

*This thinksheet is a personal meditation on the work of Transculture, Inc.--work which I have experienced from its start. (More information can be obtained by writing Village Box 104, NYC 10014.) As you read my high appreciation of this process, don't be misled into imaging that I see Transculture as messianic! I'm messianic about Jesus; but I see many processes "on the side of the angels," on the side of humanity, that are not expressly Christian. (Jesus says, "Whoever is not against me (but is for humanity) is for me.") Transculture is, I deeply believe, one of these hopeful processes.*

A---"Absolutes" absolutely doom us humans. We must learn to live with relative absolutes, with full-hearted commitments in a world full of people who are "wrong" vis-a-vis our own full-hearted commitments--so to live humbly and hopefully and graciously, in faith that some Convergence beyond our ken awaits our confession of blindness and brokenness. In this, the mood and process of TC (in this thinksheet, = "Transculture") can help us, for it encourages humble access to each other in the presence of the Beyond that is More Than we are and that calls us to become more than we have been.

B---Two things that threaten to wipe us out are personal "betrayal" and social "bureaucracy." Betrayal tramples on our very soul, our deepest self; and bureaucracy submerges our human feelings in the interest of getting the job done. Betrayal is an abuse of trust, bureaucracy is an abuse of power. How are we bruised and battered human beings to live in a world we experience as good for lust but bad for love, good for power but bad for people? TC is a gentle process toward at least reducing the baleful effects of betrayal and bureaucracy; it is a hospital for humans wounded by humans, a hostel where mutual caring can assuage pains and griefs. Doesn't every religious community do this? Yes, but TC does it, supplementally, across cultures and religions.

C---"Community" is, for many in this anti-institutional time, where it's at--at least in many people's dreams. But "commitment" is the cost of community--a heavy price many do not have the courage, or the love, to pay. Yet if we--we whom institutions treat as things--bond ourselves together in the task of becoming persons-to-each-other-in-community, we can counterbalance the dehumanizing forces of a world that is rich in societies but poor in community and therefore poor in humanity--for community is not optional to humanity. The dark side of community? It's slavery, living one's commitment instead of one's life. TC, by putting one's commitments in panhuman perspective, is a prophylactic against slavery; and it adds the panhuman dimension to all other efforts toward community. Further, it strengthens us to the courage of commitment, our will to pay its high cost in a world that honors anything but love.

D---"Declaration" of what one deeply believes is essential to integrity, to vigor, to continuity of commitment and the refinement thereof, and to depth in a society's self-and-world perception. TC enervates this human will to witness to what lies deepest within us and so most profoundly motivates us, and the TC process increases one's skill and courage in this testifying. The contrary is this: Silence about one's heart spells the death of one's heart and of society. So the old saying, "All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to remain silent." That way, holocaust forever.

E---"Ethics" must now be expanded to include all the effects our decisions have on all--on ourselves and all neighbors, on the other side of the track and the underside of history, and on the good earth. As it becomes more and more clear that our human destiny is bound up with the destiny of the biosphere, our ethics must root in an earth ethic.

Can we who have made a desert of Eden be God's gardeners and turn the desert into a New Eden? If so, at what costs and trade-offs? TC groups finds themselves at times irritated by the emergence of uncomfortable questions about what's being left out in the ordinary daily round of personal concerns. Such discomfort is necessary to health and hope, for it's what we leave out that wrecks us.

F---"Faith," whatever its lineaments, is the heart of the human heart --if we "have a heart"--and so also the heart of culture and civilization. But it's not true that "it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you're sincere." Hitler was sincere, and he utterly committed himself to his foul and defiling vision. TC can help us define faith and refine the faiths so that they become better news for humanity.

G---"Grace" used to be almost confined to the theological lexicon, to the language of church and synagogue. Now it's out of the closet, and everybody who wants humanity to make it is singing "Amazing Grace." No matter what else the words mean to you--to me it's literal: God's love has reached me through Abraham and Moses and Jesus--it means that life is for us when we are for life and for each other. TC helps deepen this insight into a gut conviction.

H---For mature human beings on this agonized planet, "hope" is more "in spite of" than "because of." It's muscular, not anemic. It puts a question mark after gloom-and-doom assertions, and it takes as a commission the promise of a better, wholer humanity. Giving yourself to a TC experience does for your soul what physical exercise does for your body: it gives tone, and strength, and the eager joy of mature hoping.

I---"I," in "Amazing Grace," am called a "wretch"! Another version is no less rough on my ego: "worm"! But what I first feel as insult, ~~med.~~ imitation brings me to see as a call to my essential dignity. My culture teaches me that "I" have to make it over against you. When I try to, we're both miserable wretches and anxious worms. Common sense whispers that there must be a better way, a way that will wind us up as human beings, not "successes" and "failures" distributed along a bell-curve. By helping us help each other to get in touch with a deeper dignity than society can grant or withhold, TC reduces slavish striving and anxious stress while increasing one's freedom to decide as a human being among human beings for truly human ends.

J---"Justice" is a beanbag tossed between power and love. The powerful see no need of extending justice: besides reducing their power, it would be dangerous. (But when the sleeping dogs stop sleeping, what then?) For their part, the powerless, relieved of the burdens and anxieties of power, are free--if their hearts are free of hate and bitterness--to specialize on love. But love without power can move the world toward justice only through pathos, and the powerful know the tricks of pathos-containment: revolution usually lands the powerless in misery more abysmal. What to do? We can make a beginning by learning to listen to each other, across all slicings of humanity, with the intention of becoming more honest-to-justice and thus less defensive of "ours" against "theirs." TC rewards this honesty with relief, self-respect, even joy.

K---"Knowledge" is an ambiguous value to humanity in the same way a knife is. Knowledge grows by distinction-making, a knife is for dividing. But a knife, properly used to cut for human good, can also be used to divide between life and death in favor of death. Knowledge, as used today, may tomorrow prove to have functioned in favor more of death than of life. Is, then, knowledge an enemy? I am no anti-intellectual! Rather, the users of knowledge and of knives are, sometimes, enemies of life. Because fields of knowledge are guilds of

pride seducible by power, those who know must learn to speak truth to each other within and between their guilds--and also to speak truth to power. TC is practice in truth-speaking and truth-hearing.

L---"Learning" turns out to be far more complicated than the pre-computer age assumed. Now that the learning-recalling tools have micro-exploded, we are more conscious of (1) what has to be unlearned and (2) what impedes and (3) what fosters learning. A side benefit, and balancing corrective, of all this human/machine learning relationship is that we prize more than before the old human-to-human, face-to-face learning relationship--the kind of learning we experience in the TC process. So TC helps to bring more life into an old truth, that the shortest distance between two hearts is not a machine; it's love. And only love has the power and wisdom to control machines for truly human ends.

M---"Mediation," in power's view, is hard and necessary, but "mediation" is soft and optional. But when the two are split away from each other, each in its own way becomes both irrelevant and dangerous. A bio-example of hard and soft cooperating: an egg. TC is a soft process with a high potential for humanizing the hard-bargaining of mediation, and every reconciliation leads straight back to renewed reflection. What comes of the egg? New birth!

N---"No" can be said outside or inside of "yes." When it's outside, it spells rejection, disruption, alienation, unproduction. But when it's inside, it expresses the freedom to disagree within the will to work together toward a better "yes." TC premises both this will and this goal.

O---"Opportunity" knocks not just once but till its fingers fall off. TC is an "open" opportunity to do something both simple and productive toward enlarged opportunity for humanity--our own humanity, and all humanity. For true listening bursts through the limits of group-aggrandizing ideology and prejudice and of self-serving notions of legitimacy, and so fosters the emergence of a more humane "order."

P---"Peace" is not doing nothing while war is doing something. Quite the contrary: war is doing nothing for the furtherance of the human project, the project of becoming human together on this small planet; and peace-making, peace-waging, is doing something toward our making it, surviving and thriving. Here TC is paradoxical: while sometimes in a group we don't seem to be doing anything of any importance, always something wonderful is being done to us--by us, by the working of the Spirit.

Q---The human "quandary" excites the human "quest." We are perpetual puzzles to ourselves, I-Thou and I-It. We quest not just because of native curiosity but also because we need to break free of the traps we've made and fallen into. And underneath it all, our seeking is our response to our being sought: the Love that will never force us also will never cease seeking us and calling us to become what we are meant to be and made to be. Life awaits our surrender of death, which cannot defeat us when we are open to love--to love ourselves and each other and the good earth and God, Source of love and light and life. In stimulating this quest, TC votes for life against death, light against the darkneses, and love against all alienations.

R---Being "right" is something everybody sometimes is and nobody can lay claim to being always, or even anytime absolutely. If we are honorable, we shall do our best to be right. If we are humble, we shall do our best not to impose our "rightness" on the rights of others. If we are courageous, we shall hang in with, and pay the

Z---"Zest" is what life today lacks, and the feverish pursuit of idols is no substitute. Zest is life bubbling up from springs of vision, joy, and confidence. TC helps us reach and release these springs in ourselves and in others.

price of, living and speaking the right as we see it. Honor, humility, courage: virtues the TC process cultivates.

S---All God's chillun need "stroking," honest affirmation--not buttering up in the interest of some cause, and not kicking around (as it is said) for their own good. In the TC process, honest affirmation is the primary skill of encouraging one another to "share" the heart, and the primary aim in confronting is to clarify.

T---"Trust" is the only door out of our fear-and-hurt-encapsulated selves, and it's at the heart of "Transculture." Culture to a human being is what water is to a fish: we swim in it and are only peripherally aware of it. Culture-struggle (*Kulturkampf*) occurs when two or more cultures slam into each other. Transculture is a third reality, both like and unlike both culture and culture-struggle; and it can make human contributions neither of the others can make.

U---The "universal" is everywhere present and nowhere achieved. But whenever we are ready, it is given to us through, yet from beyond, our powers and lights and claims. Only this readiness can free the Universal to heal our ruptured relationships and our broken hearts and to move us toward the one-universal-ecumenical humanity. The universal is the metier of TC, which weaves the woof of "this" on the warp of "all."

V---"Violence" begins where talking ends. Our God-given power to be good news is eclipsed when we abandon dialog, the speaking-listening-respeaking-relistening process TC teaches its participants to teach each other. Against violence to truth and love and humanity and the biosphere, TC offers a self-generating and equalizing talk-fest. Non-violent in itself, TC gestates alternatives to violence in all situations of conflict, private and public.

W---The "world" we've got, instead of being the world we chose, is only the world we drifted into. In the past, drifting was like a lazy canoe far from the brink of Niagara Falls. But we are now into the rapids, near the precipice. We must choose, and we are free to choose the world we want and need. In this major moment for humanity, we need all the help we can get for our world-historical task of evolving adequate decision-making processes and structures for the one humanity. TC, because it crosses all divides and aims at a quality of decision-making that can further the human cause, is a process apt for this aim.

X---"X" is for "xenophobia," which TC helps cure. But it's also for "X the unknown," which gets respect inversely to pride. The agnostic is proud of being the friend of "x," and the gnostic is proud of being "x"'s enemy. TC is a way of exploring "x" objectively, minimizing both distortions of both ignorance and knowledge. In this, it's ground-clearing and site-orienting for building a more real, more modest and loving, world.

Y--We human beings have many "yearnings" to sort out as we move through our brief lives on this shrinking and cooling cosmic sphere. We experience these yearnings in pairs: security/excitement, habit/adventure, solitude/society, sexuality/spirituality, soul/body, earth/heaven, immanent/transcendent, particular/universal, divine/human. And we are forever tempted to resolve these yearning-tensions by what the Greeks called *dichotomy*, cutting cords that should not be cut. For we lose our humanity when we try, in the interest of false simplification and stress-reduction, to live at only one end of any of these polarities. Such a cut produces, out of one tensile reality, two illusions and an untold number of controversies between partisans of the contra-illusions. TC provides one way of learning to live with the tensions and with each other in controversy.