to economic, political and military development[s]. The atomic weapon, for example, is in a certain sense [one of these limits]. The ecological consciousness is in a certain sense also another [limit]. I have had to unlearn the concept of ontological value above all in relation to our own condition in contemporary history.

How did this happen? Reading the *Tractatus [Logico-Philosophicus]* (1921) of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). I had already met him in the period of my battles with logical positivism. I quickly saw that Wittgenstein was another thing, but I did not have at that time the proper awareness (“conciencia cabal”) of who he was exactly. I must admit that an excellent book illuminated me, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973). [The authors] brought light to many of us. It was a [kind of] generational enlightenment. This great book allows another reading and perception of Wittgenstein. I then read Wittgenstein and the *Tractatus* as a pre-Socratic, as a “purebreed philosopher,” to put it in these terms, and not as the great assassin (“matarife”) of metaphysics, which is what I had thought in other readings. [I started] seeing that his critique of metaphysics was full of second thoughts. It was at bottom a clarification for a philosophical construction of great level that could instead turn, to make myself better understood, into a new metaphysics. Hence, from [this re-reading of] Wittgenstein, [I gathered] a lot of things [and lots of things] remained in me.

From the beginning, the concept of limit remained in me. There is a memorable line that says that the subject is not to remain metaphysical [concept] unless we conceive of it, I am not citing literally, as a limit of or to the world. From here, there is the reading of [Immanuel] Kant (1724-1804). I had read him many times, but I read him now from this tremendously productive angle. This double insertion in my condition of reader and in my readings has been very influential, together with other readings guided by the circumstances of the period. The book *Limits of the World* [comes out of this process]. I

give it a great importance because it was above all an important innovation. Not only does it create a new conceptual frame, it does also [generate] another new frame that is linguistic. This can be ascertained reading the previous books, for example *Philosophy of the Future* [*Filosofía del Futuro*] in which the idea of the limit is not yet generative (“fecundante”). In *Limits of the World* there is a change, a turn, a spin (“giro”). I assign this work a great importance. To a lot of people, it is the best book. I do not know if it is. If you asked me, I would pick *The Age of the Spirit* [*La Edad del Espíritu*] for the ambition. It is a book of philosophy written when I was 55 years of age and [there is a] better articulation than [any other] in the previous ten years.

About the sociological noises of a modernity in crisis or postmodernity.

FGH: In handling the questions, you are not pursuing sociological juxtapositions in relation to your thinking practice. You may say some things that were happening in the 1980s onwards, but this is “material” of sociology, politics or history as you yourself put it in *Age of Spirit*, [and you do so] mostly to gain distance from it. It is a bit as though these were “sociological noises” of children in the playground of a primary school (laughter), and you had to close the windows in the study room not to be bothered and turn to thinking keeping silent company with the adult world of German last names [clarification note: the Barcelona flat of Triás where this interview took place was above a primary school and children’s noises, screams, etc. reached us from time to time during the interview, as the taping attests, FGH].

ET: (Initial laughter). What happens is that you have observed that as soon as the doors and windows open a bit, the noises return. In *Limits of the World* I elaborate this concept of critical modernity or modernity in crisis. I am happy with it but it is a curious thing: it [represents] the insertion of my self-reflection inside the historical circumstance. There, I think, these voices sneak in a bit. The same happens with the early two pages in *Philosophy and the Future* in which I synthesize the negative circumstances that make necessary the concept of limit. I do not use the concept [of critical modernity or modernity in crisis] in the rest of the book, which is very curious thing. [Yet] I speak of the ecological limit, the military-political limit, which is the Atomic weapon, the cosmic solitude which has captured me sometimes somehow, the consciousness of living in a planet that is light years apart from other constellations.

About the search for unity in the variety.

FGH: About the concept of liminal being, I feel there is a tendency to singularize, absolutize and radicalize it. These three verbs are here synonymous. You do not speak of “limits” in the plural sense of possible entrances and exits, of possible hybridizations or walks in and out of them. This must relate to your conception of philosophy linked to the sense of the tragic, the ineluctable, the inevitable, almost inhabitable.

ET: I seek the unity since *Limits of the World*. That is to say, I seek the one (“el uno”) in the variety. Or, if you wish, [I seek] the unity in the variety. I have a very emblematic book of the [previous era]: [*Dissemination*] *Dispersión* (1971). What interests me is [now] the opposite. By vicious or virtuous disposition, I seek a radical philosophy in the sense of looking for “a root” [“radical, raíz” in Spanish]. I looked for it

in political power at one moment. I was not satisfied. I then looked for it in passion. I still was not fully convinced, despite the *Treatise on Passion* [*Tratado de la Pasión* (1979)]. This book is at some level very convincing in relation to what I was looking for at one point; that is, a center of gravity for the thinking practice that in some manner or way would have the capacity of reorganizing our mental habits, at least mine as I [experience, experiment] and communicate them. Then, I discovered the concept of limit. It was a rather virginal concept, although it is true that it had been used here and there, but never in a systematic manner. Derrida almost uses it in every other sentence (“cada dos por tres”). So do Deleuze and Foucault. *Tutti quanti*. A lot of authors. Kant devotes some very intense pages to [the concept of limit]. Wittgenstein too. But it is as though no one had taken seriously, as seriously as Heidegger did, the ontological difference as the center out of which and from which [an entire original philosophical proposal is built]. Of course, I then singularize it due to this [radical] character because I realize that there is something risky and even heroic in this type of enterprise. Still, you have the title [in plural] of the first central work of mine, *Limits of this World*. In the end, it is “we” [who] are varied, we are “ones,” [plural] singulars, but it is perhaps a kind of trap and that is why one must seek an ontological angle. The ontology of Being and Nothingness, which is also the One and the Multiple: that “one” must give reason to the multiplicity in a way that it can at least be argued. That would be the bit that for me would give justification to the [whole] disposition [or intention]. This may be the reason.

About the uninhabited topology of the limit.

FGH: Almost making an inventory or setting up a plan or a composition apropos the ontological concept of the limit or border, if such [concept] were a room or a dwelling place or a circumstance, what other elements would we find near or around it? That is, limit of what in relation to what? What would *not* be limit, frontier or border? What other figures of elements –centers, suburbs, peripheries—should we imagine? There is a tendency in your writing to make deserts (“desertizar”) of concepts such as “limit” that become “center” with “nothing” around it. I do not know if this is correct or not. Doing a “plebeian intervention” again if you wish, if “limit” were to be imaginable vis-a-vis city with its historic center, say the Gothic area of Barcelona, the bourgeois central avenues such as Gràcia, the former Olympic area, the areas more or less visited by tourists, etc. In your case, you centralize the “limit,” you put it as such, no juxtaposition with what is not limit, the no-limit, as though this was of less interest...

ET: Everything is a kind of restless and attentive listening mode (“estar a la escucha”) to something that may come from outside. It is like the story of “The Desert of the Tartars” [Italian, *Il Deserto dei Tartari*, based on the 1940 novel *Tartar Steppe* also translated as *The Stronghold* (La fortezza) by the Italian writer Dino Buzzati (1906-1972). [Jorge Luis Borges is said to have written a celebratory prologue to the Spanish translation. There is [also] a 1976 film of the same title directed by Valerio Zurlini with an international cast that includes two good Spanish actors, Francisco Rabal and Fernando Rey, FGH’s contextual note]. Where I think I consolidate the idea of limit is in the introduction to *The Logic of Limit*: [this is] where I formalize it in the terms proposed by the Romans with the concept of “limes.”

Such “limes” was to be in relation to a center and also to a Tartar barbary or any other people normally identified by their onomatopoeias and their unintelligible language, so their monstrous aspects are as much their character as their language. I think that I display a congenital ambivalent duplicity towards such notion of “beyond,” which is simultaneously [a combination of] fascination and terror. It is not incidental that I promote vertigo as [a form of central] passion in contradistinction to the promotion of anguish by post-war philosophies or [anxiety by] existential philosophies. I have recently written an article that is titled “Anguish and Vertigo,” which I will send you in an email because I am very happy with it. I wrote it as the pretext for an exhibition about the theme of our world that is *pro domo mea* better served by vertigo than by anguish. The image of vertigo is well constructed. It fascinates me. It produces horror in me. My memories [explicitly] say it: I suffer from vertigo. I recently drove in a [convoluted] road that was taking me to Sant Pere de Rodas [in the area of the Alt Empordà in the North East of Catalonia, FGH clarification] which is round the corner, [but] I had to stop because I could not go any further. I literally had to stop driving. That is why I would never go to Machu Picchu [in Peru].

The talisman of the symbolic figuration, the radical limit between the living and the dead, the contamination of the beyond of that limit.

FGH: I do not recall where you talk about Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo* and you build connections with your thinking. So, it is not about realizing a “plus ultra,” but some adjustment...

ET: [Yes, it is] an adjustment because I believe, or I want to believe, that the limit contaminates the “beyond” in a certain way. Hence, a passionate philosophical task that I have not [yet] launched would be to rethink the notion of the “infinite.” I have not done so because I have gone deeper into science and the philosophy of mathematics. I think that the limit, conceived in the ontological and epistemological sense in which I do, is not incidental: it contributes and invests in that [other concept] of the “subject.”

Of course, I do a perverse thing, which is to call center what is periphery and [viceversa] and I then put the center elsewhere or even kick it out (the “God” understood as center I put aside). At any rate, it is to put the periphery at the center, but with the idea that such periphery contaminates the “beyond,” the *Finisterre*, [literally, the end of the earth in Latin (*finis terrae*), the most western portion in the Galician North portion of the Iberian peninsula occupied by the Romans, clarification note, FGH], *the no man’s land* [sic, in English in the original], etc. And there you paint a drawing or a sketch or devise a frontier, even build a wall if it is necessary. I also say that the foundation of cities builds walls but also opens doors. [The foundation of cities] has hermeneutical valence. I give it a very radical signification, because it is the nexus between life and death, the living and the dead. So, this is a bit of an approximation to a “beyond” that appears as a great enigma that fascinates and frightens us at the same time and about which we do not know very well how to find our orientation.

I also say that we have a value or a talisman available to us, which I call “symbolic figuration” (“figuración simbólica”). We cannot simply orientate ourselves per se or as such. We must orient ourselves in relation to something. This is the disposition towards the idea of limit that has taken me to enter into dialogue with religion and surely

also with arts in general. I would say that it is mostly the very notion of limit that provokes the immense interrogation of the enigma that provokes this “beyond” (“el más allá”) that in some measure the very notion of limit contaminates and even determines in a strange manner, even though we know well that such “beyond” is not a mirage or illusion projected by the limit, but that it is owed and owned (“debido”) to the very constitution of the opening [or disclosure] of the limit. Opening to what? To a “listening to,” to give shelter (“dar acogida”) to possibilities of elaboration, which I always add is indirect, precarious, analogous... Of course, evidently, what one cannot do is to set up tent [permanently] in the limit [at least as far as I am postulating it]. This is the [ineludible] premiss.

FGH: One cannot instal oneself in the limit?

ET: Yes, in the limit one can, but not beyond the limit.

FGH: As though one could “ride the limit,” but no [going further].

ET: [Coming from such “beyond”] the border may peirce you, but it cannot go entirely through you because such “passing through entirely” would bring the collapse to the [entire] theoretical edifice. I understand that such idea, that forces itself upon me, is not obvious. I know it is paradoxical and of great complexity because I have met many people who have approached my philosophy and this is [so they tell me] what interests and satisfies them more. But it is, I admit, problematic as it is the destiny of all philosophical ideas to be problematic. Capturing such problematic condition and the possibility of its productive recreation is what holds the promise of a greater richness (“mayor enjundia”).

About the generational fascination with the contestatory movements in the 1960s in the U.S.; the quintessence of modernity and the critique of postmodernism.

FGH: Assessing the vital timespace of modernity, you do not feel sympathy for postmodernity. Modernity is for you last century [20th century] at least according to *The Logic of the Limit*. You speak of “protomodernity” (19th Century) and the consummated modernity (20th Century), its arch going from 1750 to almost the 1960s (pp. 160, 190-1). How is this? If this the temporal dimension, the central space would the end-of-century Vienna, Bismarck Prussia, and then the nascent German nation... This would be the central timespace of the philosophy of Eugenio Trías, the timespace with which you would like to link up to in order to rescue, recreate, etc. Correct?

ET: I would have my doubts about your expression of the “nascent German nation” (laughter).

FGH: As regards the Germanocentrism before mentioned.

ET: Yes. I belong to a generation, Massimo Cacciari (1944-) in Italy and many others who joined me in the general fascination with turn-of-the-century Vienna. Freud, the second School of music, Mahler, Wittgenstein, etc. There are figures that form part of my landscape since always, concretely since *Drama and Identity* [*Drama e Identidad: O Bajo el Signo de Interrogación*, 1974] or even before. Everything happens there like in no other place, I think, and that is what today Anglosaxon literature calls “modernism.”

FGH: Yes, effectively.

ET: You can also find this type of modernism in the [American school of philosophy known as the] Metaphysical Club, the music of [Charles Edward] Ives, the birth of Jazz in New Orleans and in so many phenomena that configure the contemporary sensibility. There is the Berlin in the 1920s that is also influenced by jazz and the danceable music of the period that somehow pushes Vals aside and introduces the Foxtrot. This [moment] paints a certain climate of modernity also in Europe itself that is different from what prevailed before.

I am conscious that a period of immense convulsions follows, which some call the “two European civil wars,” the First and Second World Wars, two terrible apocalypses in between, two totalitarian regimes, National-Socialism in Germany and Stalinism in the Soviet Union finishing Europe off. Evidently, there is the difficult post-War years in the 1950s and a reconstruction in the 1960s where the axis of modernity, as I would call it, travels to New York and California in those 1960s. I would say that I am of a generation that was fascinated with those United States from the 1960s onwards.

The existing political forms one notices in the United States happening in the 1960s were for me the quintessence of modernity in ethical, aesthetic and other senses. At bottom, I have been formed by these existing political forms in the United States, despite the tremendously critical essays I have written of late. What else [could I mention]? The great experimentalisms, the figure of John Cage, Pop Art, Minimalism, etc. All these things have had a great impact on me and they have helped me find some sense of orientation. This is where I would be more in the side of the “critical modernity” or “modernity in crisis” as I call it.

Postmodernism is for me a comprehensible phenomenon that logically follows a satiety and exhaustion (“hartazgo, agotamiento”) of the extraordinary dogmatism of the new vanguards [and] certain literary and musical environments, etc. I think [postmodernism] is a conformist accommodation and also an elimination of the angularities in thinking practices, also in artistic expressions. In truth, I was postmodern *avant la lettre*. *Dissemination* [*Dispersión*] is very clearly a postmodern text [written] still in the heroic period of postmodernism. However, as soon as I saw that [postmodernism] became a kind of systematic podium of [mixed] tendencies (“entronizar”) that would encourage a debilitation of thinking, as well as a series of successful operations such as deconstruction hermeneutics, which I found sterile in the long run, I distanced myself from it [postmodernism].

This is despite the fact that I was the one who introduced post-structuralism in Spain. My early books were the first ones to talk of Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, etc. Initially, I did it with plenty of devotion. Gradually, I started setting up my distances and [added] preventive measures to such devotions. When postmodernism became a kind of big movement in the 1980s, I have already established my [clear] distances. All of that seemed to me very poor and [also] very much in agreement with a period that was not a glorious either in thinking or in literature and the arts. I saw the effect of postmodernism in literature for example as a return to the perennial 19th Century novel and in art it was a kind of licence to slack off or loosen up (“para relajarse”). Ironic hypernaturalism was all right, but to try to make of it some big gestural dislocation in relation to the totality of the creative operation seemed to me a tremendous impoverishment and very wanting.

Being also aware of the “hard concept” (“concepto duro”) of modernity, which [Jurgen] Habermas (1929-) incarnates in philosophy, [postmodernist philosophy] was more than exhausted. The [same thing with] brilliant Frankfurt School with [Theodor W.] Adorno (1903-1969), [Walter] Benjamin (1892-1940), etc. Habermas does brilliant and very valuable things but [his thinking] appears to me to be very poor in general [terms] as soon as he tries to systematize [it]. That is to say, he is in need of a correction. At the beginning of *Border Reason*, I say that I have tried a similar [difficult] partition (“bisectriz”) that, on the one hand, allows reason to pick up a modern heritage in the sense of not reneging or withdrawing from reason, and, on the other hand, sets up corrective measures that postmodernism itself could introduce [but fails to do so]. In my estimation, [postmodernism] falls into the immense error of dissolving reason. How? Playing linguistic games, joining with the worst Wittgenstein, the last Heidegger...

About the vices and virtues of the unconcealed tendency of aestheticizing thinking.

FGH: Aesthetic matters are fundamental to you. Are you more classical than Mannerist, Baroque or even neo-Baroque? I am asking while I am thinking of the pejorative connotations of the neo-Baroque scenography in the wasteland in the 1950s in *Thinking in Public* [*Pensar en Público* (Barcelona: Destino, 2001: pp. 38-42)]. How would you come to terms with your own aesthetic sensibility? Baroque attracts you less. About Mannerism you have written beautiful pages, but it does not appear to capture you either. I would call [your *locus amoenus*] “high modernism,” in the sense that we are in the first two decades of the 20th Century. You write very beautiful pages about the work “The Large Glass” (1923) of Marcel Duchamp, with an undisguised taste for certain iconoclasms of the in-between-war avantgarde movements... It is as though the second half of the century had not produced any aesthetic work that would attract you enough to make you write about it.

ET: You are absolutely right. Perhaps due to my peripheral condition or for some other strange reason, I think I am a strange synthesis of modernity and certain voices summoning a tradition. Of modernity I even take some risky aspects for example in the case of Marcel Duchamp. [Whereas] those invitations to tradition may take me [all the way back] to the proto-history in *Age of the Spirit*. There is a critic, who is not a philosopher, Nilo Palenzuela (1958-) from the Canary Islands, who, coming from literary theory, wrote something that I like very much. It is titled “Recreations of the Memory.” He said that when I spoke of Saint John of the Cross it seemed to him that I was addressing Duchamp and when I spoke of Duchamp it seemed to him that I was addressing Saint John of the Cross. It amused me at first. Of course, one is not fully conscious [of things], and this is the good [outcome] coming out of the good and bad critiques: they make you realize a certain idea of reception of what you have been doing.

It seems true [as] when I speak of Duchamp’s “The Large Glass,” I end up speaking of the [Islamic tradition of the] Ismaili Gnosis. Why? Because there is a slow-down of eternity which I compare with the “delay” [“retardo”] of the glass in the work of Duchamp. When I speak of the Ismaili Gnosis in *Age of Spirit*, one could think that I am speaking of a phenomenon of a ferocious modernity (“rabiosa modernidad”). I do a special operation. I seek a synthesis. That is, I am conscious of the great perversity of a certain modernity in relation to [all] the traditions. I like a lot the essay by [Mexican

writer] Octavio Paz (1914-1998) titled “The tradition of modernity” [“La tradición de la modernidad”] Why? Because it is precisely when he is speaking of modernity as defined against tradition, that what emerges at the end is another [type of] tradition. I think this is also what is at bottom with the best of the postmodern condition. It is no chance that the postmodern consciousness rescues authors and thinkers who were somewhat relegated or forgotten as [the German philosopher Hans George] Gadamer (1900-2002), [French philosopher Paul] Ricoeur (1913-2005), etc.

More about the aestheticizing tendency.

FGH: A question at the street level: if someone asked you, is modernity what follows the Enlightenment?

ET: I would add another element, Romanticism, that I would say I have cultivated it a lot. My sensibility has been marked by it. I mention it also in relation to some comment by [the Russian-British thinker] Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) who said, “yes, but I never forgot about Romanticism.” Romanticism is so important for the Enlightenment. I would say that Romanticism is supremely important in the dialectical unit of Enlightenment-Romanticism. And it is so not only negatively, but as a necessary corrective against aspects that I have always found repellent or repulsive in the Enlightenment. At the end of the day, Romanticism is closer to my sensibility and everything else. [George Freiherr von Hardenberg known as] Novalis (1772-1801), certain aspects of the English Romantics, etc. have been closer to me than the [proper] Enlightened [authors] themselves, although these also have a Romantic side. That is why perhaps I have always preferred the German Enlightenment over the French [side] because it is, to make ourselves understood, more Romantic.

FGH: There is a strong aesthetic or aestheticist drive in your thinking. Would this be true? How to understand such disposition? What are the possible vices and virtues of such a thinking modulation, if we can speak in those terms? I am thinking of the last pages in *Limits of the World* about the space-light in “The Great Glass” of Duchamp (pp. 309-389), in which your writing and your thinking undergo sharpening and crystallization... It is thus not preposterous to juxtapose the Sixteenth Century mystic poet (John of the Cross) and the eccentric French avantgarde artist (Duchamp) in your case, as you have mentioned earlier. Having said that, you are not interested in the Duchamp who migrates to the United States. You are less interested in the Duchamp who goes from style to style. You are less interested in recreating the Dada gestures of provocation...

ET: Crystallization would be an accurate expression. I find the mystical side even in Duchamp! Acting as my own advocate, I would say that aestheticizing is giving a valuable a term to [what I am trying to do]. There are several aspects. One would be to say strongly that yes, that it is more virtue than vice, and that this is so in relation to a peculiar type of writing. I think such [aesthetic] impulse could become a very big productive virtue (“virtud fecundante muy grande”). It has antennae, I would say, and these [antennae] are poetic. With an irrepressible immodesty (“petulancia”), I would say that this writing is exemplary and [I say so in] the sense of “fecundity.”

I think the great vice of philosophy in Spain is that we are not susceptible of [proper] cultivation of a [rigorous] artistic sensibility. It is perhaps more the case in Spain] but [it is also present] in other places. One can find [this aesthetic condition] in María Zambrano, in Heidegger, in Ortega in other ways. What I have tried to do in my writing is to promote an aesthetic fecundity without giving up in the slightest the conceptual tension. [Aesthetics] would thus be this productive [impulse or capacity] that is always [operative] within a conceptual elaboration of enormous tension. Sometimes I have the feeling that these splendid authors are too “prolix” (“prolijo”) as the Argentinians say, and the conceptual frontline breaks down. I adore Ortega but there are moments in which Ortega must please and win over his audience in such a way that it is better not to describe [in detail] what he does, which is a very embarrassing pedagogy. María Zambrano is at times so disconnected and aphoristic that one looks in vain for conceptual force (“la fuerza del concepto”). Zubiri has that force but then it turns out that [the writing] is so barren (“erial”) that no one can [really] get close to it. That is a true wasteland (laughs)! So, I have tried to break [free from those limitations]. My training has the mighty presence of aesthetics, which may be a vice. I instead consider it a peculiarity, almost a question of character, which may seem aristocratizing (“aristocratizante”) to some. In this sense I allow little option for example to Pop Art. Even if I did grant concessions, I am sure I would still find unique things that would not fit into conventional pronouncements. If some day I approached [the Pittsburgh-born American artist] Andy Warhol, I am sure I would find a surprising version of Warhol. I believe so because I have done it with Duchamp, who is an artist I like [precisely] for the typical eccentricities of a genuinely illuminating creator (“luminario”). Consciously or not, I have tried to address forgotten aspects that surprise me that are not included in the [conventional] monographs of these artists emphasizing esoterisms, etc. This is not what I am up to. I do not like esoterisms [per se] in hermeneutic codes. I do not like the modernism of gestures or of grand poseur, although I understand the provocations of Duchamp in his own context.

About aristocratizing tendencias and stripping away and removals (“despojamientos”).

FGH: I would be surprised if Eugenio Trías started writing about the aesthetic of comic books, adolescent pop music, etc. perhaps more so in your journalism.

ET: Yes. That is the side of mine that I was calling aristocratizing. I did not have a lot in common with Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1939-2003), who had very recently died, but whom I respected a lot. In relation to aesthetics, I am in the antipodes. The reason is the type of mass audience that reads his work and the very selective [group of readers] of my texts published by very small houses. It is a very different [world]. It is a bit of virtue and vice.

FGH: You do not make a philosophy of the urinal in the Duchampian manner of the provocative gesture. I put in quotation marks, in relation to the concept of “objective correlative” of T.S. Elliot, you take the reader to a mental landscape with few objects. You give her lights, crystals. It is cold.

ET: I understand now your early mention of desertification. I would dare say the following: I have a type of thinking that has a lot of animated cartoons. It is very

figurative, very imaginative. Since *Limits of the World*, and I think this was the tour of force [I was doing] in approaching “The Great Glass,” there is an intensification in some ways. I feel I am more capable and stronger in the pursuit of my own philosophical and metaphysical adventure in the sense of the great tradition of “a first philosophy,” to make ourselves understood.

Thus, I begin to strip away the object [of study]. In poetry, I remember that New York had a great impact on me in the [many] images of contemporary art, which is a bit the idea of the analysis of “The Great Glass.” I am reading the latest [work of the Spanish poet] Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958). There is the line, “transparency, God, transparency” (“la transparencia, dios, la transparencia”). Jiménez, whose poetic object was initially, like mine, the passions, the sinister, etc. [In his early years] he was more into modernist poems. Later, he is stripping things away. At the end [of his life] it is this kind of “desiring and desired God” (“Dios deseado y deseante” in the original). I say it now, but I did not cite it in the moment of the writing of the *Limits of the World* and it was unjust of my part. But these are things remain in the unconscious. It is possible that this stripping away [or this removal] is part and parcel of the investigation in the last section of *Limits of the World*. I was looking for a particular radiance (“fulgencia,” sic, “fulgor”) around the mysterious idea of limit, but spiritualizing it somehow. Of course, it was not the “dark night” (“noche oscura,” as in the famous expression of John of the Cross, “noche oscura del alma”).

I always defend myself in relation to these critiques. Mine was the generative impulse of a certain type of mental operation, but I never lost sight that mysticism without philosophy [is not worth the travel and the trouble]. The great mystics also knew it. [I would lean on] the [German Catholic theologian and philosopher Meister] Eckhart [von Hochheim, c. 1260-c.1328]. [He is a] Thomist mystic who reaches out to the great mysteries that mysticism makes experiential. He does that from the most intellectualist philosophy of the epoch, the one from [the Italian Dominican philosopher and theologian] Saint Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274). I would accept what you are suggesting [as long as we are taking into account that my] philosophy is the most intellectualist [effort] possible, which is in my case means that it is my own elaboration of Kant’s and Wittgenstein’s. That is why I feel I special predilection for *Limits of the World* among others I have written.

FGH: It is as though you liked dipping your intelligence in other spaces, in and out, to give it more life (“vivificarla” in the original).

ET: To give it life, as you well put it.

FGH: But without letting intelligence go and do some apology of irrationalism.

ET: No, absolutely not. Such [option] even horrifies me. It is exactly the opposite of what I seek and precisely for that the idea of limit imposes itself on me (or forces itself upon me, “se me impone la idea de límite”).

About demarcations, antipopular perspectives and the strong feeling that philosophy is today threatened.

FGH: Your case illustrates an effort to demarcate what you call proper or pure philosophical impulse; to circumscribe and make clear disciplinary knowledge to avoid contaminations (*Limits of the World*, pp. 22, 243, 283, 302, 310, 340).

ET: Yes, but when push comes to shove, I am possibly the most invading philosopher there is (laughter), because I am holding dialogues with lots of things (arts, religion, literature). That is, I am very conscious that I do a type of philosophy that is not exactly [conventional]. I must confess that I find disappointing, even depressing a certain type [of thinking that is] very much in vogue today. We have earlier identified these among the worst traditions in postmodern, which is to say, “to mess things up” (“confundirlo todo”), if it can be put in that way.

I am very much in favor of [mixtures]. My books are not at all pure if we look at genres. If you read my book of memories, they are not proper memories, but partly confessions, partly a novel. What is *Age of Spirit*? I myself do not know [what that is]. These texts are hybrid [something] in between essays and treatises. But the latter term in not to be understood in the affected, very precise, obsessive-neurotic German sense of the term, if I am allowed to say it like that. My writing is in that sense hybrid, *mestizo*, complex. On the other hand, it disturbs me, and I do not like in the slightest, the postmodern obsession with the confusion of all genres as though to think as to narrate were the same thing, and novels were mixed up with philosophy, and philosophy with poetry, etc.

I have then the feeling that [the mutually beneficial relationship] is [thus] weaker or even worse, that there is a general lack of interest and [gradual loss of] intensity, mostly on the philosophical front. Intensity and fecundity in the form of a[ny] thinking [practice] (“forma de pensamiento”) are very important to me. I insist on certain things to warn myself [first against such dangers] and also prevent these things from [overtaking me first] because I myself incur or fall into some of these [mixing] practices. In a certain sense, I am almost assuming an unpopular attitude [in this double move of praising and warning about genre mixing], which is done to emphasize that philosophy is in some ways threatened. It has always probably been so. I do not think it is only today. It was [already threatened] in the Greece of the Sophists. [Philosophy] is constructed oftentimes upstream (“a contracorriente”). I am convinced that the great thinkers have always been themselves upstream. Today there is also such danger.

I sometimes say that I began my [philosophical] training under a double threat: logical Positivism and Marxism. The former wanted to dilute [matters] in logical and linguistic analysis and the latter, in sociology and economy. The ones wanted to turn philosophy into an “*ancilla scientiae*” [ancillary or subsidiary to the sciences], and the others wanted a [dutiful] “maid servant” to political sociology with a socioeconomic base. In the 1980s, the threat comes to me from an angle that I thought was the exact opposite, its protective device or armour (“*espaldarazo*”) so to speak: the “solution” of philosophy in story, narration or narrativity, which I enormously respect when they are done properly. It is important to me to emphasize something that I know is unpopular. There is no other way. If I do not do [call attention to] it, the possibility of philosophy dilutes itself, at least according to my understanding of what philosophy is.

What motivates me to do philosophy, otherwise I would not devote myself to it, is the conceptual elaboration and the tension [summoned] in such elaboration. I am conscious that all my concepts are *sui generis*. They carry a metaphorical load (“*están*

muy cargados de metáfora”). That is why I insist so much on the symbolic [dimension]. Another matter would be to look into those [concepts] that are not so loaded. Yet, without this conceptual tension, philosophy undergoes an [unwanted] dilution [“se diluye,” note: and we may add “solution” in the chemical sense of the term in which the minor component, the solute, is uniformly distributed within the major component, the solvent, in relation to the conceptually tense thought experiment of philosophy for Trías; FGH note].

About heterodoxies and orthodoxies about what is normally called the history of philosophy.

FGH: Is your fundamental modality a critique of the history of ideas “properly” philosophical, since you like emphasizing the “proper” and the “pure”? If someone came up to you and asked you about *Age of the Spirit*, “so, what is that about?”

ET: Yet, *Age of Spirit* is in reality an ecumenical project. It has a totalizing intention, although it is of course true that I cannot encompass everything with the lot of euridition and the curiosity that I may bring to the table. I am sorry to say that I do not speak of the Far East. Nor do I do speak of pre-Colombian cultures, as I have mentioned earlier. My friends in Mexico cry out a lot over it, although, as soon as I speak of cosmogony, they quickly understand and contribute with some elements to [make things fit better] for example, the myth of Quezalcoatl, the feathered serpent and some other cosmogonic ideas that are very present in *Age of Spirit*. My ecumenic intention is contrary to a [conventional] canon of philosophy.

In this regard, I would insist on the following: I have characterized myself as a synthesis of modernity and tradition. I would add [another synthesis of] heterodoxy and orthodoxy, because my training is truly Central European and German, even French in some aspects, in the same manner that post-structuralism is [the same] in some [good instances]. But the orientation is very different because what I am suggesting is precisely to break open the model of the history of [abstract or philosophical] thought and even the history of ideas that corresponds to what is normally called the history of philosophy. This is not for inattention to philosophy. The opposite [is true]. I know that something very important takes place with Thales of Miletus, Parmenides, etc.

Yet, it matters a lot to me to want to widen the scope of vision and [foster] the confluence of the various traditions that I consider belonging to our Western culture. I make no difference on the other side of the Atlantic. [I also include it] as one confluence of the Greek-and-Latin tradition on one hand and the tradition that in *Age of Spirit* I call prophetic-sociological (sic) in the Biblical and Jewish versions [on the other]. In my vision this one is produced above all in the late Roman Empire leaving [traces] that in some ways generate what one may call a strange synthesis in our historical and cultural unconscious.

Age of Spirit gives it an ecumenical meaning [or impulse]. I give [such immediate Greek-and-Latin culture] a sense of convocation at the humanity scale trying as much as possible. I do not know if I achieve the elimination of those Eurocentric vices that one finds often in the conventional histories of [philosophical] thinking. These tend to give great value, like a [main] protagonist, to the Middle Ages in relation to the dialogue between Christianity and Islam, a Islam that must not be the caricature that we are

currently witnessing. [By contrast] I am [opening up] to other traditions that emerge, Heterodox Christianity, heretical Judaism of the Kabbalah, etc. This is the larger profile out of which I reach the Renaissance and Modernity, already from a very different perspective from what is conventional. This is the ambitious intention of this book. That is why I spent so much time getting it ready and writing it. It is perhaps the most ambitious book I have written. Others will say if it is the best. The [declared] intention [is one of promoting such an ambitious ecumenism].

About the properly philosophical.

FGH: What would the “properly philosophical” be? I would improvise by saying that it is a totalizing or generalizing will about everything that is in the combinatory game, adding the creative and conceptual tension of what is and what is not, adding fidelity, in your case, to the German or Germanophile territory previously enunciated...

ET: That’s right. Of course, this is due to personal characteristics. I like diving deeply in philosophical thinking putting it side by side domains that are not properly philosophical, such as art, cinema, religion, etc., and finding my footing (“orientarme”) around issues that impose themselves on me. This would be the Kantian scheme, without necessarily going for the unique possible answer. They impose themselves on me (“se nos imponen”) as though these were seeking meaning or challenging the absurd or the meaninglessness (“el absurdo o el sinsentido”). Orienting ourselves in relation to those questions is what marks our own condition as distinctive [human]. There are other markers, horrific things, *homo hominis lupus* [man is wolf to man] etc. There are other obscure, sombre and “sinister” markers, the latter being a very dear term of mine. And we are left in this kind of condition of solitude and community that the condition of man (“el hombre”) incarnates. That is where, when I see and perceive the proper and specific field of philosophy: that is, for the intelligence to throw [at it] a series of interrogations.

I always insist on the antennae, affective and passionate, of [human] intelligence in relation to issues that have to do with the meaning of our life, the “why, what for, in relation to what we are here, etc.” which may not have one univocal answer, but evidently allows options to the elaboration of proposals. Philosophy is, for me, such [proper type of intelligent response] to the challenge of nonsense, death, nothingness. That is why I insist on the ontological, logos in so far as it is a rescue [mission or operation] in relation to the absurd, *ontos son* of existence [the Greek takes us in the direction of “certainly, clean, indeed, verily.” *Ontos*, the adverb of the oblique cases of *eimí*, “to be,” substance as reality, what is genuinely important, “real,” those who know ancient Greek would be able to bring further light, FGH’s note].

I would add that the orientation towards that question might also be a question of orientation for the field of poetry. The *Duino Elegies* (1923) of [the Bohemian-Austrian Rainer Maria] Rilke (1875-1926), or [the American poet] T.S. Elliot (1888-1965), or similar things. Philosophy is very close to some sense of poetry, but [operates] at another level. I would use the expression of [the German poet Johann] Holderlin (1770-1843), “it is close but these are mountains that are abyssally separated.” The same question or issue requires from philosophy the conceptual elaboration [unlike poetry]. Why? What for?

For the apparently simple reason that [such elaboration] must give satisfaction to our intelligence. There is profound pleasure (“goce profundo”) in this adventure. In my

opinion, this is the best and greatest adventure [possible] for intelligence [to have]. In the [pursuit of this type of] knowledge at this level and in relation to these issues, science holds no jurisdiction. That is, science puts us in front of [other] issues, enigmas, questions. But here, it has no [dominion]. Hence, my inclination is to set out, demarcate and define [knowledge fields]. Philosophy has things in common with poetry, but careful, it is not the same as poetry. Let us not mistake philosophy in dialogue with science, and prevent that it [may be] absorbed by it, thus bringing ruin to a whole line of reflection that is, I think, not only legitimate but necessary.

About the *bête noire* of Metaphysics and the Adventure of Liminal Being as Provocation.

FGH: In reference to concepts such as “thought” or “thinking,” “knowledge” and “intelligence” (“saber, inteligencia, conocimiento”), you are not interested in go-betweens, Maquiavelianisms of social reason fixated on the immediate or the contingent. What interests you is, as you put it, to give satisfaction to the intelligence and “instantly put it in the Absolute” (“de un pistoletazo ponerla en el absoluto”) as you beautifully put it, adscribing it to Hegel in the *The Language of Forgiveness (El Lenguaje del Perdón: Hegel o el Alma que Quiso saber todas las Cosas*. Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 1980). You would always like better to jump to that ideational mental terrain that we could qualify as drastic, singular, final, ineluctable... Some may even call it grandiloquent.

ET: The crucial building concept (“concepto angular”), the concept of limit, carries within itself the correction of any type of hubris, groundless claim and grandiloquence. I would say it is what is inherent in philosophy in the radical sense. I call it metaphysics because I like the exercise of provocation (“ejercer de provocador”). I know, I am very conscious, that philosophy has built itself against metaphysics in the entire Twentieth Century. It is not only logical positivism or Wittgenstein, but also Heidegger, hermeneutics, deconstruction or post-structuralism. Metaphysics is a bit this *bête noire* [lit. “black beast” in French, the person or thing one strongly dislikes or wants to avoid]. I refer to my first book, *Philosophy and Its Shadow [La Filosofía y su Sombra]* in which I addressed that “shadow” as something we ourselves need at the end of the day, as something without which philosophy loses its virtue and substance.

After this gesture, which may very well be ironic, what I have wanted, was to open myself up to issues or questions that impose themselves on us. Perhaps metaphysics is not the type of knowledge in the sense of an episteme as it has sometimes been the claim. But it may well have been [something closer to an episteme] in relation to a gamut of questions similar to the ones postulated by Kant around “the three ideas of reason,” as one might put it. These issues or ideas impose themselves on us (“se nos imponen”). It is the legitimate right of nature to give them figure, form, expression (“derecho legítimo de la naturaleza”). I would almost say that this is my definition of philosophy.

You can have a different form or expression [and different philosophies] holding dialogues with the different environments of culture and experience. I would insist a lot at bottom on the existential procedure (“ha de proceder de la experiencia”). This [experience is] a bit in the Kantian sense, but one must look for conditions that transcend it. Fundamentally, my books claim that it is experience, as stylized and formalized as you wish, that guides [thinking]. These [experiential dimensions] are the first [steps] that give

a bit the basis of [what will follow later]. I would say that I try to have an organic opus more than anything else. More than big jumps or changes, or stylistic matters, and these are also here, what is is the [pursuit of a] “ground” or basis or foundations [that undergo development later].

My books, mostly those of the 1970s, are about providing foundations that please me (“para mi gusto”): *Treatise on Passion, Language of Forgiveness*, that in a certain sense is a continuation and also a corrective of *Treatise on Passion*. It is also the case in relation to the aesthetic aspects that are included in *The Beautiful and the Sinister*. Without these [“grounds” and foundations] the adventure of the limit could not take place. That is, they give me a bit the physics that allows me to rise up to a certain metaphysics. But there is the reference to experience and passion that can be lived in many diverse modes and ways.

Yet, what interests me is the phenomenon of experience. I illustrate it with paradigmatic figures that are significative and relevant, for example in relation to the aesthetic experience that is part of the explorations I undertake in *The Beautiful and the Sinister* and *The Artist and the City*. These were the bases for the strictly philosophical adventure that I begin with *Limits of the World*. This adverb, this “strictly,” must be understood in the metaphysical sense, bringing it gradually closer to what Aristotles called “first philosophy” (“filosofía primera”).

About the language of forgiveness as love.

FGH: I have noticed a tendency to nominalization in the titles of your books [clarification note: substantial, substantive and “sustantivo” or “nombre” in Spanish share the same root, FGH]. I would like to see verbs, adjectives, adverbs and [request] a complete sentence in the manner of synthesis, for example, in relation to your doctoral thesis, *The Language of Forgiveness: An Essay on Hegel* (1981).

ET: This was a very provisional book in some ways. I culminate or conclude it in later works. It happens often that I pick up an inconclusive concluding ending [and I develop it elsewhere] but from another angle. I think the conclusion of *The Language of Forgiveness* must be found in *Philosophy of the Future*, which I see as my book of synthesis of my early or preparatory period. *The Language of Forgiveness* is a reflection on the figure of forgiveness in Hegel, which per se receives very few pages at the end of the book. In a sense I walk on tiptoes over it whilst I instead develop other experiences that I like better magnifying there.

It is the period of inter-subjectivity. First, I am interested in developing the “love-passion” in all its complexity taking as paradigm the myth of Tristan and Isolde, which can be thought beyond these figures and forms. I think [the paradigm] is valid for any love-passion construction (man-woman, woman-woman, man-man, any arrangement). I was interested in developing the various arrangements of this construction as well as bringing to the fore the ugly side of violence, struggle, war, etc. that was involved in “love-passion.” [Such theme] holds many components, even the horizon of death. I was interested in the corrective mechanism of Hegel, that is at bottom the school of Hobbes, i.e. war of all against all, fight to death. I think Hegel starts from Hobbes and reaches a [horizon of] post-Kantism.

One of the great merits of Hegel is that he takes the thing with its “bad” side, let us say, in the Lacanian sense of the Real, the ugly side, the mirror image of the fight to death in relation not via the narcissistic route of [self definition and affirmation], but [in relation] with the other, the “*hostis*” [in Latin], the adversary, the deformed and sinister figure. All these characters in the “relation to alterity” [template] have nothing to do with the often edulcorated forms that lately proliferate in the rhetoric of the philosophy of alterity where it is never the horrible face of the wolf of the other. This [ugly] Hegelian side interests me a lot.

The whole thesis of the book was that Hegel who had initiated in Frankfurt a route close to Romanticism, putting love a bit in the center of all things, wakes up one day from such dream and turns to Hobbes’s school. He then puts the origin of inter-subjectivity in this fight to death and [the] fear [factor] in relation to all. Fear, say, as a fundamental impulse (“pulsión”). I was interested in it, even as a corrective to what [French social scientist] René Girard (1923-2015) will call the “romantic illusion.” But, of course, an enormous dissatisfaction ensues. This was a kind of self-critique to *Treatise on Passion*, although this [ugly] aspect was also [present] in this book. It was a kind of a catharsis, to go through the Hegelian school, that brought me down the [Hobbesian] stairs to “hell,” so to speak.

There is heavy orchestration in the section dealing with Revolution and Terror. The horizon of fight to death is brought to its ultimate, even post-Hegelian consequences, for example, of the violence of the atomic weapon, when there is the possibility of the destruction of all participants. I wrote the book in the thick of the period of the Spanish transition when the fratricidal situation of generalized fight to death turns to a language of conciliation, even of social pact, where Hegel speaks of morality, a type of figure [of speech] that would overcome the experience of a Revolution that carries Terror inside and does not fulfill its postulates but inevitably perverts them. It is a strange book. It is made with a lot of tension. The ending is, as you suggested in your notes, brief, scarce. Today I would complement it, perhaps adding thirty pages. The theme of forgiveness could be expressed in many different ways. I was thinking of it as a horizon of conciliation in which fight is carried out verbally, via the parliamentary route inside a democratic form. Forgiveness could also be understood at another more personal or intimate level.

About the difficulties and transits inside the ample and complex semantic field of love.

FGH: *The Language of Forgiveness* has very beautiful recreations of an ineluctable Hegelian world. May Spirit love? In Hegel, you say, “no.” Yet, what does “love” mean vis-a-vis the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*? I confess my own reader reaction to the book: sudden shocked impression and intimidation (“sobrecogimiento”), momentary seduction of the ineluctable or inevitable in this heroics, and, if you let me, a certain feeling of [perceived] fragility embedded in those critical proposals of “forgiveness” (“perdón”) that are few in the end (pp. 224-230), almost like these were resting moments of a soldier after the battle, few hours, in a world in which Absolute Spirit reveals itself in total war (pp. 73ff) as though love was a little quiet clearing before storms coming. [Love is also] inside a battle for recognition that is always uneven and where everything that is worth, erotics of power for instance, is [or revolves around] fight. What are you trying to

articulate with “love”? Is it a Christian-humanist notion? Is heterosexual intersubjectivity that may open up to other forms? In later books, you speak of “de-subjectivation,” and “openness.” What synonyms of love then?

ET: Yes. The problem comes when *Treatise on Passion* places the emphasis on “love-passion” vindicating it in polemics with Ortega [y Gasset] and other authors. This vindication is a certain form of passion without which there is no possible action in the adventure [that we call] knowledge. I try to assign to passion a status a little contrary to what is usually the case, i.e. what obfuscates our knowledge, what blocks our clear sense of things, an impediment to intelligence, what impedes our practical adventure inside a horizon of freedom. What happens, of course, is that I realized that one thing is the passional component speaking of love and another thing is love as it seemed to me to be its semantic field in its latitude and complexity that I myself had enormous difficulties in the transit.

Inside the frame of these hesitations, I wrote *The Language of Forgiveness*. In part, the intention was again to return to the scene of the storm, as you mentioned. In *Love-Passion* [*Amor-Pasión*] it was a bit the storm of “love-passion,” and what is even blindness, alienation (“enajenación”), etc. What happens is that I was not assigning a negative meaning to it. That was in a certain sense a bit the novelty of the book and the reason why the book [had some success]. It is one of the books with the most [lasting] echo, even in environments that are not strictly philosophical. In *The Language of Forgiveness*, I returned to the scene of the storm, that originates the fight to death, the hate of the other, etc. It might be the case that I move better in scenarios of storm than peace and quiet. The same thing applies to the aesthetic domain; hence, my first book *Philosophy and Its Shadow*. “Shadow” is close to the meaning of [the American short-story taller] Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). In some sense it is very present in me, madness and reason, without which reason isn’t.

In *Philosophy and Carnival*, if you do not have it very near, if there is no link or relation of some kind with it [madness, carnival], be it aesthetic or ethical, which is what I intended [reason isn’t happening either]. I enjoy myself more dealing with sinister aspects contaminating what is beautiful. Without this contamination, beauty loses vitality, or even beauty [loses] itself. I would know better how to approach those realities, to speak in Hegelian terms, that form the foundation or basis of the Spirit, the ones that are seldom taken in consideration. What I do know is that [such foundation or basis of Spirit] implies a certain mode of integration or trespassing what is called “passion.” In other words, a “love” without such component does not exist, not even the love that is called Platonic.

Here I would be in the antipodes of some Lutheran theologians who oppose Eros and Agape. I am not Christian but I am interested in finding the best arguments that integrate what the word “eros” may suggest, coming from Plato, or even the discourse on Love, such as Caritas or Gratia, from Christian traditions but doing a different thought [experiment]. I would say that the best pages I have written about this complex topic are those that you may find perhaps hidden in *Philosophy of the Future*. It is a theme that is enormously complicated, the most complicated of all from all philosophical, theological, psychological view points. It is a theme that some have truly approached from a restrictive angle: Plato has his theory of Love, Aristotle, his idea of friendship, the Christianity of St. Paul with his hymn to Charity, the philosophy of German Idealism,

Hegel remains in the idea of Spirit as Reason and its maximum is freedom. Love is in the origins of philosophy and [reaches] the Romantic period, but then disappears. Love may be said to be the culmination of [Kantian] philosophy that is above reason and Liberty, but it is not very explicit.

FGH: Your language betrays an Enlightened sensibility with a Romantic attachment...

ET: Yes.

FGH: That, is, from an intellectual standpoint, “love” may bring a series of synonyms: disposition, inclination, predilection, adjustment, convergencia, copulation, etc. in relation to what you have written about the “dia-bolical” [“diabolical” in the etymological sense of partition, “dia-,” splitting, fracturing, divergence, distancing... as developed by Trías]. How to translate it? One could do sociological readings of such mental operations? But you would not be interested per se in that fight for recognition among social groups and faithfulness to one’s belonging, willed or not.

ET: This [sociological aspect] may come later. I think the intuition of “love-passion” is from its origin a relation of one-to-other, [in] which [this other] could be death, as something ambiguous, as though it might allow the union in some way, which is also a limit of any [such] union. That is to say, it is a bit what allows it and makes it possible. I admit that of all the philosophical themes I have addressed, this [love-passion] is the one where I find myself more at a loss (“me encuentro más desbordado”).

About the crisis of modernity in the shadow of Hegel.

FGH: You have written about eros as this “overflowing over borders,” an overwhelming ‘excess,’ etc. (“desbordamiento”). Is your conception of modernity Hegelian? I feel it is. I am not only talking about this or that book, but in general. You call him the philosopher of modernity par excellence in the way he “sees through the de-substantializing economic impact upon all intersubjective relations” (p. 180). You equate the spirit of modernity with freedom, self-sufficient self-consciousness, absolute substance or totalizing totality that violently crashes everything (“arrambla”), p. 98).

ET: Modernity [is] also [understood] as [an, the] emergence of the subject or subjectivity from Descartes onwards, demonstrated in relation to the enormous importance of the French Revolution. Perhaps I find the Hegelian version in relation to the French Revolution [to be] enormously brilliant. It is a bit the constitution of an “absolute subject,” that is, an absolute subject seizing power. Of course, when he uses it, it is no vehicle for the construction of a world, but of the absolute ideology of an absolute destruction of the existing world and at the end [such absolute subject] remains empty. This is the terrible moment that Hegel calls Terror. The test is to see how to get out of it, from modernity and the problems that ensue. Modernity becomes modernity in crisis. Correspondingly, the subject is also in crisis, subject to interrogation or questioning. In the early books, I come to philosophy with such crisis...

FGH: How to understand such crisis?

ET: It is [crisis] in the sense that it is neither the consolidated Kantian subject nor the Cartesian-substantial. But it is a split and plurally diversified subject (“escindido,

multiplicado”). In my early books, I would speak of the profusion of masks, which in some way subsist in a certain idea of subjectivity, or a certain notion of identity that emerges as projection of such [early conceptions of the] Kantian or Cartesian subject...

About Panoramas of Sociopolitical Order and the Distancing from the Enemies of Philosophy, the Postmodern Merchants of Cynical and Accommodating Reason.

FGH: You write that “Hegel does not develop a critique of modernity from superior concepts flying over the sociopolitical order. Modernity is then truly the hypostasis of sociopolitical categories onto the ontological terrain: he makes metaphysics of politics” (p. 189). What do you mean by that? What would that “flight” be of ontological concepts and those non-hypostasized sociological categories be? Would the sociopolitical world “fly low” for you?

ET: In Hegelian terms, yes [to the latter question]. At bottom, one of the great explorations that Hegel calls “objective,” is that of the civil-state society, which in reality is the objective domain of desire, work, economy, power in terms of dominations. I have insisted that Hegel himself calls it “Objective Spirit.” For him, there is [yet] another domain that he calls “Absolute Spirit,” which takes flight with religion, art, philosophy in the most purified sense (“sentido depurado”) of the term. Of course, I have sometimes the impression that Hegel signals a singular combat, being fully aware that Objective Spirit is omnipresent and contaminates everything and we cannot remove ourselves from it. Such would be a tremendous mistake. But it would also be a tremendous mistake to remain trapped in it. This would be the fundamental dilemma: to be in between the all-contaminating Objective Spirit and the unavoidable, ineluctable and almost uninhabitable Absolute Spirit.

It is not that one avoids realities without which I feel I could not do either philosophy or have the bare-minimum lucidity and basic decency to survive. I am always alert at any reductive or closing gestures, the ones that say that “this is all there is,” because if this [were] the case, then the adventure of “the being that we are” (“el ser que somos”) would call upon us either [as] an apocalyptic revolution or [as a] generalized suicide. Instead, I try to find other transactional forms, as qualified or nuanced as one may wish, but understanding that as fundamental as institutionality of knowledge is, and of philosophy in particular too, we cannot forget about the substance of artistic doing, or even the possibility of diverse criteria for philosophical doing that cannot be strictly reduced to [such institutionality]. That is why I insist on this [difference between institution and substance] with strength, sometimes with fear, because [otherwise] it could take us to the vertigo of indetermination and indifference that is to me utterly unedifying.

FGH: In other words, that the enemies are the merchants...

ET: The merchants and a certain cynical reason that is at bottom accommodating. This is a bit the hate informing my awareness of the enemy of postmodernity that travels in this direction because I see here a lot of resignation, a lot of a cynical [mindset], both aspects combined [clarification: “cínico” in Spanish and “cynical” in English are *false cognates* in the sense that “negative pessimism” has nothing to do with the former, which is instead a feigned, undesirable, indecent attitude of an intention to deceive or abuse

others and hence produces a type of duplicitous discourse that seeks to play its cards at the expense of others. Such “cynical” attitude –playing with word, deed and omission-- always resists being exposed as such by an accusatory witness, the Emperor is naked!, provided others are not complicit with or covered by the Emperor; there is the expression “cynical play” in sports which implies malevolence in the violation of the norm of genuine, clean effort of a player as denounced by a third party, i.e. “cínico” has nothing to do with the “negative judgement” of an observer virtue-signalling, from an assumed position of docility, compliance or and consent obedience, about someone else’s “negative doubts” about the constituted power or authority which is the conventional sense –in American English reaching British English-- of “cynical” doubting goodness of an extended human nature: Trías denounces the self-righteous, goody-goody “weak thought” or mainstream discourse as he sees it, the notion of “cynical reason” in Peter Sloterdijk is related to this richer notion that is still common in Spanish and surely in the other romance languages, FGH note].

At any rate, postmodernist thought has a lot of accommodation [or compromise] in it. Its combination paints [sad] forms of a [poor] picture that provokes depression (“desánimo”) in relation to those [important] “things” that are not many, those “beacons” aforementioned, of the type of adventure to which I am devoted, and which I pursue with great effort, because I find in [such effort and adventure] the sense of what I do, which validates itself in its doing, [also] in the sort of pleasure that is produced doing it, in philosophy in my case. Others will do it in painting, cinema, etc.

There are reasons for thinking that pressure and harrassment (“acoso”) are immensely powerful (“poderosísima”). You only have to talk with artists and the majority of thinkers who have always endured enormous difficulties, incomprehensions and bad encounters with the world of institutions, [great] difficulties in bringing into fruition the things they want to do, or the poorly accepted ways of welcoming such [efforts]. And this [statement] is not only due to a late Romantic sensibility. At any rate [it is] an awareness that if the [philosophical] task is simply to be subsumed to [or absorbed by] the merchants of the Temple in their institutional domains, it would totally lose its [profound] reason [for being such philosophical task]. My protest is that it is [such postmodern] consciousness [the one that] has cynically succumbed and does not want to appreciate the interrogations of certain ethical forms in art, culture or thinking.

About “first philosophy” as the formalization of the common experience and also as the unlearning of education and memory.

FGH: It is as though intelligence said to itself, “I want to constitute myself in the ontological vein, I do not want to “buy and sell and trade” (“mercadear”). I want to behave in an entirely convincing ontological manner. I want to ontologize.” What would you say to her almost in the abbreviated manner of a cookbook or a traffic manual, say, “do it this way or that way, go here or go instead better there?”

ET: There is a beginning in a book of mine that is always very present in me. It is *Philosophy of the Future*. We can say that the autobiographical *Tree of Life* also develops this [aspect] a bit. I would say that Plato has always been in the vicinity (“cerca”). I have had him among the best philosophers. Two of his ideas [impact me]. One is Eros, of which I have already said some things. Another is the exercise of reminiscence. I find

both profoundly moving. I would appeal to the passage of the use of reason, in relation to childhood, the moment when the child is asking a series of issues and problems that remain alive and implied (“latentes”).

I always have the impression that philosophy formalizes or stylizes something that is absolutely common and that anyone may have experienced. Some people complain and say, “well, why is this evoked in such complex formulations?” [A possible answer could be] “Because these complex forms were formulated as such already in infancy.” I am not in doubt that a child is not a simple being. Hence, the philosophical practice thus understood is an appeal [even a plea] to memory; that is, to the one who is in so far as one was. Evidently, there are layers of forgetfulness, layers produced by what Freud called the period of latency, education, integration into institutional frames, forms of life that belong to a concrete society or culture or a specific symbolic community, everything that builds barriers of incomprehension or walls of forgetting....

We are born in a river of oblivion. We become forgetful in part due to the process of education, in some ways due to [forced socialization]. I would say that philosophy is a kind of “de-education” (“des-educación”). Such would be the character of the Platonic *paideia* [rearing and education of children]. The *Republic* of Plato already has this character of “unlearning to learn.” It is a bit of a return to the origins that evidently remain [hovering] in limbo, [confusing and misty] in myth, but which determine our own identity in some sense. Those early questions one asks for example at that surprising moment when one realizes one is mortal.

Tree of Life is a very special book. It is very sincere in the expression of my own experiences. I give a lot of importance to matters that are typically not treated that way in this type of book; for example, there are thirty pages devoted to dreams and the oneiric world and how those dreams are producing and forming a kind of oneiric cogito. These are archaic dreams [clarification: “sueños” has originally in Spanish no conscious or willed impetus of self-improvement as the “American dream” in the English language does for example; there is a lot of “unconscious forces” in these “dreams,” but there is “contamination” between conventional American (self-)celebrations and Spanish “obscurities,” FGH]. These are dreams dreamt when I was twelve or thirteen years of age, but they still give me a kind of unconscious typology of what is and will be my way of understanding a concrete form of philosophy.

At bottom, I am refereeing (“arbitrando”) these concepts that allow me, somehow, to formalize some experiences, not in a different manner from a poet or a painter. When I say, as I often do, that philosophy is creation, it is because I am convinced that it is so. [Philosophy] is a creation in the sense of being a recreation, an agitation of one’s own memory, a delectation in a series of philosophical questions that I think are common. What happens is that these are later forgotten. The majority of people forget the[-se questions and delections]. What happens then is that they may find difficult something that is not so due to the layers of formative, educative, epochal, mass-media sedimentation in our current societies. These [obfuscating layers] make, in the end, that the simplest [dream sequences] emerge as the most enormously complicated things. The reverse [is also true]: things that are enormously complicated turn out to be immensely simple. Better yet, it is not that there are complicated, they may be surreal or unreal or worse things (laughter). False complexities may sneak in and provoke [a certain interest].

It sometimes happens with other phenomena that are more difficult to understand and [still] generate interest.

About The Philosophy of the Future.

FGH: What synthesis would you [like to] include about *Philosophy of the Future* [*Filosofía del Futuro* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1983)]? What are you trying to do here?

ET: It is projecting a future following the same great impulse as it is going back to a past. It is a “bastard title” (“título traidor”), because it is in reality a type of continuous tension between something that is closing down [in the past] that is [still] also carrying the closure of the future with it. The more the memory is agitated, the more the [push and pull of] the lever (“palanca”) towards the future in terms of truth and freedom. This is perhaps a good synthesis of the book.

About the Ontological Preeminence of Vertigo and the Inherent Suspension of Liminal (or Border) Being.

FGH: Having in mind the article “Thinking together with Ortega y Gasset (“Pensar en compañía de Ortega y Gasset,” *Revista de Occidente* (Mayo 2001, 241: pp. 72-86), I see a strong influence of Ortega in relation to your *Philosophy of the Future*, [when you speak of] the return of a fertile past (“pasado fecundante”) and the futurity of philosophical reason. This is a deliberate provocation: there is a subterranean, almost shame-faced existentialism, a kind of Chet-Baker cool-jazz “soft style,” in you sometimes, but you have also distanced yourself from a post-War existentialism out of favor and fashion in some of your own writings.

ET: I accept it. And I will say more. This is even clearer in the initial chapter of *Border Reason* over and beyond *Philosophy of the Future*. This initial chapter triggers the entire book and carries in it the problem of beginnings. I highlight this because it is a stronger fight (“combate más fuerte”) after *Limits of the World*; yet it is approached from another angle. The big fight in *Philosophy of the Future* is with Heidegger. It is one of my most significant fights and I am not very combative in philosophy. That is, I do not like this type of scenario. Nonetheless, *Philosophy of the Future* [engages] or recreates the idea or principle of variation. I need to engage with the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. How do I set up some differences with this philosophy of existence? I lean mostly on Nietzsche’s philosophy [and I provide] a rather peculiar and personal reading of mine. This aspect is very clear in the recent *City over City* [*Ciudad sobre Ciudad*]. I invert the relation in feelings (“sentimientos”) roused by philosophy or ontology in existentialists. For Sartre, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard of course, who is a bit the inspiration of those who follow, anguish or anxiety is the central passional feeling over vertigo. I see a bit the peculiarity in the concept of limit there. At bottom, the limit is indicative of a [dangling, a] suspension, “being suspended in between” being and nothing, life and death, etc. I do an inversion. For me, vertigo has an ontological preeminence in relation to [my proposal of] the ontology of liminal Being. This is abundantly developed in the chapter that is called “philosophical passions” in *City Over City*. The epistemological consequences of vertigo were already clearly insinuated in *Philosophy of the Future*. This book is written after *The Beautiful and the Sinister* [and] after the incursion [in the “ugly” aspects

aforementioned] and I begin to extract some consequences. The only curiosity is that *Philosophy of the Future* has everything except the concept of limit. I have not found it yet in this book. There is a timid appearance at the beginning. It is [as though it were] thought out in a negative manner. It is understood as a restriction. It is done before the already clear exploration that emerges in *Limits of the World*.

About the Outrageous Vertigo and the Possible Gain of Eros.

FGH: Very beautiful pages convey to the reader the dialogue of the intelligent, thinking “I” (“yo pensante”) in relation to this feeling of vertigo. How would one get rid, fix or take care of such feeling of vertigo?

ET: At some level, it has to be an operation that integrates it within the totality of experience in such a way that [vertigo] does not burst in all of a sudden. If vertigo is a disruption (“trastorno”), it is because our life is disrupted. It happens to me, for example, when I go up to a certain height, or when it suddenly appears due to general conditions. At first, I would say that it is a latent disposition. In this regard, it is similar to anxiety in that we have it and it displays our mode of being (“nuestro modo de ser”). The image of disruption (spiral, swirling motion), something spinning around, is very present in all my writings. It is related to the perception that in one way or another is connected to something outrageous [challenging qua rare, scandalous, profoundly surprising, unprecedented, unheard-of, exceptional] (“inaudito” in the original).

Vertigo is linked to audition. It is a perception of “something unheard of” because of its own enormity (“inaudible por su misma enormidad”). [Vertigo] is thus connected to the mysteries or limits of our own life, our relation to the non-life which is death, non-thought and madness and those domains that form the world of shadow and vertigo, [which constitute] an irrepressible whirlpool (“torbellino”). What we can do is mobilize all our faculties. There is also the vertigo of very powerful feelings, such as love-passion, the adventure of knowledge, etc. I always believed that [the latter] is a struggle (“combate”), not very different from what Freud mentioned in relation to Eros and Thanatos: to gain for Eros is not so different from the gain for Thanatos. But you can only have consciousness of the combat. Without its tension, triumph is always triumph of shadows or that the power of “darkness” (“tiniebla”), which is also big and powerful. Then, rescue, gain, more than elimination or suppression, which is impossible, I believe, is through integration. I almost define [vertigo] as a kind of ontological condition of mental health (“salud mental ontológica”).

About Being for Recreation and the Principle of Variation.

FGH: What is the structure of order in *Philosophy of the Future* that is not clear to me? [I wonder it is the same] in relation to *Limits of the World* in which you are establishing a progression from Nietzsche to Kant, ethical and aesthetic variations, the Hegelian appendix, etc.

ET: There are two key ideas. If [the reader] takes a good look at the first half of the book, she will find orientation in relation to the concept of variation, which is the main course [in the menu] of *Philosophy of the Future* in relation to the dialogues I establish with Schopenhauer, Heidegger and other philosophers in order to elaborate the

concept of “Being for Recreation” (“Ser para la Recreation” in the original), which is complementary of the “Principle of Variation.” Here is the substance of the book. The following essays, it is true, are less unitary. They have significant passages, but these are not the central aspect of the book. The structure of *Philosophy of the Future* may indeed be *sui generis*. [However] these two ideas lie at its heart in this first half of the book. *Border Reason* is different. These are four convergent essays in four different parts. One of them comes out of the development of aphorisms. I did not intend *Border Reason* to be unitary, unlike *Limits of the World* and *Age of the Spirit*.

About the (Sexual) Lack in the Inevitable Analysis of Marx about the Objective Spirit and the (Objective) Lack in the Disorders of the Subject in Freud.

FGH: What would happen if we poured historical and social content into the solipsistic-individualist methodology of what is called “philosophy”?

ET: True. Philosophies limp on the “other side of the Moon” of what they insist the most (“las filosofías cojean de aquello contrario a lo que más insisten”). When I read Marx’s *Capital*, which is an extraordinary book. I say to myself, something is evidently missing here. I have to re-read, for example, Freud. These interlinked institutions provide as good an ethnographic document as the dreams of a society. Dreams or sexuality are as important as the circulation of merchandise. Re-reading Marx, which thrills me, more so today when capitalism dominates and dominates us. The great merit of Marx is to have defined it and determined it, which does not mean it is beyond discussion. This [vision] provides another aspect of the conversation. It gives me the aspect of experience. It explains to me something that is unavoidable. If we forget about it, our experience is radically incomprehensible.

Yet, holding *Capital* in my hands, I cannot explain the whys and wherefores of dreams in general, including “my” dreams. I cannot explain sexual behavior, be what may, at all either; let alone [the choice] of the objects of my sexual desire. Marx’s text does not give me the slightest inkling about that. It happens a lot with texts centered on what I earlier called the “Objective Spirit” in relation to the world of institutions. The same thing applies to Freud. That is to say, the hypothesis of the unconscious appears to me as absolutely necessary in trying to understand mental disorders such as hysteria, paranoia, obsessive neurosis. But, to me, this is not an absolute [either]. This is happening to subjects who live in relations of production or forms of domination and there not even Marx or Freud, perhaps even the Max Weber of state characteristics and typical forms of legitimation would have a voice.

I always see the problem as the gesture of closure or reduction. I remember one of my earliest books, *Theory of the Ideologies* (1970), which is a book very much in the spirit of the period. It is impregnated of structuralism. At that moment, I seemed to need a necessary form of distance from other ways of doing philosophical thinking. There are still some reductive chapters in it in which I try to bring things down to relations of production or the Freudian unconscious, etc. The end of the 1960s was an epoch leaning on dogmatism. More than anyone else, the Marxists were terrible [in this sorry practice of reductive dogmatism, retrospectively assessed six decades later]. It was a kind of “liberal” inventory or exam, a “clearing of the forest” for thinking practices that was then very useful for later orientations; but [it was] mostly not to fall for sirens’ calls and [in

order to] retain a bit the [modicum of an] attraction for each of these doctrines in the style of Max Weber. This is still a bit my attitude. I do not know if I manage to project it convincingly in what I write [in order to] prevent the blindness of the philosophical attitude towards some of its [inspirational and] unavoidable explorers. The beginning of *Philosophy and the Future* includes an inventory of some names.

Establishing some Distances with Sociology, Max Weber included.

FGH: Since you have mentioned Weber, whom you cite often, you would be in the antipodes of his way of reading the history of religions, [whilst] being very aware of his work on the sociology of religion, above all in relation to *Age of Spirit*.

ET: I have an immense respect for him. Yes, it is true that my way of doing things in *Age of Spirit* is completely different. In general, I set up my differences with sociology. I do so not because it is not serious, mostly in relation to Max Weber, whose sociology is extraordinarily interesting. Before writing *Age of Spirit*, I read his entire work on sociology of religion. Taking stock of the greatness of his thought and his ideas, I must admit that bringing everything down to sociology is, to me, reductionist and produces in me an effect that is similar to what I feel with Freud, who, on the other hand, I like very much and I [also] like very much how he goes about doing things.

But you reach a moment [with both thinkers] when you think that this is not the only way of approaching realities, although if you approached them from the angle of psychology, it might be most productive. I feel most comfortable with Freud, also with Marx, despite all the criticisms. Nothing has substituted him in relation to the impression felt in trying to understand the economy and the most problematic concept of “surplus value.” I have read [the English economist John Maynard] Keynes (1883-1946), [the Canadian-American John Kenneth] Galbraith (1908-2006), etc. because I have been interested in these matters. We may be in a very “post” type of society, but “post-capitalist,” we are not. The same thing with biology and Darwin who finds a key aspect. His hypothesis continues working with or without other findings such as the genome. Something similar happens with Marx.

Solipsism, Bourgeois Reflex Action?

FGH: What would you say to the argument that what Eugenio Trías is doing, consciously or not, is to delink the individual from social group; hence executing a certain “violence of de-socialization” in relation to knowledge structures? When you speak of “subject,” the “I” who speaks and thinks, who may be anybody, in reality we all know that it is following a more or less hidden taxonomic typology of the European, bourgeois, white subject of hegemonic countries, etc.

ET: I would say that I am defending the sacred rights of subjectivity and the methodological necessity of solipsism. This would be the case whilst keeping an eye on a certain balance as I do in *The Limits of the World*, which is a balanced book (“libro equilibrado”), also solipsistic, knowing that it [solipsism] has to be overcome when the moment comes, because there are some limits. The hypothesis is that of the inter-subjectivity. From it, there is truly an opening of the social field we are (“se nos abre el ámbito social que somos”). There is a famous analysis in Max Weber of the Deutero-

Isaiah [in the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Bible], the “man of sorrows” (Isaiah, 53). We now know that this was one of the models for the figure of Jesus of the Gospels. When Weber addresses this second Isaiah in the period of Cyrus the Great (600/575-503 BC), he calls this Messiah “pariah,” which is brilliant. I refer to it in *Age of the Spirit*. We are passing from a glorious Messiah, a priest figure, to a sacrificial, scapegoat figure, who redeems but only in so far as he carries the faults of the whole world with him. This is [done] from the sociological standpoint which Weber links to a whole series of avatars of the historical Jewish people. The text also has the force of a poetic and religious invention of a figure that only later will be the intelligible model, as mentioned, of the Jesus of the “Deutero-Isaiah” [Isaiah 40-55, dating from the time of the Isrealites’ exile in Babylon, one of the Books of the Prophets, cited in the four canonical Gospels of the New Testament].

The [exclusively sociological reading] is to me very impoverishing. And I am talking about the great figure of Max Weber who does not allow such gestures. But I would assert that sociological philosophy impoverishes [such possible findings]. [It opens vistas on the one hand and closes them on the other]. It is the same situation when Freud addresses a childhood memory of Leonardo da Vinci. [We could say to Freud’s ghost] “what you are adding is a couple of more or less fitting suggestions that try to explain certain behaviors, tendencies, etc. above all in relation to the choice of sexual object of Da Vinci, but this tells us very little of the man and the peculiarities of his work.” Same [comment] to the sociology: it is a necessary and indispensable method, but, to use the terms of [the German idealist philosopher Gottfried Wilhem] Leibniz (1646-1716), insufficient.

About the abandonment of philosophy and possible scenarios; writing in Spanish and big Hispanic lacks in the natural landscape of modernity, lukewarm passions.

FGH: There are beautiful and startling pages about the Leviathan of today (96), vampire capital (78) and the intellectualized sphere of the metropolitan spirit with the [diminished] memory of destroyed experience and the loss of affective capacity (78). How do we understand your desires to bring ontology to life in between the 20th and 21st centuries in non-hegemonic political and philosophical countries? Is yours a dissident saying, a counter-saying, what exactly?

ET: There is also a gesture of peripheral pride. It is true that I do not speak a lot about Spain or about the Hispanic [condition] (“lo hispánico”). It is true that I write in this language. Given that the metropolises have exhausted the philosophical discourse, as far as I can see, this is finished perhaps in France, also in Germany, because I do not see what good thing could happen after Habermas, [and] also in the United States, where few figures [still exist] but I do not see a lot of continuity. I say that it is perhaps our time. Let us hope so. At this moment I see more philosophical discourse happening in Italy. It is a curious thing. [Such emergence] may happen in the next generation in Spain, not now.

What I am doing is creating a series of possible scenarios of diverse order for the vivification of metaphysics, or philosophy, when the entire world, let us call it “civilized,” to make ourselves understood, has abandoned it [the equation of metaphysics qua philosophy]. It may be a gesture of desperation but I do not want to deprive those who still find pleasure in this banquet of the intelligence (“gozar del banquete de la

inteligencia”). Why is not this language going to give access to philosophy? To give access to modernity, almost like it were a natural landscape, is the footprint, sign and identity of my generation. Ortega achieves it but with forceps. Zubiri too, but holding on to pre-modern and scholastic categories. Zambrano achieves it too with difficulty. It is my generational turn to set up tent in this type of almost natural landscape where it is the same to speak of Quixote as Shakespeare, but with clear consciousness.

I am not distracted from the writing in Spanish. In this language, I want to attempt the exercise of recreating worlds that do not have to the ones of such proper Hispanic tradition per se. I go into [the Spanish Baroque playwright] Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681). I have a book about the philosophy of [the Catalan modernist writer] Joan Maragall (1860-1911). These explorations are few compared with others. There is evidently less passion with the Hispanic as there is with the German [domain], or with many other things that come out in *Age of Spirit*, the Greek for example, Plato or Aristotle. Why? Because the truth is that Spain has not provided a lot and does not deserve more enthusiasm. There is still not an awful lot of cloth to cut. I remember reading *The Literature of the Spanish people from Roman times to the present day* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1951), of Gerald Brenan, which did not provoke great enthusiasm in me. In good [understated] English style, he would say things like “here you can see this flourishing moment, there you can feel that important, interesting literature, but there is no philosophy.” I have seen you have work on Francisco de Vitoria. Either it is earlier or it is late 20th century, that is Ortega. We have had no or little Renaissance. In the Baroque, where one could have had things, there is no Leibniz, no [Denedictus de] Spinoza (1632-1677). There is nothing similar to [Nicolas] Malebranch (1638-1715), if you press me. There is Calderón [de la Barca]. And then we reach Francisco] Suárez (1548-1617), a bit like the mastery of [René] Descartes (1596-1650). This neo-Scholasticism is very good and has a vigorous expression, but it is a bit on the edge.

Enlightenment, zero. Something saddening in the early Enlightenment, Romanticism, zero. It is hard for me to carry this [burden] because the Nineteenth Century is a very flourishing period in other European domains. Then, some discover [the German figure of Karl Christian Friedrich] Krause (1781-1832), the apex of intellectual blindness [explanatory note: the figure of Julián Sánchez del Río (1814-1869) is the one typically mentioned in relation to the introduction of Krause in Spain mostly in education sectors by the middle of the 19th Century]. The Catalans discover the Scottish common-sense school, which is lamentable and sad. Thus, I find myself with this problem, that the autochthonous philosophical traditions are frankly heartbreaking (“desoladoras”). When philosophy has truly flourished in the epoch of Kant, Hegel, Descartes, Spain does not allow for much (“no da para mucho”).

How to vindicate the wounded intelligence of peripheral dimensions? About perennial agonies and unplanned emergencies of philosophy and colonial chains of thinking routines.

FGH: One problem would be how to vindicate the intelligence –more or less insufficient, unsatisfactory, etc.—of peripheral dimensions without falling for exoticist or folkloric localisms. There are two aspects: your evaluation of the “why” of such self-perception of thinning out by 1750...

ET: I do not think it is [one unique] phenomenon. I have the impression that philosophy has always lived, in the expression of [Miguel] Unamuno, in pure agony [explanatory note: crisis, strife, struggle, combat, closer to the Greek sense of the term “agony,” rather than simply dying, FGH]. That is, when the death of philosophy was declared, Kant appears all of a sudden. Even in its origins, when Sophistry looked like it had finished philosophy, one or two very strange characters show us: Plato and Aristotle. I have the impression that it has always been like that and that it is something unforeseeable. We can say what you have said, but any day [something surprising shows up]. It is like saying that cinema is dead and then [Stanley] Kubrick shows up and cinema exists again. I would see no more reasons to build the argument that the novel will die with the death of the best Latin American novelists. Today, the novel is better written in English in India, or a Turkish author writes in German in Germany. It is curious that there is a revitalization of the novel in the travel from the metropolis to the peripheries. I am speculating out loud. I believe it is. I do not really know. The question is whether something similar could happen to philosophy.

A lack of tradition would be the first major objection. The second objection is that philosophy, being at least for me a synthetic articulation of many things, must still somehow establish its distance from other ways of thinking. We are speaking of a periphery of societies with a strong experience and cultural weight that find phenomenal expression in poetry, novel, etc. but less so in the sphere of philosophy. Inside the Hispanic setting of Spain, there has been persecution and continuation [of that]. This would be [also] directed towards my Latin American friends: not to waste time associating philosophy [with other matters], because that would be the excuse not to develop magnificent possibilities. It may well happen that a great philosopher may emerge any day in Brazil, Chile or Mexico. If it does not happen, it is because there is sometimes timidity (“apocamiento”), a terrible symptom one still finds in Spain, but much more in Mexico and Argentine, as [though] some kind of colonial chain of subordination [were still reconfigured] in regards of the Parisian or the North-American discourses of so variants such as the Postmodern, Braudillard, Deconstruction, etc.

This lamentable colonial chain of affairs provokes in me an immense desolation. I find it in Spain and I can find it when I travel to Hispanic America. Gradually there is an increasing awareness. Yet, it is lamentable to be part of this colonial chain of thinking routines that one finds in some philosophical collectives in which one small European, or some Anglo-Saxon teacher is magnified [for the simple fact of being European and Anglo-Saxon].

About the artistic-aesthetic frame and the world of what is possible.

FGH: In *Philosophy and Future*, you speak of aesthetics as the “force or configuration that precedes all physical and moral “legality,” promoting ideal and sensible synthesis in the order of possibilities: order of philosophical ideas and order of fiction” (p. 72): explain this to me.

ET: Art, in general in its best expressions, would have the capacity to force a possibility as Aristotle says. In relation to the tale of what has happened, the exploration, which we can call fictional, of the gamut of possibilities of life or existence [is what exceptional art would be about]. Of course, fiction also allows that. But I would say that

art in general, or better, the modes of argumentation that are proper to the arts [allow for those possibilities]. I am currently studying the possibilities of vocal music inside the tradition of absolute music (“música absoluta,” sic). [Vocal music] opens possibilities in which reality can settle [within that aforementioned frame of absolute or “classical” music]. Such reality remains at the level of an [artistic] possibility. [Art] has a bit the meaning of possessing this anticipatory character. [Art] anticipates realities that may later find fulfillment or verification. [Art] gives form to figures that later reappear in reality via a selection process. In reality, art is a kind of synthetic shorthand of ways of living that are expressed in the richest possible manner (“el arte es una especie de abreviatura sintética de formas de vida expresadas con la mayor riqueza”). Max Weber would call these ideal-types, but incarnated and concretized. This is of course the field of literature. But it is, I would say, the domain of the arts, painting, architecture, music... Arts are those [thoughts and practices] where the production of meaning does not pass [necessarily] through the canon of language or through the linguistic foundation of writing (“son artes aquellas donde la producción de significación no pasa [necesariamente] por el canon del lenguaje o de la escritura con fundamento lingüístico”).

About Aesthetic Shelter and Refuge.

FGH: I am noticing that you are establishing a brutal (“decarnada”) vision of the contemporary world, the Leviathan of today, Vampire capital, the immediate Hispanic wasteland and then I see you “are seeking shelter and refuge in aesthetics,” perhaps in quotation marks.

ET: It would be quite accurate.

About the Desire for Survival in the Artistic Archipelagos and the Theme of Love, Again.

FGH: I think you have written somewhere that given the world of the institutions, of [degrading] work and [debilitating] labor conditions, philosophy would have to find its habitation in other parts...

ET: You have said it superbly. It is not that [philosophy] ran from reality, because the gesture, that is accepted and assumed, is one of commitment with reality (“compromiso con la realidad”). Yet this [attitude] also takes me to an unpleasant realization. In *Lost Memory of Things* [*Memoria Perdida de las Cosas*, 1978], I speak of it. It is true. For me, art, creation in general in its diverse forms, and philosophy among them, could constitute what we could call “the archipelago of the arts.” [I mean] the arts [in the sense of] a maximum of expression in my specific case, although this could be generalized. What does music have? What about the art of narration? Architecture? We intuit that the various creative possibilities configure our reality in its contemporary modality or its present. I would say the same thing about philosophy. [This artistic predilection is] against types of economic and social thought that are put together according to formative demands, sometimes in headwind conditions, accepting or questioning those realities, also negotiating strategies to prevent or avoid the asphyxia in some ways. I agree that at bottom these are survival modes in relation to something that could provoke anxiety or anguish, because anguish is a feeling of a closing on itself, a contraction and even retraction, [and thus] we feel suffocated, choked, etc. The truth is

that there are not many ways out. You only have to catch contemporary television and torments of such type.

About the Flaccid Eroticism of Some Philosophers Unworthy of the Name of Philosopher.

FGH: In relation to such hostile context, you introduce briefly, again the theme of love (pp. 80-2). Your use of the concept of love in the various books: I imagine it is the same conceptualization throughout.

ET: Yes. These were only two pages because I was seeking something like a synthesis that I was not finding. I finally find it but it is very brief, aphoristic.

FGH: I confess I do not know what to make of it, as though love moved us out of the nightmares of days and nights... I almost resist the joke: we are in a bureaucratic world and, suddenly, “love” appears but it is not a loving jungle, no Orinocco [basin], no “drastic and definite slamming of the door and go somewhere else for real,” it is more like a small parenthesis, a gas mask...

ET: The idea of love is the cross of my thinking (“cruz,” crucible, but also vexing problem, even torment). That is why I am an avid reader. When I have deficiencies, or things I do not see, I look for, I try to explore, I keep myself informed. In the end, “love” is going beyond certain conventions, [for example in] courtly love, “love-passion,” Christian agape, Aristotelian *phylia*, Epicurian friendship or any other. We also have it in literary expressions, [in] delicious, extraordinary novels with magnificent incestuous loves, or in variety of expressions in cinema. In philosophy, I seek a conceptual elaboration [and there is not an awful lot that comes in handy].

Ortega’s texts are lamentable [in this respect]. The worst book Ortega wrote is about love. It is very irregular. It has wonderful things, very weak things and others that are in my view absolutely false. About the theme of love, we can list authors of the top ranking [and there are few worthy examples]: Heidegger in the work that deserves severe trial and punishment (“auténticamente de juzgado de guardia”), the best of the 20th century, *Being and Time*, where he is doing an analytics of human existence... There is no one single instance of a word on eroticism. What a pitiful thing! He makes a big thing of anguish, death, fear... It is the typical expressionism of the inter-war period. If you read it like the devil’s advocate, you can [solemnly] declare it a poisonous work (“obra infecta”). And I consider it the best work of the 20th century! Yet there is no one single word of eroticism and sexuality. So, we can add: “excuse me, Mr. Heidegger, wasn’t this a philosophical matter since you did not deign talk about it?” If it is not a matter for [philosophical] thought, this is a big deal (“esto es muy gordo”). Love is a very tough, difficult and complicated theme. What I have tried to do is that when I find difficulties, I divide and clear out the aspects that are closer and more familiar. There was a time, between 1975 and 1982, between *Treatise on Passion* and *Philosophy and the Future* when I was more [involved] into the theme of love. Afterwards, I sort of leave it as something impossible. Although I have recently returned to it with a few pages, I admit to you that it is my cross.

About the Limits of the World.

FGH: I would ask for an initial synthesis of the *Limits of the World* so that we can see what you are doing there.

ET: There is a sentence that is included in the book, “we are the limits of the world” (“los límites del mundo somos nosotros”). I always say that wonder or a sense of awe, as Plato would say, is the feeling behind philosophy, also mine. Yet, in my case, what causes awe or wonder is our own condition, above all in those peculiarities of errancy and mindlessness (“desvarío”), [and the art of] following unpredictable and erroneous ways. This aforementioned sentence at the beginning of the book almost gives meaning to [the entire book].

With the concept of “limit,” either in singular or plural, what I intend to do is in the last instance a reflection of “who we are” or an elaboration of what we could understand by “subject.” That is, [mine is] a radical and critical renovation of the concept of subject that comes from the traditions of modern philosophy, the Cartesian cogito and the Kantian transcendental subject; yet, I am giving it a radical turn or change of direction (“giro”) that is in some sense in the antipodes of what modern tradition thought. And it is here when I see the fecundity and profitability (“rendimiento y fecundidad”) of the concept that also comes from the modern tradition; that of “limit,” which comes from Kantian categorical transcendentalism [and] the linguistic turn of the *Tractatus* of Wittgenstein. It is still here where I give [the concept of limit] a very radical turn [because] I treated it ontologically. I conceive of it not simply as an epistemological, but as an ontological and fundamental concept of the “first philosophy,” not only as the restrictive domain that Wittgenstein felt and what he could express about it in such a significative manner. I give it a very important and highly surprising turn, an ontological dimension that is not simply epistemological, logical or linguistic. To do so, I think [the concept of limit] positively. I think [the concept of limit] in the form of affirmation (“en forma de afirmación”). To do so, I lean on the very etymology of the concept of “limes” of the Romans.

About the Very Selective Use of the Philosophy of Limit.

FGH: I underline such “we are the limits of the world” (p. 117). How do we follow up? All right, and now what? What happens with those limits that are said to constitute who we are?

ET: I suggest that modern philosophy is [deep] in some kind of pothole in the road. Either there are philosophies that orient themselves towards ontology, i.e. the case of Heidegger, and then these philosophies have a hard time when they try to elaborate an ethics; or there are other traditions with connections in the political dimension as is the case of contemporary ethics. But a dimension is missing, which I would call ontological, which, I would add, debilitates ethics.

Thus, the proposal of the philosophy of the limit or liminal philosophy that I am building, would try to be an ontology which is also an ethics. It is a projection of “who we are” (“sobre lo que somos”). This is a new idea of our own condition. How do we use this philosophy? I think philosophy is anybody’s personal use. Good luck! (“allá cada cual”). It is like poetry. If we read the extraordinary poems of T.S. Elliot, for example

“The Hollow men,” here you are [alone] on your own, good luck [to you!]. I appeal to personal experience. I do not want to distance myself from the community we always are [since we] are always inside intersubjective links. This is very clear in *Limits of the World*. [Yet] I appeal to this personal experience that ratifies the interest in philosophy. Of course, that [appeal] makes that philosophy is very selective. Again, [this is related to] poetry, or to truly elaborate music that is not of the pure consumption or degraded type. This is a bit the drama and, if you press me, the tragedy of the culture that really elaborates its proposals. It always has a dislocated and torn or ripped position (“una posición bastante dislocada y desgarrada”) in a context of a certain latitude, more so in the context of the society in which we live, the mass society of popularity rankings and the unifying tendencies of the lowest-common denomination. Then, of course, yes, these are phenomena that have an impact on poetry and philosophy, and it appears that I am defending myself, but it is inherent to the [exclusive] thing [we can continue calling “philosophy”] (laughter).

It has a character that is always very present in my head because at the end of the day there is little footprint of the Hispanic inscription in my philosophy. It is not that I do not belong to that tradition, but it would rather be a Quixotic gesture that is assumed radically. I think such [exclusivity] happens with philosophy, poetry, good music, etc. In general, it happens in almost all creative domains. What happens is that I stretch out (“ensancho”) the creative domain. I confess that these creations are often [similar or comparable to] those who invented the canons of the system of the arts. But I add that the forms of renovation and removal (“renovación y remoción”) have to do with the thinking domain. It is here where, I believe, philosophy always has or may always have the stamp (“impronta”) of creation.

About the creative framing of conditions of experiential possibility, or “emergency landing.”

FGH: How does one learn about this liminal being (“un ser fronterizo,” 73)? What would you say to someone who says, “very well, Mr Trías, I want to do it. How do I do it?”

ET: I would say that everything that I have written about the philosophical adventure is in a sense, at bottom, philosophy in the Platonic sense and *Limits of the World* is among those books where it is better expressed. Plato thought that philosophy was political philosophy, first point, and that politics must have a philosophical basis and above all a pedagogy, *paideia*. Hence, second point, education. My texts give a series of general indications about how to orient the behavior towards what I consider to be truth and freedom (“espacio de libertad”), both things. What happens is that philosophy can only create frames of the conditions of possibility of experience. Some may ask, “how do we apply the Kantian categorical imperative?” I would say, “That is up to you! [Buckle up and] emergency landing! (“aterriza como puedas”) (laughter). As I say in some texts: “do your own arrangements, consult your own demons, also your *daimon* [complex Greek notion: guiding spirit, “god,” power, fate, etc. FGH clarification note]. If I gave the minimum suggestion, [I would fall into] my own objections against those self-help texts, moralist philosophies that somehow muddle through opinions that tell us what to do and not to do in every instance in detriment of our responsibility and our freedom. I think that there is a certain optimism in my philosophy in the last instance about our condition,

despite the occasional dark tinctures or, as you mentioned earlier, also about a predilection of mine for certain stormy weather.

There is at least the possibility of freely finding an orientation in relation to our own behavior. The ethical principles I indicate are very general. On deeper reflection, one discovers that inside such general characterization there are channels and frames that are not just assumed in a general manner for example in *Ethics and the Human Condition* or the ethical section in *Limits of the World*. That is, together with this ultimate optimism as regards our ultimate condition, there is also a profound and almost ironic feeling that [says that] human beings (“el ser humano”) tend in general, in majority disposition or more spontaneously to disorder, excess, defect, cowardice or temerity, imprudence, stultitia. The principles I underline above all in those books that have the ethical dimension most present or where it is most latent, are indicative of those paths or [general] ways according to a free condition [of being human] that is for me fundamental.

For me, the concept of limit is what opens the domain of freedom and this freedom is of the type that is accessible [“Para mí el concepto de límite es lo que abre es un ámbito a la libertad. Y una libertad que sea al mismo tiempo acorde con aquella verdad a la que podemos tener acceso;” clarification note: “limit” is thus open, free, agreeable, truthful and accesible, but not entirely, FGH]. I know that this [type of statement] goes against the tide in our context of today of a distrustful and critical postmodernity towards all these concepts.

The impression I have is that philosophy always goes against the tide of the immediate times. What often happens with the name of postmodernity is the opposite of philosophy. [Postmodernity] is [often] an invitation to relinquish thought (“invitación a que dimitamos del pensamiento”), to give up thinking and to accept that the task of giving form to our mental operations is counter-productive, ruinous and useless. I am convinced that the historical analysis would find similar voices, or sirens’ calls, in the Eighteenth Century or in the Athens of Socrates. These are the historical contexts in and with which philosophy must strive and struggle (“lidiar”). I insist that it is not possible for any true philosophy, mine included, to reach [complete] concreteness (“concreciones”), because it then fully denaturalizes itself.

It does not mean that there is no appeal to experience. But we are dealing with possible conceptual elaborations and these concepts cannot of course be [eminently] useful and have [immediate] social use. Those uses are evidently connected to the interpretation of each reader. I would say that my books are like music scores. These music scores can be very different in the hands of different readers. A Bartok quartet played by different ensembles is often very different from one another. I think that philosophy is like poetry: what one writes is music scores. Interpretation follows. There will be different hermeneutics extracting meaning out of these [scores]. [With] modesty, I already discover great divergences in the reception of my work that find themselves in the prehistory of its reception. I know that if I brought concreteness, I would completely denaturalize what [my] philosophy is.

It is a fallacy to ask for a poetry of experience. No, poetry is poetry in so far as it elaborates conditions of experience, no experience itself. Kant said that philosophical forms express the conditions of experience but these do not come from [such experience]. That is to say, the categories of space and time do not come from experience. They are exactly the establishment of the conditions of possibility of experience. I would apply this

[assertion] to all my reflections. I believe that all my reflections move in a domain in which the philosophical task, as I understand it, would undergo denaturalization if I were to make “it” or “them” (task and reflections), more concrete.

This [mindset] does not go against other activities such as the [work of] compilations of journalistic articles like *Thinking in Public* [*Pensar en Público*]. Some of these can only be understood inside the frame of [proper] philosophical reflection; but it is clear that I follow the urgency of the [latest] event or the [various] political forms as they emerge in the conjuncture. I did one year of journalism [at the University] and that is journalism. I am also interested in this dimension. Hegel has the beautiful line about “reading the morning paper is the prayer of the man of today.” I assume it. I don’t always read the papers in the morning because it means sometimes to start the day with the wrong foot. But I certainly take it as medicine or correction [mechanism].

About the aesthetic sprinboard towards the elaboration of a philosophical proposal, about modernist removals and the increase in conceptual tension.

FGH: You speak of the character of the prose in this book as “dry, severe, ascetic, dessicated or *recitativo secco* (“seco, adusto, ascético, desecador o de *recitativo secco*,” p. 27). Tell me something about the suppression of contextual references that “weighed heavily on the text” and that “lacked the relevance of the strictly philosophical argument” (p. 20). There is something about this letting go of the historico-social referentiality that is very much a liking and a modality of your choosing.

ET: Yes. At any rate there is plenty of irony and self-punishment because I am given to self-reflections that may trigger more hesitations than anything else. This is a bit of an in-joke that allows me to anticipate some of the objections by the readers who have been few. I wrote *The Beautiful and the Sinister*, that had ample dissemination with seven editions, three or four years before *Limits of the World*, and one year or less before *Philosophy and Future*. This [successful] book was full of figures and images. It included one film by [Alfred] Hitchcock that the entire world had seen; there was a tale by [the German Romantic author of Gothic horror, Ernst Theodor Amadeus] Hoffman (1776-1822) that was also well known, also two paintings that form part of the most consumer and trivial iconology, “Allegory of Spring” and the “Birth of Venus.” by [the Renaissance Italian painter Sandro] Botticelli (c.1445-1510). That is, *The Beautiful and the Sinister* is the type of book that allows for this type of recognition and [the book] sells [well]. If I had wanted, I could have written ten of the same [type], once you know the formula that finds “success” in mundane terms. I could have settled down for something like this and built [more] work on a kind of aesthetic philosophy allowing for copies and variations. Of course, my option went for something completely different.

I already had considerable production of similar characteristics since the 1970s, between *Drama and Identity* and *The Beautiful and the Sinister*, some six or eight books in between. In these books, I carry some deep dialogues with artistic and literary forms or music in *Drama and Identity*, or with characters in our cultural identity like Goethe, Thomas Mann, Wagner or Nietzsche in *The Artist and the City*, or [I handle] myths that come from the Middle Ages like Tristan and Isolde in its novelistic recreations as in *Treatise on Passion*. I realized I had this dialogic base given to me by own philosophy in the domains of art and aesthetic and literature.

However, I saw myself stimulated and with the capacity to go for a jump towards what I was looking for from the beginning which was a philosophical proposal. The crucial moment is in between *Philosophy and Future* and *Limits of the World*. In *Philosophy and Future* I already try a kind of elaboration of an ontology. I call it the principle of variation. In *Limits of the World* I somehow find the foundation of this ontology. I carve out a foundation of and for truth. It is the foundation of the concept of limit, which I will be elaborating conceptually gradually in the following books. There is, of course, an increase in the intensity and the tension of the reflection. [Limit] is increasingly elaborated conceptually.

There is a stripping away or a removal (“despojamiento”) [of what has preceded, according to the gesture of the aforementioned Spanish poet] Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), and his process of moving away from the early poetry of plenty of modernist images towards one of a more elaborate, linguistically complex, esoteric, in some sense hermetic [poetry] in poems such as the “The Contemplated [One]” [“El Contemplado”] or in “Desired and Desiring God” [“Dios Deseado y Deseante”]. I mention [Juan Ramón Jiménez] and there is no self-betrayal at all because he was a reference of mine when I wrote the prologue of *Limits of the World*.

I believed I was somehow purifying my own philosophical orientation with the added risks and also the hopes that such a task was provoking in me. The hope was to generate a space of more intense reflection, more elaborated, conceptually richer, and also, of greater complexity. [Such task] carries the decrease of the number of readers because many people who were used to the essays I wrote in the 1070s found themselves now bewildered in front of *Limits of the World*. I must say it was also a purification process in the readers themselves. For some, this book is the most significant work of all. I am not the right person to [enter into these internal evaluations]. I have some doubts. With time, and it already has more than twenty years [by 2003] a small and select group of readers has understood a bit the type of operation that I am attempting in the field of philosophy. This is a complicated operation as all these are that claim to be a relevant innovation in environments of ample debate and discussion and share the difficulties. I return to the Quixotic theme, which comes out in the prologue of this book, and the sense of doing it in the periphery, at least in the philosophical periphery, in the Hispanic domain of ours, where philosophy has not passed the test with flying colors and where the most recent philosophical creations, let us say from Unamuno or Ortega onwards, and not before, unless we have to go back to Suárez or even Vitoria [are wanting].

About Fidelity to the Norm, the Tradition of Modernity and the Perverse Recreation of an Innovative Dislocation from Within.

FGH: Let us [insist] on the desired frame of intelligibility: you remain faithful to the tradition of modernity, or the history of philosophy that we may find in textbooks understood to be a certain type of European knowledge production, Western, specialized that initiates in Descartes, retraces its steps to the Greek-and-Latin world, and finds consolidation in the 18th-19th Centuries in a novel national context, [preferably] the German, t[hat finds a] dissemination in the 1960s (pp. 36, 61). We would find a contemporaneity in the Deconstruction moment of “bargains,” if you wish, in the 1980s, and we may be still riding in these coattails. How to clarify your own fidelity to this norm

and form (“norma u horma”)? Your principle of variation would be combinatory games of enrichment and fecundity, a word you like, of a certain tradition. You have spoken of philosophy as threatened, in crisis. This frame of intelligibility is your fundamental referential frame and there is no need to ask for apologies or sorries.

ET: Yes. In reality, mine is a perverse operation, which is to assume a tradition and to displace it from within. For me [such operation] is more interesting than letting [tradition] go away and see what innovation can do on its own. I start from the premiss that everything has already been invented and that everything is to be invented. That is why I give so much importance to the concept of recreation. The term delights me. I discovered it whilst writing *Meditation on Power* [*Meditación sobre el Poder*]. It means to create, to find pleasure in the creative act, to interpret and hence give a new version [of things]. But it also means to innovate. It is not simply to repeat.

I always think together the concept of recreation and the concept of variation. The concept of variation comes from [the Austrian-American Arnold] Schoenberg (1874-1954). I say it now when I realize I have used it, because these [types of] influences are not always [self-evident to the author]. A bit earlier, I had written *Drama and Identity*, which included an excursion into music in the first essay [of the volumen]. It is a kind of reflection on music. [Variation] is already a [major aspect or dimension] since the Baroque, [the Italian composer Claudio] Monteverdi (1567-1643) or earlier, until [Austrian-Bohemian Bohemian composer Gustav] Mahler (1860-1911). Schoenberg is an author who comes out not often enough. He is very important to me. I have listened to him. I have read about him. I like him. He pleases me, although this word “pleasure” may surprise those who accuse the composer of not being pleasant. His writings interest me immensely.

My concept of variation is a bit what Schoenberg calls “developing variation.” It is a synthesis of what was called treatment or development in the form of the sonata. Then, there is the concept of “renovating variation” in Beethoven, which has nothing to do with the archaic concept of a form that comes from tradition, that reaches Mozart and Hayden, and then Beethoven gives it a surprising and very interesting turn. [Beethoven’s] variation is very free, a mixture of improvisation and return. Yet, the interesting thing about Schoenberg, and that is why I am lingering in him, is that he always puts variation in contradistinction to repetition. That is, variation is exactly what replies to repetition. It has a bit an obsession to avoid unnecessary repetitions. Another thing is the expressive use of a repetition, an *ostinato* [the musical term refers to an insisting or persistent repetition of a motif or phrase in the same musical voice and frequently in the same pitch, FGH note], as Modernity makes use of it, for example in [the Russian composer Igor] Stravinsky (1882-1971) and [the Hungarian composer Béla] Bartók (1881-1945). The case in Schoenberg strikes me as extraordinarily suggestive.

What is it about? It is about an operation with tradition in this order of variational things. That is, the Cartesian cogito is, for me, firm and established (“sentenciado”). So is the Kantian transcendental subject. Idem with a lot of ideas of Modernity. That [temporary conclusion however] does not mean that the recreation of these traditions [is futile, *ad nauseam* or endless]. What I do with Plato or Nietzsche, I also do with the great philosophers of the “big hammer,” those who annihilate our own [sense of] traditions. What happens is that such “perversion” inside the philosophical field, as mentioned earlier, is comparable to the one I do in the arts as well.

I treat Nietzsche as a great metaphysician, as a Platonist, and I treat Plato as a kind of great Deconstructionist. This is a bit the operation that interests me. Why? Because we are not in an epoch, and [the American philosopher] Richard Rorty (1931-2007) is right about it, in which we have to denounce this type of foundations or innovations as though modernity was built from zero, or as though tradition had not existed, or [there was] no ground upon which Descartes or Kant built their guiding schemes and building projects. This [ignorance] is what produces dissatisfaction in all of us and the disinclination of leaving those traditions behind. The same attitude can be found a bit in Wittgenstein, the vainglorious and excessive presumption (“presunción”) with which he begins the *Tractatus*, [something like] “I have seen that I have solved all problems of philosophy with this book.” And he allows himself the ironic wink of adding “and you realize how little important it is to have done so” (mutual laughter).

I am interested in a double assumption, and here I would agree with Rorty and [the German philosopher Hans George] Gadamer (1900-2002), that philosophy has its own bases and prejudices upon which is built, also its mental routines that procede [from a certain tradition]. And one must take such tradition very seriously. This is for me the great objection to (post-)modernity. In this regard I would always be with postmodernists such as Rorty and Gadamer. Now, having said that, let us be careful, because these postmodernists take me down the road of disappointment, abandonment, resignation and horror.

I believe there is a [mental] operation that is about displacing these traditions from within, but not in the style of deconstruction that says “look how clever I am! I have found how to prick the balloon!” No. I am not interested in pricking the balloon of Plato because when I read Plato I am struck down [by his magnificence]. The *Banquet* of Plato is one of the most beautiful texts ever written. The “Allegory of the Cave” is one of the greatest and timeless texts ever created. Contemporary authors such as [the Portuguese novelist José] Saramago (1998 Nobel Prize in Literature, 1922-2010) and others still use it today. I do not think it is mere reverence to these classical authors [for the sake of their classicism]. It is the awful lot of truth that is captured in them [that interests me the most]. What is irresponsible and, at bottom, sadening of these deconstructive operations is to go to the most insignificant points of fragility in the discourse of Hegel to discredit and smear a series of fecund reflections.

And it is true that I have the word “fecundity” very present, which is what I have found reading the *Science of Logic* of Hegel, a text that is extraordinarily impressive and most radiant for his philosophy. I can say that I am proud of joining such exercise of the intelligence of the human species (“misma inteligencia congénere”) which writes this [type of] text. Instead, I try to do something that is neither modern nor postmodern. It is neither pure devotion to tradition, as though there were nothing else to be said or done; and, hence, the only thing remaining is hermeneutics, which depresses me and appears an enormous resignation. [Such attitude of surrender] gives away those who at bottom are not innovative philosophers. I do not mind saying it out loud, I am thinking of very interesting or very important figures such as Gadamer, for example, who are not in my opinion true innovators. Such [critique] does not mean I do not value them. But they do not elaborate an original proposal. They are brilliant epigonal figures who may promote among their disciples the thought that not everything in philosophy is hermeneutics [and that’s that]. To me this is crass error and monumental mistake.

I believe that philosophy must be innovative. This modern [innovative] gesture must be rethought. It must have a relation to a different tradition from the one Descartes, Kant and others had. I very much agree with Rorty, who depresses us in our reference to modernity in the sense that it [modernity] is [an] excessive prowess and tremendous presumption (“esta suerte de prepotencia, presunción tremenda”), [when it tries] to think that, after centuries of obscurity and error, all of a sudden the head of the philosopher undergoes some [kind of] mental illumination and the great foundation emerges. I believe foundations must take place. I insist on it in *City Over City*. I use the metaphor of the foundation of cities and I speak of the philosophical city in ironic Platonic terms also in clear consciousness that such innovation of a new city must happen over a precedent old city, a bit like a bricoleur composes things with elements that history itself supplies or delivers to him in certain ways.

About Methodological Solipsism and the Double Legacy of Capital and the Interpretation of Dreams, the Platonic Distinction between City and Soul.

FGH: Two initial things come to mind in relation to the mentioned methodological solipsism (pp. 63, 85, 118, 152, 159). First, you have written beautifully in *Limits of the World* about this thinking “I,” non-idiosyncratic “I,” “any I” (“yo no idiosincrático, cualquier yo” (54). That is, it cannot be a pathological, unhinged, sick “I.” It must assume necessarily and methodologically speaking a “connector, collective I,” a “we-I” (“un yo conjuntivo, un yo-nosotros”). This is a building philosophical assumption. But a series of problems suddenly appears, how do we travel from this methodological solipsism to what can be called anthropological universals?

ET: Yes [to the first point]. I promote different ways of approaching this question following the inspirational thread of the philosophical traditions themselves. I insist a lot on the Platonic idea of soul and city, particularly in my latest books and also in my most recent interventions. I have always been very Platonic. That is, I insist a lot on city, but one must understand city like subject. Soul in Platonic terms can also be translated into subject. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel is a source of inspiration when [Hegel] passes from the “I” to the “we” in a spontaneous manner placing intersubjectivity at the core of reflection. The subject is unthinkable if it is not put in relation to other subjects; hence, the solipsist option makes sense only if it is provisional or methodological as I mention in *Limits of the World*.

In this book I also entered into polemics with some attacks on solipsism that were not, in my opinion, convincing, for example, [those contained in] the project of Habermas. This is not explicit in the text and I am a bad polemicist [anyway]. I do not like fighting with others. I do not like fighting with the classics although in some sense they allow me to do that. [But] in reality, the whole project of Habermas is to create a philosophy of communication based on inter-subjectivity. His primordial enemy, the one who must be strangled from the beginning, let us say, is solipsism, the self-centered subject (“sujeto ensimismado”) in its own emptiness (“vacío”) and desolation, as “something” (“algo”) that in some sense is radically sterile and infertile, unfecund (“infecundo”) for the domain of thought (“ámbito de pensamiento”).

I do not think that such is the case because solipsism has in reality to be thought out ironically and methodically. The radical assumption of solipsism is a mistake

(“desvarío”) and takes us to madness (“locura”). Instead, it is methodologically a pedagogic way of expression and we must be careful that many calls to society, communication, community, etc. what these [calls really] do is to distract us from realities that our own experience discovers much more easily. Like Wittgenstein, “[I go to or I think] the world as I have found it” instead of this [sometimes easy] call [for society, community, communication] that many times invites us to discourses infected by sociology.” I am not saying sociology. I make the distinction, as I made it earlier, between the great sociology of someone like Weber and [an undesirable] sociologism that may surface, for unilateral orientation or professional deformity, even among the great sociologists, and if you press me, even in Weber [occasionally].

This Soul-City dialectic, if you wish personal and social domains, is always very present in me. Some of it is very alive in an old book of mine, *Artist and the City* (1976). The entire book is built out of this dialectic duplicity (“duplicidad dialéctica”). From the late 1970s, I inherit the dual myths that have today almost become “corpses” (“cadáveres”) in the postmodern attic. I do not think these are corpses. I think they are perfectly alive, but the postmodern [disposition] has tried to put them in the corner [by placing them in the attic]. I speak of Marx and Freud. In some sense, I am heir of the traditions that come from *Capital* on the one hand and *The Interpretation of Dreams* on the other. I suggested this [point] earlier. With *Capital* I understand some of the atrocious things (“espantosas”) happening today. But it is totally insufficient because it does not give me one single clue (“pista”) about how to find some orientation about something that is so important and relevant to all of us –myself included of course—which is dreaming. We spend half our lives dreaming. Here, I am much more [convinced] and better understood in [the vicinity of] *The Interpretation of Dreams* and of course we can then enter the debate [with Freud].

So, this is a double reality. One thing is as real as the other. It would have to relate to what Plato calls “soul” and “city,” and Plato thought of these whilst providing a full articulation which is very interesting, later providing a differentiation between the two. One must think about his articulation as well. This [Soul-City duality] is one of the principles that I have most strictly observed in my entire trajectory. I have constructed a philosophy that would never neglect both domains, neither the objective nor the subjective, to use the terms of German Idealism, or the Objective and Subjective Spirits in Hegelian terms. One must sometimes take stock (“tener cuenta”) of the institutions, the state, etc. to explain the source of our misfortunes out of which the inherent wounds of our own reality are, i.e. the sexual wound (“herida sexual”), the unconscious wound that leaves its trace in our dreams, our failed acts, etc. This duplicity has always been very important to me to try to find my own orientation [“duplicity” must be understood in the original Latin and archaic sense of “being double,” duplication, duality or dualism –no Manicheism-- and not in the contemporary and standard sense of deceitfulness, with or without the extra carriage of dream-like “unconscious obscurities,” FGH note].

Still the Aftertaste of Bourgeois Philosophy?

FGH: I feel that such intersubjective dimension is somewhat mitigated in your texts. You refer to it, but there is no development. I see it purely from the appreciative standpoint of a receptive reader. This is a provocation. How would you respond, if I said that this

solipsistic-individualistic methodology, that “jumps” from the “individual [first person singular] I,” as open a category as you wish, to the [anthropological] generic category of the totalizing *homo sapiens*, makes little or no reference to intermediary [stages or] social groups [in battle with each other]? This may indicate that we are still in the aftermath or aftertaste of the bourgeois philosophy, from Descartes onwards.

ET: I would say that what precisely characterizes bourgeois philosophy is to have a very strong group consciousness. It would then enter [into play] like that of a province or a suburb [in a bigger map] with a proposal or project that is presented from a more objective platform. No. I think, on the contrary, that bourgeois consciousness is shaken or buffeted (“zarandeada”) and left wounded (“herida”) when such exposure of those personal wounds, or wounds in the “soul,” happens. We are not dealing with a tranquil sea. This is an ocean as choppy or rough (“encrespado”) as [the objective spirit of the institutions]. It also depends on what one discovers there.

What I have tried to do is not to close my eyes to realities that are not necessarily gratifying. What happens is [instead], I think, that a methodology that is obsessed (“obcecada”) with a social or sociological thought has sometimes an escapist character. It is a kind of flight (“huida”) from painful realities that are discovered through a process of self-exploration or introspection (“auto-reflexión”). That is why I have always built my philosophy in dialogue with psychoanalysis. This is one of the most persistent [dialogic modes] in my philosophy from the beginning, probably since *Philosophy and Its Shadow*. Psychoanalysis -or at least a certain type of psychoanalysis- has degenerated, like many other things, in abject institutional forms. Nonetheless, I have sustained a dialogue with the more valid forms of the psychoanalytic tradition, starting from the very texts of the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud. I have evaluated and assayed (“aquilatar”) the main concepts in dialogue and reflection with him, for example, the concepts of “matrix” (“matricial”), “limit” and “symbol” that are so present in my latest books.

Freud is very present among the most living influences in my own thought. This disposition to the “psychic” [dimension] [“lo anímico,” from “ánima,” soul, but also feeling, mood, affect, vigor in the rich semantic field in Spanish, FGH’s clarifying note]; which is also about the discovery of the abyss or “hell” (“infierno”) that engulfs the person, i.e. the [rendering of the] inhuman that is internal or born (“inherent”) in the human [dimension]; that is between the subjective and objective forms. [Such rendering] does not take us in the direction of benign or placid scenarios. I must say that my general disposition in philosophy shows a predilection for a dialogue with these subjective forms and this must be from personal reasons of my own [individual] character. It is true that that domain of intersubjectivity, and the dimension of public or political forms are more like a sketch and remain more uncultivated or fallow land (“en barbecho”). It is only in few books where I go into it, for example in *The Language of Forgiveness* [*El Lenguaje del Perdón*], or the final chapters of the first section of *Limits of the World* when I speak of “Terra” and “Antiterra.”

I always do it from a peculiar angle. This is my way of doing things. It is very deliberate, *ex profeso*. [I do it] a bit to break up conventional discourse. Conventional discourse, mostly in the domain of political philosophical, or “the first philosophies,” is enormously depressing to me because among other things blocks the comprehension of other domains. That is why I enter sometimes a bit those forms that are not conventional. Yet, I do admit that such objective domains are not abundant in my work. It is true that a

book such as *Age of Spirit*, although so centered on the great spiritual movements, is building a kind of historical narrative. If you follow the argument and the narrative, I sometimes say it is a “big novel” (“gran novela”), “big” in the sense of large in scope, and I hope [it is] also intense [and profound], but it is not for me to say.

With some backlighting, and in an indirect style, I am also showing that these are real historical scenarios. That is, when I speak of Islam and I focus on two particularly brilliant lines of the Quran, or when I describe some aspect of an Islamic mosque, or I address a Gothic Cathedral or I land in the Renaissance or the Baroque, or in the end when I address the current situation of spiritual forms and [philosophical] thought, I am also at bottom trying to shed light on [objective] realities. But, yes, I accept that my [natural] disposition is towards subjective forms. It may have a basis in personal character. I am a very withdrawn, shy person. I keep myself very entertained with my own interior landscapes.

A certain Andrei-Tarkovsky sensibility found in the Writing, a Certain Ascetic Spirit in relation to Immediate Historico-Social Referentiality.

FGH: You speak of “my world” (85) and of a “setting that I call mine” (87-9) [and sometimes you equate it with] the “world of human experience” (135), always in a manner that is not and cannot be purely individualistic or anecdotal. I can very well think of the world of Eugenio Trías, or mine, or those of Hegel, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jordan, those in the future generations, *any* world. I sense that you do not put them in intersection, mutation or collision [however]. You appeal to the world of experience, according to the solipsistic methodology, that which is “I, mine,” but you have very quickly to circumscribe an aesthetic demarcation of such “first person singular pronoun.” You do not put [such first singular pronoun] in interaction with others (you, s/he, it, we, they). You do not place it [consistently] in a concrete and defined timespace. You do not bathe it, paint it, dress it up, place it inside a constitutive landscape. Such “first person singular pronoun, I” must remain of necessity empty of historical, social, political content, [or least] explicitly empty. Logically, it is “full” of historico-social content. But what happens is that you are not interested in making it explicit. Hence, you jump from the head of that pin, the “first person singular pronoun” to the imaginary pile of the *homo sapiens* from ever to forever facing the dead, those not yet born... It is a bit like the gesture of the great Russian film maker Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986). When your prose wants to gain in intensity, your gesture is one of similar recreation of pools of water [and vegetation] and rain in [the film] *Stalker* (1979), or the unconscious pull of the magnetic ocean in *Solaris* (1972). That is to say, you de-socialize and essentialize a series of questions, preoccupations, doubts and tensions and your claim is that [those questions, preoccupations...] must have trans-generational importance. You do not take these [questions, preoccupations...] to a historico-social concretion for a walk in the streets of Barcelona. You take them to the Duchampian transparent light. Yet, you do not [wish to] accomplish the Dada gesture of confrontation or rejection of society. You do not chase down the individual artist who repudiates his society, leaves France behind and seeks refuge in the United States. I do not know if you will accept this account or whether it is convincing to you. Mine is a purely descriptive account that tries to map out how your sensibility goes about stuff.

ET: Listening to your description is enormously illuminating. You have described a feature that I perceive, but still requires reflection apropos [what I would also say are] characteristics of modernity. What you say sounds right. I feel close to what you have described. I have mentioned to you that I like [Andrei] Tarkovskij very much. I cite him in one passage in my book *Thinking about Religion [Pensar la Religión]*. There I speak of the ultra-sensible and intelligent ocean that projects its truth to the subjects and makes these subjects go mad because they cannot take it. I think that some of it is part of the project that I try to elaborate in the field of philosophy. I perceive some possible affiliation with what you have mentioned. When you referred to *homo sapiens*, I suddenly imagined the stylized figures of [Alberto] Giacometti (1901-1966), atemporal or non-temporal, but marked by temporality, as [Theodor W.] Adorno (1903-1969) mentioned. The materials are historically assembled but no one can say that these figures are Italian or Roman. I also remembered epic terms, although epic is *sui generis* in the 20th century. The only epic poem there is, of the few poems I now remember, the “Anabase” of [French poet Alexis Leger known as] Saint-John Perse (1887-1975). It has an extraordinary epic impulse but you can never know where that happens. The real landscape is totally blurred (“desdibujado”). The place could be any place. Nonetheless, there is a moving display of potent forces and transports of wagons or caravans and other surprising elements. Not to mention the terms of utter desolation as the one presented by the scenarios of [the Irish playwright] Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). [I am thinking of his latest fragmentary works] *Sin Seguido de El Despoblador* [Spanish edition, Tusquets Editores, Cuadernos Marginales, 1973], where one’s consciousness finds itself a bit between life and death.

At any rate, a drastic removal or a [strong] stripping away (“despojamiento”) has happened. The [literary] expression has stripped away all features of locality and real community. I think that this is a certain destiny of modernity. What happens is that I give it a tragic dimension, which is not necessarily a pessimistic dimension. That is a bit the peculiarity of the discourse I propose: it assumes its tragic end (“asume un fondo trágico”), but it is not necessarily pessimistic [and] I am not going to say that it is the reverse [either]. It is a message. It is a proposal. It is the elaboration of an idea of our own condition that it evidently delinks and strips away those features that come a bit from history and geography at the moment of completion [of such idea or vision].

The materials are historical and geographic, but this is said in the [aforementioned] sense of [Theodor W.] Adorno. These are materials that are available to me. I find them in my language and also in the forms I use in the [answers to the] “why” the concept of “transparency,” and not others, forces itself upon me, or how the idea of “liminal Being” (“ser fronterizo”), which is very *sui generis*, itself liminal [also forces itself upon] ideas that also circulate in our contemporary world. Evidently, such border condition has something of extra-territoriality. Borders have many uses (“las fronteras sirven [para muchas cosas]”). Borders are curious things. Lots of strange things happen in them. There are phenomena of mestizaje and hybridization and [there is] also profound ambiguity. No one is the same as before arriving to these borders. It is a strange thing. You are not French, Spanish, Mexican, “Yankee” anymore. Dreadful things and surprising things happen. Border is a metaphor. I lean on it to make my way into an idea and a concept that is difficult to conceive. I thus assign proper credentials or passports to

the metaphoric-symbolic uses of language. That is why I give such an importance to the symbolic [dimension] (“lo simbólico”).

In dialogue with these symbols, I am working through them to refine and strip away (“depurar y desprender”) certain conceptual forms. In truth, there is a kind of asceticism apropos referentiality (“la referencia”). In my case, this may be more remarkable (“llamativo”) because I write in Spanish, a language that, by the way, is not so cultivated philosophically. I dare say, [it is a] poorly cultivated [language], full stop. There are [however] some references. There is even a book dedicated to [the Spanish and Catalan literary figure] Joan Maragall [i Gorina] (1860-1911). But it is true that there are very few explicit references to [and from] my immediate living context. I make some reference at given moments, but these are not many. At one point in *La Aventura Filosófica* [*Philosophical Adventure*] (1988) I give an entire chapter to [the Golden Age playwright] Calderón de la Barca, who had been a priority author. I could almost say that I entered literature via the reading of the works of Calderón. Yet, it remains true that there is a lack of references that may be eye-catching in comparison with other authors -- German, French, Italian-- who share this “crazy” adventure (“aventura o desvarío”) called philosophy that still finds some inspiration in one’s own [immediate] culture. Truth be told: I have found few and scarce affinities. There are some, but there are not enough. My misfortune is that I am a passionate music lover. I like music a lot, and, by music, I mean the one that can be called “classical” but also the more elaborate or experimental varieties in qualitative terms. There, I also find big lacunae [in the immediate culture]. [There are] the same ones I find in philosophy until the 20th century, which is most likely more or less provincial and still not outstanding.

About Inherent Limit and Liminal Being, the Habitation of the Border in Between Life and Death, (Un-)Reason and Edgar Allan Poe, Michel Foucault and Sigmund Freud

FGH: If we are (or want to be) such border [creatures] or liminal inhabitants, what adjectives could we use to qualify such border or limit? Do we still “cling to” the noun, if we seek concretion?

ET: The concept of border or limit (“frontera”) is important. Shadow is another concept. It is like its archeology and foretells this side of the storm. I have had shadow near from the very beginning [of my trajectory even] giving name to the first book. “Shadow” has in my case a peculiar use. It has nothing to do with “shadow” in [Carl] Jung (1875-1961). I already say so in advance because this type of dialogue [with Jung] has always had little interest [for me]. I would instead suggest the reading of the tremendous narrative “The Shadow” of [the American writer Edgar Allan] Poe (1809-1849). What does this shadow mean? To what is our reason in relation? Unreason! (“sinrazón”). The great book of Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization in the Age of Reason* [*Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique*, originally published in 1961] opened my eyes. My encounter with it was crucial. This duplicity of reason and unreason was very present in my own space of reflection. Later, the late Freud [was present too] when he brings up something I have always investigated; that is, “eros with all its shadows,” a kind of besieged and threatened relentlessly little island (“islote asediado y acosado”) by something tremendous that Freud calls the “death principle.” I would add that the limit is in between life and death. The nouns would thus be life and

death, but also reason and madness. Along such duplicity is where, when the limit acquires its [ineluctable] necessary character (“carácter de necesidad”).

The third part or the part of the critique in *Liminal Reason* [*Razón Fronteriza*] is where I have expressed the most satisfactory and most rigorous conceptual manner [of the character of liminal reason]. It is not an easy text in the sense that I lash out a bit (“arrebato”) at the limit of the traditions in which I found myself trapped (“enquistado”), for example Kant and Wittgenstein, who sketch out the concept of limit yet make no good profit of it. I thus take [the concept of limit] out of this context and I take it to another context that is much more satisfactory. That is why I say it is an ontological concept because “*Onto Son*” relates to Being, or better yet, to Being and Nothing in Freudian terms. My conceptualization has the character of a place [limit as place] that we can inhabit because in it our life is always under the pressure or circle that contradicts it. Therefore, who is this border or liminal Being (“ser fronterizo”)? A character who is perfectly alert to that reality and who lives and builds its existence accordingly.

It is true what you said that there are certain existentialist echoes. That is when I open up new angles (“doy unos giros”) that are very different from existentialism as when I highlight [the emotion or feeling of] vertigo. [Vertigo] changes a lot the theme of existentialism. I add a second clarification: “onto-logic,” but “logic” and what contradicts it. That is, reason and unreason; therefore the limit is that which disallows the closure of reason upon itself in the style of a Descartes or all the rationalist options. I set up as well my distances with irrational options that take us in the direction of the complete unreason (“desvarío”), i.e. those that proclaim that our reason is like a buoy going adrift, lacking authority, vitiated or corrupt from the beginning, as certain philosophies stemming from [Friedrich] Nietzsche suggest.

I do not believe that Nietzsche is fully comprehended or understood, although he gives himself away [sometimes to such misunderstandings]. I would instead say that the limit operates at a truer level, more than real life [sic, “vida real”] and I would also say that limit is or happens in us (“lo es, se da en nosotros”) in there being a vigilant, mediating reason operating between [two undesirable extremes of reason], one overbearing, arrogant or sovereign reason (“razón prepotente, soberana”) that closes upon itself; and another [reason of] unreason that relentlessly pursues and pressures us. One must stay alert to both [extremes]. That is why I understand [the concept of] limit like a habitable place and not only as a line (“línea”) as Heidegger and others do. If it were a line, it would be a very easy matter [rather than the infinitely complex matter] of a limit highlighted by an alert consciousness that is concerned with both dangers [of the self-satisfied] reason closing upon itself and a [proud unreasonable] unreason [strutting its stuff up and down town]. Thus, “limit” responds a bit to this [design of mine]. Limit is limiting [as border is bordering] necessarily so (“el límite es límite por necesidad”).

There are borders and borders... About the Empire of American nothingness from World War II, the Insistence on not Forgetting about the Religious Basis of Cultures.

FGH: Your proposal of “Liminal Being” does not open up to other border formulations, let us call them “American” [in the expansive sense of the term, not exclusively United States, i.e. from Alaska to Patagonia as the Spanish term of mono-continental “América” still conveys, FGH note]. [Your proposal does not include] problems such as national or

nationalist partitions –a phenomenon like Tijuana [between the U.S. and Mexico]—or how Hispanic populations in the U.S. look for their spaces of creativity, reflection, aesthetics, etc. I am now clearly “vulgarizing” your philosophical aestheticism by taking you to spaces that are not conventionally considered to be “properly philosophical.”

What other border modalities would be out there since it is somewhat fashionable, at least since the 1980s, to think about intermediary spaces or spaces in between? We can think about the borders among the various disciplines inside the various institutions. Another border could be the Latinamericanist critique of the Europe-U.S. binary, ever so close to [post-]colonial variations or recreations since the 1960s. I am thinking of authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Lewis Gordon, Enrique Dussel, Walter D. Mignolo.

A Weberian analysis of social groups and institutional settings might help establish “who’s in and who’s out” in the institutions. A conventional conceptualization of borders in the U.S. has also to do with the “push of the borders towards an outside” and what official historians have done (Jackson Turner, Herbert E. Bolton, etc.) with the national history of the U.S.

Other modalities might contemplate the meanings of Latinity, Anglicity, “Germanic” languages, *Romanística* in old-fashioned university nomenclature.

Another modality would be to look at geopolitics from the standpoint of the latest American administration in which we have the imperial civilization [of the West] and the scaling down of foreignness (the standard U.S. mass-media coverage of the world, European otherness is different from other continents, and here Spain occupies an uncertain place).

You do not establish dialogues with Ortega’s brood in Mexican soil appearing less interested in the juxtaposition of border and exile and the diaspora of a certain peninsular philosophy that settles in America (I am thinking of José Gaos of direct influence in Leopoldo Zea, but also the [Mexican historian] Edmundo O’Gorman).

I have the feeling that you may have heard of these options but you are not going to seek them out tomorrow. On a personal note, I find that there are enormous difficulties for these border dwellings between Europe and [expansive] America institutionally and otherwise in the U.S. There is European thought centered on two or three predictable national enclaves, on the one hand; and there is a larger American dimension very unequally distributed between the U.S. and Latin America [on the other hand], and I do not see ample channels of communication North-South, East and West.

Someone may throw the charge in your direction that America means absolutely nothing to you in relation to thought. And there will be economic, social, historical reasons for that “nothingness.” The big preoccupation of mine is that such “nothingness” is now on top of the world, at least in relation to the U.S. We spoke earlier of the Hobbesian “barbarism” and of the “analytical philosophy” disaster [at least from the philosophy that you represent]. I wonder if this [comment] bothers you. It is as though such “nothingness” were in the podium since World War II until today with a profound lack of convincing thought and discourse (“pensar-decir” using Trías language). I would like you to say something about it.

ET: Look. I will say one [strong, clear] thing, which is that I believe that every true philosophy is political philosophy. My philosophy is that. It is motivated by the urgencies and necessities, I would say, of politics. My thought tries to be a philosophy. I do not do chronicles, as legitimate and valuable as these are. I do not do journalism,

although I have sometimes made some journalistic interventions. [And I say that] with all the respect I have for th[e journalistic] profession in which I have many colleagues and friends. No. I try to do philosophy knowing that philosophy is political philosophy. My Platonic conviction is that philosophy seeks fertility in the [historical] demand and the [contemporary] interest (“tiene que fecundarse en gran medida por el reclamo y el interés”). A sentence by Hegel I accept: the one that says that philosophy is the elaboration of the concepts of its own historical age or epoch.

I have listened to you carefully. I agree with you. It is true. And it is a shame (“es una pena”) because I know that the expansión of my philosophy and the relevance of my books will continue after I die above all in Hispanoamerica. I say this to you because I know that I have a readership tradition in Mexico. Quantitatively, it is not enormous quantitative. I do not see [those big numbers]. [Because] I produce the type of text that better seeks a small community of selective readers. The same thing happens in Argentina, where I lived for a year and in other places I do not know, for example in Chile. I have always found readers [of my work] when I have been to Hispanoamerica.

It is true and everybody tells me and I see it. It is disquieting. I regret [the neglect] immensely (“me crea mala conciencia, lo lamento horrores”), except for *The Tree of Life* (2003) where there are pages dedicated to Argentina that could compare with those written by Ortega y Gasset in *Meditation on a Young Nation* [*Meditación del Pueblo Joven*, 1958, original date of publication]. The comparison is interesting. I add another thing because it is a reflection on a particularly significant Latin American domain. I continue this reflection [in the book] as I travel to Brazil. It is certainly not a priority reflection on the problems that add pressure and legitimately take place in the Latin American domain.

Since the 1990s, I take a risky decision. I think it was successful, because I had been subjected for a long time to all sorts of critiques. It is my own intellectual choice that operates within [its own] reasons that are political, social, etc. Philosophically, my decision has been the riskiest and the one that most critiques has provoked. I took refuge (“me parapeté”) in the most ambitious of all my books, which is *Age of Spirit*. This [decision] has to do with putting religion in the pool position of philosophical reflection. The reason is simple: I see the general view of the Cold War, the end of the peaceful coexistence of the bipolar system, the [so-called] “end of history,” as [the American political scientist Francis] Fukujama would say. Before extraordinarily polemical books such as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) by [Samuel P.] Huntington (1927-2008), I already speak of the importance of religion and how the foundation and the belief in religion have been forgotten in relation to the foundation of our cultures. This is one clear possible reading of *Age of Spirit*. *Thinking about Religion* [*Pensar la Religión*] (1997) is an interesting complement to it because it gives clues to the current understanding of what is going on.

I insist on the forgetfulness [of the religious foundation of our cultures]. This great theme has been forgotten and I say again that postmodern reflections leave religion as the neglected subject of modernity and thus simplify the theme of religion. It is an accusation of the postmodernity that has spent excessive time [covering] other themes that are in my opinion of infinitely less importance and fails to put [religion] on the front page. *Age of Spirit* tries to approach Oriental realities, Islam for example, at the popular

level, but also at the level of intellectual elites [now undergoing] a kind of absolute demonization and the quintessence of the “axis of evil” [in 2003].

I am horrified at the current state of affairs of *Realpolitik* that you have mentioned earlier that is in the hands of an Empire that is becoming self-aware of itself whilst saving efforts on the economic front and disregarding corpses elsewhere, which is a disaster. There is no possible vindication of such a tradition. From the 1990 onwards I have realized that the theme of Christianity and Islam, at bottom East and West, is in reality a [call to] “the West, beware!” (“¡cuidado con Occidente!”). It is not fortuitous that I write a joint book, called *El Cansancio de Occidente* (1992) [*The Exhaustion of the West*] with [Rafael] Argullol. [The said book] is journalistic. It is not very profound but it is urgent. It is embattled (“de batalla”). It is immediately after the first Gulf War [1990-1, during the George H.W. Presidency, 1989-1993]. It is a priority, despite what my Latin American friends may think. What are we going to do? It is what it is! This type of confrontation may end up in the Third World War! I see it very clearly. I am the son of a Francoist politician who was also intelligent. I have political eyes. That is why I like to intervene from time to time in the media. Despite my dream-like tendencies, as this interview has probably depicted, this [geopolitical question] is very present in me. How do I handle it?

My journalistic articles provide some of those frames of reality I am looking for. I am very horrified. We are at the mercy of a series of completely incompetent people confronting an enemy that is absolutely resolute and who deserves a different treatment, not necessarily as enemy, because if this is the case, it will be the end. I have taken the theme of Islam to heart. That is why I give it so much room in *Age of Spirit*. I also have articles that came out in the [Spanish] newspaper *El Mundo* like “El Islam Espiritual” [Spiritual Islam] last year [2002], in which I try to demonstrate a bit that the most terrifying forms of fundamentalism (“integrismo”) have triumphed because of options such as Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia that is behind the funding of these violent forms. But, let us be careful, because Islam is a world reality of the first order and follows a politics that is absolutely insensitive to a community that, taking all the inequalities and misadjustments in stride, and these do exist, is creating a most horrifying (“espantoso”) scenario in the new century and the new millennium. I would dare say that this kind of publicity has put the religious issue and the Christian-Islam duality in the front page [of our historical actuality].

Of course, I jump outside “old Europe” as soon as I reclaim an even “older Asia” (laughter). I am exploring the worlds of Asia in *Age of Spirit*, not all [of them] because I hold no jurisdiction to know all of them. I am conscious that there are realities I am sorry [to say] I am not able to handle or develop because I cannot do so (“no soy solvente”). If I am asked about these, I will say I do not know them. They may surely have a lot of importance and I am sure I will be not be insensitive to them. I realize that the dissemination field of my own work is going to be Hispanoamerica in the long run, more than Europe and the United States. It is true that I do not reflect a lot of these realities among other things because I do not know them. I have not lived there. I will say that other realities have taken the limelight in relation to international issues of a world scale. These are the realities I do not want to lose sight of. This is a bit of a possible explanation.

It is true that the American continent is not very present in general terms in my philosophy [Spanish-language “América” is one mono-continental entity, inside which

the United States of America must be included, in sharp contrast to North and South American bi-continentality assigning the same name to the dominant nationality and adding “Latin” for the rest, typically not part of the “West,” in conventional English language on both sides of the Atlantic, FGH note]. But I do not think it is valid to say that my philosophy is centered only on Europe. *Age of Spirit* is my most important and ambitious book. This is a very important opening effort in another direction. I have a disciple of mine who is Iranian who is doing a doctoral thesis and is exiled there in the theocratic regime. [My student] is precisely working on the relations between philosophy and religion that come out of my books. Of course, I am sorry [about these blind spots]. I would love to be able to attend to those realities and include other people who surely would approach my books more spontaneously but fully knowing that my philosophy speaks little of their type of realities.

Virtual de-Hegelianization and de-Europeanization of the United States in the Second Half of the 20th Century moving Forward?

FGH: Let us see what else you tell me about the big dimension of the relation between the European and American continents with all their faultlines and inequalities. It can be said that the second half of the 20th century means, at least from the official or dominant perspective, a virtual “de-hegelianization,” hence the predilection (“culto” in the original) on the detail, the ephemeral, the ornamental, the differentialist and identitarian particularity, the kitsch-and-pastiche aesthetics, time-space compressions of the global market, the brutal fall of axiological or evaluative mechanisms, the agonies of historicity, the banalizing television visualization, etc.

From the perspective of the U.S., “Europe” is undergoing a virtual “de-Europeanization” of impact and influence, almost from the pedestrian level of migratory flows. The young blood of the country does not come from European migrations. That was the first half of the 20th century. Even [European] schools of thought have undergone a tremendous debilitation in my sense of things. This is what I see. I may be wrong. *Age of Spirit* is a tremendous effort in the virtual “re-hegelianization” understood as culmination of Western thought. You are “playing” inside Hegelian recreations of presumably fertile variation. It would be a heroic and “tragic” attempt on your side, adding the restitution of totalizing, systematizing desires and a fidelity to what you call “our” Greek-Latin European Civilization, filtered through the German –and to a lesser degree French-- “devices,” not falling for servile attitudes in your case. No one will accuse you for not going tomorrow to Chinese traditions and returning in love with them. One must frame the thinker in the original context. I do not know if you will accept this Hegelian suggestion about your work. I have felt the totalizing impulse in *Age of Spirit* and *Logic of Limit*.

ET: I accept it and I add the following reason. I think Hegel is extraordinarily marvellous. His principles may be more or less fashionable, but the exceptional effort of his principles and the extraordinary ambition of his thought correspond to the nature of intelligence itself. It is an adventurous type of intelligence that is not limited to conquer, but “to colonize” [clarification note: one must hear positive connotations in the latter verb, like risky and adventurous settlement in hitherto unknown timespaces pushing limits of experience, vision, language, thought, etc. unlike a more conventional reflex

response adding “negativity,” FGH note]. Such encyclopedic desire, the effort [always] to find the best term... That is one of the things that marvels and surprises me in Hegel. That is why I have often called Hegel the Aristotle of our modern times.

Everyone reproaches him as though he was [some sort of] self-activated clockwork mechanism. No. What is superior in Hegel is that he never behaves like Kant who talks nonsense when he faces the detail. Hegel has a surprising capacity for the analysis of the singular and the individual since his more abstract works, the aesthetic lessons, the lessons on the history of religion inside the knowledge of the period and the immense synthesis he pursues. I would say that Hegel’s eagerness (“afán”) is Aristotelian. Of course, I [want to say that I] have it. I think I have it. I believe it is part of the tradition of philosophy or of the best sociology.

We spoke earlier of Max Weber. We could reproach Weber that he is [also] hegelianizing because he does want to have a kind of sociology of the whole world, according to the materials he has to integrate and [use to] build. In this sense, I would accept [what you are saying], because I think it is the great virtue that Hegel has. I repeat that you are often surprised at how many unexpected circumstances (“impredecibles”) you run into when you go deeper into Hegel’s discourse.

Analytic philosophy has normally produced very poor products (“bazofias”). But the occasional flower also comes out of the most unfavorable terrains. There is an English-speaking [South-African philosopher] called J.N. Findlay (1903-1987) who wrote a superb book titled [*Hegel: A Re-Examination* (1958)]. Findlay said [Hegel] was the best empiricist our entire tradition has ever produced. And it is true because there is much more empiricism in Hegel than in [the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David] Hume (1711-1776), [the Anglo-Irish philosopher George] Berkeley (1685-1753), [English philosopher John] Locke (1632-1704), [English philosopher John] Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and the entire Anglosaxon empiricist tradition. Why? Because of its encyclopedic ambition and its [synthesizing] attempt. There I recognize myself in Hegel as I do in Aristotle. I have this ambition. Without it I would not have written Age of Spirit or the incursions in aesthetics in *Logic of Limit* and others. At least there is a horizon without [apparent] restrictions.

I insist that philosophy for me comes with no adjectives, or the adjective goes underneath the noun (“se subsume en el sustantivo”). I have spoken that political philosophy is philosophy. I believe that philosophy must be thought as though it were flying over (“sobrevolando”) the different fields of knowledge. Is this possible today? That is my [self-assumed] challenge and my wager: to think that in some way, through some strategies I am setting up, it may be possible, despite being in the burnt library of Alexandria as the stories of [the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis] Borges (1899-1986) tell us and one verifies it is so because we are in the world of the internet communication and it is an immeasurable world. Yet, it is perhaps possible to make some selections and realize some strategies and being fully cognizant of one’s own immense ignorance.

Therefore, I would accept your [suggestion]. Hegel has been built into a completely mistaken figure that does not correspond to [his] reality. I will say something else. It is true that this European tradition may not have such a demographic impact. But, let us pay attention to the following: what remains are the forms. What I see is that the American philosophy that is most interesting to me always goes to European traditions in the end. That is, when [the American philosopher John] Rawls (1921-2002) wants to

formalize his thinking, whom does he turn to? To Kant and becomes Kantian and he is Kantian. Rawls' is a very interesting interpretation of Kantism. Communitarians? Who do they turn to? To Hegel, and sadly to the "Volkgeist" aspect of Hegel, but not the whole of Hegel. Th[ese] American thinkers do not go [for the most part] to an autochthonous thinker and when they do so, as [Richard] Rorty, it is because there is a tradition called Metaphysical, which is magnificent, as is the case of [Charles Sanders] Peirce (1839-1914), one of the great philosophers of the transition between 19th and 20th centuries. [He was] a very great metaphysician, enormously abstruse. I have more difficulties reading Peirce than I do reading Hegel. Still, there is a North-American philosophy of metaphysical pragmatism that is sadly forgotten. It is not the vulgar pragmatism that appears to be part of the American soul. No. It is something else. It is much more complex and it is the enormous merit of Rorty to evoke and remember these traditions of a type of American society. [We can remember] William James (1842-1910), brother of [the novelist] Henry James (1843-1916), both very close to the European world.

FGH: A clarification issue: when you speak of "colonizing," I imagine that you do so in relation to unsuspected or unimagined spaces. The term has here positive connotations.

ET: Yes, of course. I have the image of pristine jungle or wilderness ("selva virgen") asking for some furrows that will make it habitable or familiar. Or, pathways, bends, curves, areas where to build huts or what have you. I give it a positive sense and I then I think of other things. It is what was "Magna Greece" for the Greeks. Of course, we have to be careful with the concept of colony and the colonial that is characteristic of an imperialist bourgeois society in the XIX or earlier in the mid-XVIII. But I give it a different meaning. Or at least I use this linguistic form to understand another thing.

Calling for the construction of a pluralist ontology in between the common condition and a defeatist multiculturalism, the U.S. is the society of the integration of the ghetto.

FGH: Your proposal of a pluralist ontology is built upon the possibility in which each monad becomes an observation platform ("atalaya") and as such, as you say, splits open or breaks up the subject-object dichotomy. You have referred to Rawls, who leans on Kant. I confess I do not see it, even the connection with Rawls, which a neo-Kantian liberalism that does not seem to go anywhere and is exhausted. How should we understand your call for such pluralist ontology? What are those platforms you climb up in order to make such calls that I do not see well?

ET: I insist that our border condition is like that of the [Roman deity] Janus, the God of the two faces, one inward-looking, the other outward-looking. I would say our reality is Janic, two faces, front and back, because we are, on the one hand, part of the same [human] condition [and, on the other hand, we are individuals]. I insist on the universal-anthropological side in our own self-discovery. That is why I speak of the human condition in some of my texts. The foundational philosophical concept of the liminal or border subject ("sujeto del límite o fronterizo") refers to a common condition. I believe [the concept] transcends all forms or figures of local incarnation, be cultural, civilizational, linguistic, any other type. This is something I want to hold on to for one reason: I do not agree with the dissolution that has come to be called multiculturalism.

No. It is false. [If assumed] it turns us into aspects, good and lamentable, of the North-American society, which is a society of ghettos or little islands. For me, this is truly the monadological world with the little islands of Chinatown, the Hispanics, the Antilleans, the Caribbeans, the Dominicans, etc. [We must include] the attractive and civilizing model I mentioned earlier of what I know, and love, of New England, New York, etc. There are aspects that can be elevated to a philosophical, almost ontological levels.

I believe there is a common condition that makes us meet many times for better and for worse. In the [least optimal meetings], we discover identical lowness and foulness (“ruindades o vilezas”) in everyday life or political life in the East and the West, the Far East and the Far West, everywhere. There is also an elevated dimension (“lado excelso”) because reflections may take us to the possibility of convergence if they come from religion or art. These cultural frames are very important. There are very present in me. And, of course, everyone tries to add or leave a mark behind. What I have tried to do since the 1990s is to emphasize the religious roots underneath our feet or [the weight] we carry on our back, which I thought was the neglected subject [surrounded by a big] lamentable forgetfulness.

[Religion] is that which is in the composition (“compone”) of who we are. This is what Ortega y Gasset calls “beliefs,” because they form our deepest routines and habits, perhaps unconscious[ly], upon which our cognitive frames are constructed, and these are the “ideas.” These are some of the reasons why I wrote *Age of Spirit*. It was about finding a frame of beliefs for our Western culture, but also for other cultures that have gone on to develop themselves in other directions. It is very important to trace down a series of religious foundations. *Age of Spirit* is in that sense many things. It is also a scheme (“entramado”) of great religious foundations introducing novelties, Darshana heterodoxies within Hinduism and revelations within Buddhism, out of which Buddhism is born, for example. There are few pages because the [format and scope of the] book does not allow for more. Yet, there are a few, elaborate pages devoted to understanding the originary presentation of Buddhism. The same happens with Biblical traditions. And the same happens with Homeric traditions that later produce tragedies and pre-Socratic philosophy. [I also include] the reformed religion in Iran or advanced Islam of the later period and other things.

That is, I am creating a bit those scenarios that facilitate the plural cultural frames stemming from religious foundations in which what is important is not so much the religion [per se in singular] as the collective, multiple or plural frame of the revelation of [each] religion. In my case, no one enjoys any special privilege. That is, Christianity shows up as one among many other generating foundations. Hence, *Age of Spirit* assumes a certain relativism that to me is important since [German-born physicist Albert] Einstein (1879-1955). I put [this relativism] to the test in *Limits of the World*: together with this early theory of relativity of Einstein, I formulate a general theory of unified fields. [In it] I would have both levels or dimensions (“planos”): relativity, that is, there are many cultures with [an emphasis on] their religious foundations, and this is what interests me in *Age of Spirit*, but [these would be included within] a common condition (“en una común condición”).

I use the metaphor of “Spirit,” as a kind of ideal horizon, imagined territory or dreamed transcendental practice or incarnated utopia (“de práctica transcendental imaginada o soñada, o de utopía encarnada”), which is in reality a bit the odyssey of the

common condition and that which is in common to the condition we can call “human.” Both aspects [relativity, commonality must happen] at the same time: paying attention to the variety, but at the same time not avoiding [the possible synthesis] in polemics, as you well put it in relation to Rawls and his reflection that I agree is unsatisfactory and disembodied (“reflexión insatisfactoria, descarnada”) [not paying] attention to any particularizing frame. Such [neglect] is no demerit (“no le quita valor”). It has its [own] merit. It is a kind of communitarian multiculturalism that I find lamentable and disappointing and [it is also] very dangerous (“lamentable, deceptionante, nocivo”) to[wards] forms that end up constructing the opposite of what one would hope they could create, which is more incommunication, bad vibrations and animosity (“encono”). I speak by hearsay and you will know better about these than me. At bottom the United States always ends up in the culture of the ghetto. I do not know why that is, but it is. It is supposedly the great integrating society but integrates under the form of the ghetto. This is my perception of that country.

How Does One Travel From One Religious Foundation to Another?; the Constructivist Methodology of the Dissociation or the Dissection of Symbols.

FGH: In *Age of Spirit*, you speak of “aeons” or “avatars,” also of “symbolic epochs [edades simbólicas]” and you clearly separate them from what you call, in quotations in the original, “material history” (“historia material”), the economic, social, political conditions, mentalities, etc. Addressing the exposition of such historical frames, how do we travel from one synthesis to another, one age, epoch or aeon to another?

ET: In the first chapter, I explain a bit the system of categories and how one draws the others. I explain it. I give some clues, for example, in relation to the first one that I call “matrix” (“matricial”), “cosmological” follows (“cosmológica,” both in the abstract adjectival form in the original Spanish), where the theme of the creation or the foundation of the world is at the forefront. [I also mention] why this is an urban or better proto-urban culture, a culture of the foundation of cities. [We are contemplating] the formation of the first urban enclaves (“agrupaciones”), how from a revelation, such as the one taking place in Mount Sinai [in the Sinai peninsula of contemporary Egypt, FGH note], something like a “face to face” [takes place], a reference to the voice of God [and] an interactive relation of man and the subject that is a personification of the sacred.

We move on to the focus given to the forms of communication and expression and there it is what I call the category of “logos” and the religions that insist more on it. [We are] following some of these aspects, some of which are surprising [and] sometimes the analytic possibility has not been very present. What I try to do is precisely show how the categorical scheme [of things] delineates or even paints a way of articulating “symbolic forms,” as I call them. What I do is to take out of the hat as it were, almost in a gesture of prestidigitation, the analytic elaboration, which is a dissection of the various aspects that build the concept of symbol.

What I [also] do is a constructivist epistemology upon such concept that comes out of the previous dissociation of the elements [involved in such symbolic composition]. I call these elements categories. These categories are those that put together (“conjugados”) generate [a] synthesis. This I call “symbolic synthesis.” Then, after the

initial prestidigitation, what I discovered is that this analytic “de-assembling” could provide a sense of orientation and organization of historical materials.

It is true what has been mentioned earlier that this [endeavor] could be thought to be of Hegelian idealist inspiration. How does this scheme or ensemble (“entramado”) of another historical period show up for us today? This is one of the most extraordinary aspects of Hegel’s thought. It may generate skepticism, but it is enormously convincing to me. I would hope that my work had this character, and if it generates scepticism I would only wish that the ordering that is produced in argument and development might overcome such early skepticism. I put it to the test. I realized that this is no panacea. In this regard, I am not Hegelian. I cannot attempt in the least to say that my approximation is what gives meaning to history. This would be an enormous claim (“pretensión enorme”). Hegel could do it, but he belonged to another epoch. I instead say, “careful, an approximation could be accomplished to the material conditions of existence, [for example] from a-history-of-mentalities approach (“histoire des mentalités” in French) as [in the French medievalist Georges] Duby (1919-1996) onwards. This is [however] something different from me.

What I try to do is the analysis of the symbol that is in reality a construction of the concept of symbol. I try to show the effectiveness (“solvencia”) of such construction through the binding or bringing together (“capacidad aglutinante”) [of the different parts] that come from the historical material. It is a test. It is a crucible of an experiment (“de experimento in crucis,” sic). In writing this book, I take risks. I [did it because I] saw myself capable of doing it. I am aware that I look at the historical material from a very concrete and specific angle of vision [which is] the religious basis or spiritual foundation of ideas. This book would be part of what can be called “history of ideas,” but these are looked at from a very specific angle that comes from [my] methodological and a strategic privilege. [This privilege] has to do with the aforementioned forgetfulness of the theme of religion and the intuition that it is a theme, I am more convinced than ever, that is at the forefront [of things], whether we like it or not, and I do not think I am mistaken.

The interview took place in the flat of Eugenio Trías Sagnier in Barcelona during October 23-28, 2003. The interviewee passed away in 2013. A section of the Spanish original version was published in *Ciberletras*: “Sobre la propuesta filosófica del ser del límite. Entrevista con Eugenio Trías Sagnier” (*Ciberletras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* - *Journal of literary criticism and culture*, <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras> (La literatura y cultura españolas de fines del siglo XX) 2 (2005): 220-245. A complete English translation of the entire Interview in Spanish has been done by FGH, 12/16/2022, Warwick, U.K.

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