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Interhomo

Introduction – just a preposition

One of the notions that have been especially successful in social sciences and humanities in general is the preposition “between”, often encountered in the Latin version “inter”¹. This inconspicuous language product has pointed to several ways leading to reflections on the human being and has become the trigger of a certain intellectual revolution. The preposition is remarkably adhesive, as it is capable of merging with various nouns and adjectives (interdisciplinary, intercultural), and at the same time each new compound seems to generate separate interpretation of reality and new areas of interpretation of the surrounding phenomena. Therefore, it is a kind of intellectual parasite, which, feeding itself, gives a lot in return to the organism that feeds it.

To be “between” means to be on neither side. To be “between a rock and a hard place” means to be in the line of collision. “Between the cup and the lip” means neither consumption, nor abstinence. “Between the carnival and the fast” means neither a fiesta, nor mortification. This applies also to being “between Scylla and Charybdis”, i.e. between two threats; between the sky and the earth or between heaven and hell; between temptation and resignation; between love and hate; between comfort and sacrifice; and between the sacred and the profane. One of the most common misunderstandings is to interpret this “between” as being everywhere.

Therefore, “between” tempts and seduces. For science, and particularly for pedagogics, it is the Promised Land where everything can be invented and understood. This resulted in the creation of the strangest creature of our times, which I have called “interhomo”. The man without the place, the undecided, the dull.

New space for the savage

Let us start with Jean Jacques Rousseau, as he seems to be a proper introduction to this topic. The genius Swiss does not impress me with his twisted pedagogical concept or his unquestionable erudition, but the pragmatic and perverse interpretation of the world. For this reason, I have read everything he ever wrote. His “Social contract” is a fantastic pastiche of human whims and fight for power. It led to the emergence of the

¹ See: e.g. M. Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 78ff; Z. Kwieciński, 2000, p. 10ff.

well-known triad “liberty, equality, fraternity”, which turned the world upside-down by leaving aside the barnyard and old-fashioned “faith-hope-love” and replacing it with a total mess connected with fomenting and preparing (for a change) more and more revolutions. We are living like that up to this date. Our Bastilles may look differently, and so may our guillotines – fortunately! – but it is hard to see any substantial differences. In Rousseau’s view, freedom is the change of human relations which consists in replacing the “above-below” relations with the “from-to” ones. We are free because we are equal, because we are joined by the natural law. What is “fraternity” if not the reference to natural blood ties? We choose our wives, lovers, work partners and sometimes enemies, but we do not choose brothers, sisters or mothers – they are given to us. We cannot escape them. This is what the power of nature wanted.

Referring to the idea of human liberty (although he could be a despot and scoundrel sometimes), Rousseau put emphasis on the opportunity to choose.² Europe, constructed by the Church identified with Christianity, was a monolith. Protestantism, after the impressive debut, soon became atomised into numerous fractions and splinter groups, and thus lost its impact and reformatory power. And it has not regained it ever since. Today hardly anyone knows that the Amish, the Mennonites, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Pentecostals, the Methodists, the Baptists and even the Mormons are all the children of the same Luther and his Wittenberg theses. The relationship between them is rather loose, while the differences (which often evolve into serious conflicts) are substantial. This is how the place of “one truth” was taken over by the choice. The first victim of the “Social contract” was God, who lost the monopoly on appointing emperors.

Since Jacob’s fight with the dragon (Genesis 32) no one tried to challenge God as bravely as Rousseau.³ He created the space between education and non-education, calling the former crime (precisely *la crime d’éducation*). As he pragmatically worked out, you cannot educate the human created to the image of God, as it is just like educating God Himself. And so he surrendered humanity to the powers of nature and assumed that this would result in the emergence of *le bon sauvage*, i.e. the *noble savage*. It was probably the first pedagogical hybrid, and doubtless the first hybrid in the broadly understood modernity.

The human invented by Jean Jacques, consisting of written features rather than real ones, was located in the space “between”. This human was taken out of the world of culture (as he was invented by a civilised philosopher) and faced with the unambiguous natural laws. This *bon savage* is the man located between nature and culture, as everything that can emerge as part of nature must be born, whereas in culture, everything must be created. To be “between” is to long for giving birth and creating at the same time. It is a specific cognitive greed that creates beings with words and seeks the confirmation of their existence in nature. It is probably the essence of each “third” way, which may be regarded as the philosopher’s stone – desired inasmuch as non-existent.

² Compare: H. Soniefeld, 1993, ch. III.

³ It is best depicted by the song by Jacek Kaczmarski: “And when Jacob was fighting with the angel/And when he realised it was a fight with God/He hit the shining wing with his sweaty forehead/He tarnished the unearthly body with the dust from the road/And yelled: I won’t let you go, Lord, until you give me/Your blessing for now and for later”.

Salutary hybrids

Searching for the “third way”, looking for and settling the spaces “between” result from longing for the hybrid, i.e. the new quality emerging out of the existing. It is the desire for conducting continuous experiments and mixing everything together. Such hybrids are represented by centaurs – creatures that constitute the perfect blend of a stallion and a man. The strength, speed and vigour of a horse was mixed with the cunning, intelligence and bravery of a man. Between a man and a horse, there has been established some space for a new quality. Another example of a hybrid are mermaids. In this case, the grace, beauty and seductive powers of a woman were combined with a fish – a swift, fast and skittish water-dweller. A unique example of hybrids are the Amazons, who are a combination of sex characters. The female body was filled with masculine features, such as ruthlessness, cruelty and bravery. The modern hybrids are, for example, Robocop or the protagonists of Star Wars (Rewers, 2000). They are not humans (animals) anymore but they have not become robots yet. According to the contemporary educational philosophers/sociologists, the hybrid is the “absorption of differences” (Melosik, Szkudlarek, 1998, p. 78). However, as I believe, it is simply the disregard for differences leading to obliteration, a procedure that gives the imagined effects in one’s imagination. This is because the role of differences is by principle to divide, and not to tie the knot with other differences. The impact of differences may be postponed but never neutralised. The hybrid is what it is only because it cannot become the norm.

The examples of hybrids mentioned here have one more significant feature – they are the aggregate of advantages. It is easily noticeable that only the best features of the elements have been mixed, creating not only a new but also a better quality. The centaur is stronger than the man and more intelligent than the horse. Regardless of the intention, the third way is always the effect of longing for the aggregation of values or features. It is a more perfect solution that reconciles all, which is sometimes substituted by a weaker form – the compromise. In common understanding, the man standing at the parting of ways is in pain. Yet, the one who seeks the third way is a happy creator.

Atoms of culture

In the context of chemistry, the perfect hybrid is the inseparable mixture, in which one atom of something corresponds to one atom of something else. Mixing takes place at the basic level and does not require emulsification, i.e. support. What we encounter here is mutual absorption, which leads to a new quality – the hybrid. An example of this may be the air; green colour, which is a perfect mixture of yellow and blue; and sea water.

Therefore, in nature, hybridisation is possible only at the deepest, indivisible so to say, level. In other situations we can speak only of suspension, emulsion or amalgam, that is of “forced” mixture of elements that are inherently immiscible and separate in nature created with the help of emulsifier. I will explain this notion a bit later.

So what is the atom of culture? What is the smallest part of culture whose existence cannot be questioned; the part which can be defined without too much difficulty and which is at least quite unambiguous? The

answer to these questions also constitutes the attempt to specify the level at which the true and almost perfect hybridisation may take place.

It seems that this function can be ascribed to language, as it is the essential factor determining one's cultural identity. Let us exemplify this issue with the controversy over the nationality of Copernicus. It is doubtless that the astronomer spoke German (at least to communicate with his patron and uncle, Lukas Watzenrode), he wrote in Latin (just as the entire Europe at the time), and probably used Polish in order to talk to burghers and common people. For researchers, the inability to define Copernicus as a native speaker of any linguistic option is a sufficient reason to regard any analysis of his nationality as unsubstantiated and irresolvable.

Language as the metaphorical atom of culture is easily mixable and it reveals a surprising tendency for hybridisation. This was the case with Yiddish language, which was almost the only way of communication used by the Ashkenazi Jews. It was a mix of linguistic resources of German, Hebrew and some Slavic elements understood not only by the Jews but also, to some extent, by the local community. Importantly, this linguistic hybridisation was not accompanied by the hybridisation of the areas of culture at a higher organisational level (customs, religion, tradition). The perfect mixture emerged only at the level of language, while higher levels were almost completely isolated and all values were protected with jealousy. Any attempts to mix these levels resulted in even greater manifestation of independence, and sometimes hostility.

In fact, this process is not characteristic only of the Jewish community. Another minority, which was very popular at a time, also underwent a similar process. Hardly anyone knows that the sentence *Na bułanym rumaku cwałuje ułan z szabłą* (Polish *An uhlan with a sabre gallops on a dun stallion*) contains only two Polish words: prepositions *na* (on) and *z* (with). All the remaining words are Arabic.

The contemporary counterpart of this process is the ease with which various languages borrow Anglo-Saxon phrases and abbreviations. The examples of this kind of borrowings in Polish are the words such as *komputer, biznes, laser, e-mail, digitalizacja, spin-doktor, piar, fidbek, and frontmen*. To some extent this pertains also to other languages: *pizza, maczo, szansonista, kabaret*. Specialist terminology is yet another field. The first example that attracts attention is craftsmanship. *Laubzega, girung, hebel, blinda, winkiel and blajzerka* are still quite common names of tools taken from German.

A certain specific case related to the susceptibility to hybridisation at the lingual level is the possibility to generate non-existent meanings. My granddaughter asked me once to give her a *giraffe-turtle*, as she did not know that the mere fact of imagining such a creature does not make it real. What is possible at the linguistic level may be totally unrealistic at higher levels. At one time, there was a discussion about the works of Melchior Wańkiewicz, particularly his "Tworzywo". The author merged the lives of different people in one character and still perceived it as non-fiction, a report. But it was literature, and not life, that gave him the opportunity to effectuate such "creation" of a human being. Wańkiewicz refuted all accusations claiming that all the facts were true (which was probably right) and from the reader's perspective it does not matter whether the events relate to some real Smith or Taylor, or to a Jones created out of the two of them. The reader does not know them anyway.

United States of Culture

A specific example of the humanist utopia is the faith in mixing cultures, and thus in the value of being at the border, between, at the meeting point. It is sometimes called conversion, penetration or complementation. It is related to the desire to achieve a better, more beautiful and nobler life. It is a utopia of a feast for which every guest brings the most tasty dishes of their cuisine.

However, it seems that the major driving force for the emergence of a given culture is the desire for distinction and consistent separation. Culture is not only a collection of authors and their works, in the broadest understanding, but a clearly defined set of enemies. The ideological element (for example the axiological structure) makes it jealous of competitors. In culture, the "alien" or "other" is as important as "our" and "own".⁴ You cannot help using these adjectives interchangeably; through their difference, they constitute culture. Pedagogical goodwill, or any goodwill whatsoever, is not enough to create hybrids and "alien-our" kind of bastards. It is possible only when using a computer keyboard, where the order of letters arranged into words remains unpunished. You can write "I love fellow human beings" but it is much more difficult to welcome and feed a homeless person who stinks with alcohol and urine. The same happened when Polish culture mixed with the cultures of the Romanian, the Jews, the Belarusian or the Ukrainian. All of them remain separated, and Polish culture borrowed only minor elements: Romanian music (because it is good for dancing), Ukrainian borsch (because it is delicious) or Belarusian embroidery (because it is delicate). But even these borrowings have nothing to do with hybridisation. It is all about using the elements we like, which should not be taken for mutual enrichment; just as forcing a horse to work cannot be equated with the love of animals.

Cultural collectivisation

When two separate cultures meet, the encounter generates certain consequences which are worth a closer look.

The first consequence is the inevitable existence of the border between "us" and "them". The border, or the borderland, as ethnologist would rather call it, is not supposed to unite but only to divide. The borders which are natural — and not created by politicians — are never a discussion table but always a detonator, though sometimes dormant. The attempt to liquidate them does not lead to mixing and "mutual enrichment" of cultures, but a slow expansion of the detonator onto the whole territory. It is exemplified by Turkish minority in Germany or the Romanian coming to Poland across the open border.

The second consequence is the social need for factors that facilitate the mixing of cultures. These are emulsifiers.

The emulsifier operates on two (or more) cultures, mixing their elements in a cultural suspension. It is neither a hybrid, nor a perfect mixture, but a myriad of particles of one culture scattered within another one.

⁴ This part was inspired by the book by T. Merton, 1994.

To continue with chemical nomenclature, one could call it emulsion. Sometimes the cultural emulsifier is so strong that the suspension seems to be perfect. However, the elements of the cultural emulsion are mixed but not merged. The perfect mixture cannot “unmix”; its hybridisation is irreversible. Suspension, on the other hand, undergoes the process of coagulation, in which the mixed elements get separated and return to the original state as soon as the emulsifier stops working.

One of the simplest emulsifiers is political correctness that tries to impose cultural tolerance. In this context, tolerance means an effective capability of hiding one’s aversion, chauvinism, and, in extreme cases, even hatred. It is a trained and commonly acceptable hypocrisy which leads to indifference towards the “other”, mistakenly taken for acceptance.⁵ Coagulation takes place in the situations where political correctness is not required at all cost, such as private conversations, family life, narrow social groups or secret associations (e.g. Ku-Klux-Klan) or criminal organisations (e.g. neo-Nazis).

Another emulsifier is power. This was the case of former Yugoslavia. The appearances of unity, kept up by force as the alleged blend of cultures, exploded immediately after the political system and the emulsifier of power ceased to work. What happened next was coagulation, i.e. the elements of the mixture started to repel each other dynamically and spontaneously, leading to the emergence of separate chauvinist ethnic cultural groups that engaged in murderous fights. A similar situation happened to USSR or Georgia and Ossetia. This is what is happening on Cyprus and in a few African countries.

The third consequence seems to be something that we could call ego-cultural approach. It is not the creation of the third way but a dichotomous division of the world into “me and the rest”. It is a kind of parasitism that consists in treating the surrounding world as the perfect place to find food. It is not life in culture but life derived from cultures.⁶

The fourth consequence is the attribution of comfort. Being “between” may also pertain to the stages of life. Take for example the “no ready man”, that is somebody between a child and a macho. It is a young man who lives with his parents and works only to provide for himself but does not really devote himself to his career. He wears funny T-shirts and does not like animals because they smell. He has a girlfriend with whom, as promises to everyone, he will get married at once. However, for the time being, he only uses her car, her body and carefully avoids insemination. He is still unready to get married and establish a family because he loves diving, paintball, trips into the mountains and meetings with his male friends.

⁵ I observed that during my numerous visits in England. All my friends (most of them are from the academia) were particularly charming, polite and kind to the representatives of Muslim, Chinese and Hindu minority whom they encountered in shops, petrol stations, schools, or during local community gatherings. But in private conversations they spoke of them really badly, sometimes even in vulgar terms. You could say that only the topic of ethnic minorities made them excited and emotional.

⁶ Near the end of Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem there is a large souvenir shop, whose owner probably speaks all the world languages. He greeted me with the words: “Welcome, my compatriot from the country of Wałęsa”, and seconds later, he said to some woman: “I hug my compatriot from the country of Chirac”.

Problematic conclusions

- Two ways can never generate any third way. They would have to sum up, which is impossible. If there are two ways, it means they go in different directions. *Between* them there is only wilderness.
- It is hard to believe in the “third value” suggested by Danuta Mostwin, that is the state of being a loyal American and a Polish patriot at the same time (Mostwin, 1985). It is a nice and appealing utopia that makes emigrants feel better. The illusion of the existence of such “third value” stems from the fact that it can be found at the verbal level (which is easily hybridised) and it is not tested at all. The arguments provided by the author indicate that she did not test her subjects in situations where “being a Pole” and “being an American” would constitute two opposing or conflicting notions. Therefore, we can speak of the acquired skill of shifting one’s identity rather than its hybridisation. Moreover, as I have already mentioned, such hybridisation of identity starts and ends at the level of imagination and ordinary speculation. It is a humanist record of the dream of both having your cake and eating it.
- Being in two worlds (cultures, ideologies, churches, attitudes) at the same time is only illusory. One element can be located in one area. If it is at the border of two areas, it is not visible in any of them. It is subject to semantic utilisation, almost degradation, as a half of the element is not equal to the whole element, just as the head itself cannot be equated with a human being. You cannot be in two realities without losing your credibility. Similarly, you cannot be in two “times”. The gift of bilocation is reserved for few. Therefore, one reality is occupied only allegedly, apparently or ostensibly, and this is exactly how hypocrisy works. This is the case of hideous Mr Hyde and highly unconfident Dr Jekyll described by R. L. Stevenson. However, it is only literature. But whenever we try to avoid hypocrisy, we immediately face the reality, which is a strict examiner that openly ridicules the “third way” idea. “Third ways” disappear in reality, and here is a drastic depiction of this harshness: “The SS-men took priest Dominic Paczkowski out of the line. He was a young priest from Rawicz. They whispered something to kapo and he went to bring something. Moments later, he came back with a crucifix. The SS-men started to shout and hit the priest, ordering him to defecate on it, otherwise he would end up on the hook. I guess we all prayed for the cross to turn into a branch or to disappear. We begged the Lord not to leave the priest with the choice between allegiance and death. But there was no miracle. The priest, shaking his head in refusal, came back to the line. Ten minutes later, he was hanging on a butcher’s hook stuck under his ribs, wheezing. He died at dawn” (Mioduszewski, 1971, p. 33). When I was serving in the army, I had to face the unavoidable problem of the military oath of allegiance, which was woven of declarations of loyalty to the Soviet Union, socialist ideas and something else. One of our friends, who was an avowed oppositionist manifesting his independent opinions, rebelled against the situation and desperately tried to solve the dilemma: to swear or not to swear. At last he found the “third way” and told us: “I will mumble the socialist fragments”.
- Pedagogics (but also sociology, psychology and philosophy) more and more often includes notions that live their own life. It is fond of them much more than of the surrounding world. When you go beyond

the salutary notions, you encounter the ungrateful reality, which does not listen to educationalists and, maliciously, does not want to change. The solution is to create surreality, i.e. pedagogical surrealism. For this reason, a few years ago I thought of it more as of a literary genre rather than the search for ways of introducing changes (Nalaskowski, 2001). In order to fight for them, I had to take the side of the real and establish a school. After 20 years, the success is still rather moderate.

- In this humanist surreality almost everything is possible. Notions are glued to one another, definitions are consistent, all mixtures are subject to hybridisation and, in most cases, constitute new quality. It is home for the intercultural, the interdisciplinary, multiple identity, creative borderline and inspiring areas “between”, as well as a great number of other issues to be covered in doctoral dissertations. What is more, almost everyone can be the priest at one’s own church – this is what we were given by Rousseau.
- One can imagine god without a church. After all, a great number of people declare their devotion to the Decalogue without the imperative to visit temples. But is it worth building temples that host no god, or at least an idea? Is it worth buying a ticket for the seat “between” when all you gain is the inability to say either “yes”, or “no” with your full voice?
- You can crossbreed a donkey and a horse to get a mule – a strong and resilient, yet a bit slow pack, carriage and riding animal. You can cross a wisent and a domestic cow to get a new breed that has great meat (allegedly) and provides high-quality leather. The hybrid of a lion and a tiger is a tigroleo, while of a zebra and a horse – a zebroid. Nature allows for that; however, it does not seem to trust in such experiments, as bastardisations, that is interspecific crossings, forever lead to axiomatic infertility.

Afterword

It is hardly possible not to ask oneself whether the search for the borderline, calling some areas borderlands or presenting the meeting point of two areas are only fruitless actions almost equal to the creation of parascientific artefacts. There seem to exist two ways, which do not cross or merge in any way.

The first one leads to authentic search based on curiosity about what would happen if there existed the third value, the third way and all the notions concealed in this essay under the term *inter*.

The second way leads us to the parascientific camouflage, being a fashion victim and putting a show of science, which does not have any effect, apart from the points granted by prestigious journals.

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