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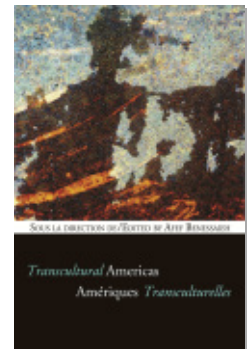
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IV

Moving Through Space and Being Moved Emotionally: Embodied Experience of Transculture¹

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I heard Rubén Martínez read a poem once at Self Help Graphic & Art in East L.A. He was standing on stage, reading from his laptop at a very fast pace in order to convey the speedy rhythm of his travels. He was propelling the audience from L.A to Mexico City, back and forth like a ping pong ball. The performance left me with a sense of thrill. So many air miles were accumulated; life was depicted as constant exaltation. That life of speed and mobility, however, came across as much more painful in another of Martínez's poem entitled "*La distancia*" (Martínez 1992: 76–7):

Querida Y:

Last night was not a second;
that millennium with you is now my life.
I will remember you often . . .
As I write this, I sit
in yet another airport lobby,

waiting. The smog hangs
 over the tarmac and the pall
 bearers lift the city up.
 I imagine the name
 of the airline changes and that
 I am on my way home.
 Or to Paris.
 Or to any impossible city like that.
 Our tropical sea still lies
 thousands of miles away (and such
 a treacherous road!), while
 a few hundred miles south,
 they wait at the border,
 readying to battle the dust
 and come north.
 I dream of walking south
 to meet them, convince them
 to return home and dream
 away the war
 (and then live the dream).
 I envision the wind before
 a deluge in El Salvador—
 that terrifying liberation.
 For now, I leave the north
 to arrive in the north.
 And you, of course, are leaving
 the south to arrive . . .
 Y, why are we always leaving
 to arrive nowhere?

Te recuerda,

R

Distance, he writes, is also about longing; it slows time between encounters with loved ones. Distance, moreover,

is about bodily pain on the “treacherous road” of migration between the south and the north; it is about hope, fear and will. Yet, conquering distance is an irresistible magnet: despite fear, longing, and pain, migrants migrate, and airport lobbies are always busy.

Indeed, mobility is a central defining character of globalization. People travel faster and more often. Migration flows are substantial, often times pendular rather than linear. Daily commutes occur on longer distances (often between cities). These multiple exchanges and encounters bring about cultural intermingling and multiple identities. Transculture is constructed through these exchanges. As I understand it, the prefix “trans” signifies traversing, going through. In contrast to the traditional concept of culture as a delimited and unified block of social homogenization, transculture emphasizes instead webs of relations; it sheds light on connections and transitions (Welsch 1999). This is why zooming in on the experience of mobility gives us a sense of how encountering new landscapes, new modes of behaviour and new values participate in constructing hybrid identities and politicized subjects.

As Martínez expresses, two types of flows generate transcultural moments: 1) bodies in traveling, migrating, and commuting spaces, and 2) affective flows generating intense emotions. This paper first discusses the relation between these two types of flows in order to reflect on the individual *lived experience of transcultural processes*. What does it mean to be mobile? How does it feel? Evolving in transcultural spaces can be thrilling, liberating or even painful. In the second part, the paper dwells on the *political consequences* of life in transcultural spaces. The focus here is twofold. First, with the help of ethnographic work with domestic workers in Los Angeles, I ask how people may transform the experience of mobility and its related emotions into progressive politics. Second, through a brief analysis of the globalized fear of terrorism, I look at how these mobility-induced emotions are manipulated. In

conclusion, the paper warns that transcultural creativity is unevenly distributed.

A) THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING TRANSCULTURAL
MOMENTS: MOBILITY AND AFFECT

Eso fue horrible para mí. Yo decía : « ¿Qué pasó? ¿Se me perdió? » Y yo llamaba a la [...]. « ¿Qué se hizo? » « Está en el otro lado. Es que no puedo pasar? ¡Ay! Dios mío. »

Me decían, tienes que, me notaban los nombres de las calles, dicen : « Te vas a hacer aquí cuando pase este calle, y jalas al timbre, y se va a parar y te bajas ».

Cierra la puerta y uno se queda a veces ¡AY! Y uno se queda ahí. ¿Qué es esto? Entonces ellos son groseros. Hay unos que son groseros.

Yo quería regresarme. ¡Regresar!

Cuando te pones shorts, oh my god! Y yo, me acostumbraba a poner shorts; porque así es! Como se dice : la cultura americana, así es. [...] Yo me siento más como ellos, como la cultura blanca, que son más tranquillos, más buena onda.

Laura² expresses fear and stress as she narrates how she crossed the US-Mexico border; Pia explains how she gathered the courage to start riding the bus in L.A.; Angelina tells how daily commutes are filled with frustrations; María remembers how she viscerally wanted to go back to Costa Rica as she first arrived to L.A.; Julia joyfully explains how she feels liberated from Mexican gendered norms when she wears shorts to jog on L.A. streets. These snapshots partly reveal the emotional texture of mobility. They speak of how it feels to move around, from intense fear to minor frustrations and exasperation, from extreme fatigue to fulfilling liberation, from suspicion to the feeling of being overwhelmed, from a feeling of membership to solitude and nostalgia.

Mobility generates emotions because it imposes numerous tasks on individuals. When moving around, one has to constantly negotiate newness. Cognitively, this means that moving involves categorizing information, making choices of itineraries, observing how it works in a new environment. Emotionally, negotiating newness means discovering the Other, being surprised by difference, managing uncertainty, fear or discomfort, its intriguing drive. Morally, negotiating newness involves openness to difference.

Mobility also entails developing skills: learning how the bus lines work, how to drive a car, how to behave on airplanes, how to buy tickets, and so on. Beyond these “expert skills,” mobility requires kinesthetic and social skills. One needs to learn how to read various landscapes and to orient oneself in new spaces. One also has to learn behavioural codes in unknown spaces. Should one push to get on the train or wait in line? Is it considered polite to look at someone in the eyes? Is it acceptable to wear shorts on the streets? Similarly, moving around requires learning how to avoid dangers in new environments (becoming streetwise).

Moving around, obviously, also entails enduring physical fatigue and absorbing sensual stimuli (heat/cold, odours, rubbing shoulders, thirst, noise, dust, etc.), while managing complex schedules and family logistics. It also prompts reflections, locating oneself in terms of identity and group membership (finding psychological benchmarks). By comparing how people are and behave in a new environment, one is repositioning one’s identity. Do I want to be part of this group (and wear shorts, for instance), or do I prefer to reject certain forms of behaviour? Finally, mobility means that one has to find ways to cope with the absence of loved ones, particularly when one is moving often and on longer distances.

These are complex tasks straining the mobile individual. They are entangled with emotions. Because they involve adjusting, learning, building self-confidence, these tasks

influence how individuals construct their identity and act socially and politically. They participate in what cultural studies call “processes of hybridization.” I find it more useful to speak more humbly of transcultural moments: “transcultural”, because the argument is that the accumulation of such sociospatial experience through mobility shapes individual identities, and “moments”, because the focus here is on fleeting and seemingly banal interactions generated as people move around (at all scales, from the daily commute to international migrations). Transcultural moments are steps in the constantly evolving construction of identities through sociospatial interactions.

Moving around, therefore, is painful, but also addictive. As Pia recalls of her first trip back to Mexico after migration to L.A.:

Entonces yo como a los 15 días, yo estaba que me quería ir, ya se había acostumbrado a levantarme y a trabajar la rutina del día y de andar movida. Y allá, pues en un pueblo no es lo mismo. Se levanta uno y todo, pero no es lo mismo que trabajar con una responsabilidad.

Pia expresses here how she quickly got accustomed to being mobile in L.A., and how she missed that rhythm and the sense of autonomy it provided her as she went back to her rural Mexican village. According to Melucci (1997), one of the greatest difficulties of living in a globalized world is learning how to reconcile internal individual rhythms with social rhythms. There is social time: regulated, increasingly rapid, predictable and linear (before, now and after). And there is internal time, which is multiple and discontinuous, multidirectional and reversible (events can be rehashed multiple times in dreams). From one moment to the other, one can perceive time differently. One can also immobilize time (shutting off from the external flow of events). For instance, when I asked Pia what she did while riding the bus, she responded:

Me gusta inventar, como que están los carros, invento movimientos que están en la calle. Siempre uno tiene la curiosidad, de que pues, ver personas que van a veces con los niños, va inventando uno. Por ejemplo, uno para y ve la Iglesia, y pues el domingo fui a misa o voy a ir a misa.

In this passage, Pia explains how she reconciles social time with her internal psychological space, using imagination and visualization, creating fictional interactions that may affect whether she decides to go to church the following Sunday. By using her imagination, she is able to cope with her fear of riding the bus and to locate herself psychologically in the flow of events. She has found ways to emotionally manage her mobility, for despite its difficulties, she would not want to cease it. Talking about how she felt migration was an act of self-affirmation, she ascribes to mobility a central role in how she constructed herself:

Después cuesta la ignorancia, y pues como lo acostumbraron a uno, como lo enseñaron a uno la educación que no le dieron, no me permite hacer todo eso ¿Verdad? Entonces ya me dijo [...] « y yo vendí los cuartos que yo tenía, los que yo tenía [...] yo reuní dinero y le dejé a ella para que les diera a comer a los niños. Y un poquito para venir conmigo en el camino.

Again and again, the women we interviewed expressed how mobility was important to their emotional well-being. Angelina, for example, explained how being on the move enabled her to emotionally cope with the absence of loved ones after her migration to L.A.:

Entonces, todos iban a trabajar, y me quedaba, porque como que todavía no sabía andar en las calles, salía y sentí que

*iba a perderme, entonces me quedaba todo el día solita.
Y de ahí venía la nostalgia, porque cuando uno no está
ocupado, empieza a pensar en la familia, los hermanos, en
los momentos felices y todo eso, entonces se pone nostálgico.*

In the next section, I ask whether emotional well-being through practices of mobility can yield potential for progressive politics. So far, I have taken mobility as a practice and focused on how individuals feel while physically moving around. Let us now shift the lens from bodies travelling, migrating or commuting in space to the affective flows passing through these bodies. Affect, as Anderson suggests, is a “transpersonal *capacity*” (Anderson 2006: 735, emphasis original). Unlike feelings which are embodied, affects are theorized as flowing between and through bodies. Influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1994), this literature states that “when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn” (Massumi, 2002: 212). The analytical focus is not on feeling individuals, but on the energy flowing as individuals enter in relation with one another and with objects. Anderson explains: “To think through affect we must untie it from a subject or object and instead attune to how affects inhabit the passage between contexts through various processes of translocal movement.” (Anderson 2006: 736). In this perspective, when someone feels fear, for instance, she is in fact feeling the passage of affect through her body. An emotion would be a way to describe such embodied feelings.

This theoretical perspective sheds light on the fact that transcultural moments are indeed generated by encounters between mobile individuals who move through space and reflect consciously on what to do, what it means for their identity, how it feels to encounter newness, but further, transcultural moments emerge from the affective energy flowing through these sociospatial interactions. Individuals unconsciously capture these affective flows, and this modifies how they feel,

their ability to act and the shape of their identity at a specific moment.

Let me illustrate this with an example from field observations on the bus in L.A. It is early morning commute; the bus goes westbound, driving many women to work in Beverly Hills and Westwood. We are exiting downtown, entering Koreatown on Wilshire Boulevard. It is impossible to advance farther. The street is blocked by young (and less young) Korean-looking people marching with Korean flags. They poured out from various cafés as the football match won by Korea ended. Cars with flags also drive around honking. The bus is immobilized. From complete silence a few minutes ago, passengers begin to talk in small groups. We hear laughter as strangers begin to sympathize with one another. Most of the passengers are of Latino origin. They do not necessarily feel joyful because Korea won a match, but they unconsciously capture the joyful energy pouring out onto the street, and transpose it inside the bus. They could empathize with the people outside. They could perfectly visualize themselves blocking the street out of joy had a Latin American country won a match. This is a fleeting transcultural moment. Will the passengers on the bus remember it consciously even just a week later? Probably not. Yet, that experience of transcultural exchange cumulates with previous ones and influences their capacity to live transculturally.

**B) PAIN AND LIBERATION: PROGRESSIVE POLITICS OR THE
MANIPULATION OF FEAR**

High mobility chains the women we met in Los Angeles. It eats up their time, drains them physically, costs money, and produces anxiety and frustrations. This was at the core of the famous battles of the Bus Riders Union (BRU), aiming to render the experience of riding a bus less difficult to the transit-dependents. At the end of the 1990s, bus stops across

the city showcased ads saying “*No somos sardinas*” as part of the campaign by the BRU.

Yet, high mobility also empowers these women. Many of them dislike their houses, as Laura described: “*Nos encontramos ratos, cucarachas, la rate enorme pasando caminando por el pasillo.*” They feel trapped in them, unable to get out.

The women we encountered on buses often spoke of their home situation in comparison with that of their employers, as they often worked in other people’s house. In one conversation, for example, a woman spoke of how her female employer managed house chores and how she spoke to her husband. This domestic worker then complained about her own husband who stays home and does not understand that she is tired and would need help in the house. She commented on how her own husband did not accept that she spoke to him the way her female employer spoke to hers. On buses, conversations revolve much around information exchange: where to get access to health care or other resources, where to buy good food products or send money back home; but also on stories of migration, on the cost of living, on the fear of being deported, on abuse by their bosses or by the police, and so on.

In all of those examples, women can construct political subjectivities; they build a critical consciousness. Laura told us many stories heard on the bus where women were not paid for cleanings they had done, or similar forms of injustices. “*Eso es una explotación,*” she concludes. The fact that they have to constantly struggle to get by is acutely perceived as unjust, particularly in comparison to the “easy life” they attribute to their employers.

Voyage and migrancy, Clifford or Bhabha would tell us, create fluid forms of subjectivities because the freshly-arrived experiences disruptions, which in turn provide her with a critical eye (Clifford, 1988; Bhabha 1994). Moving around makes you aware of other people’s suffering, while providing tools to express your own pain. Wilkinson (2005) insists that

suffering has the particularly difficult characteristic of being impossible to describe, in other words, “unshareable”. One can feel empathetic to another person’s suffering, but can never know this person’s total experience. While it is analytically impossible to describe suffering, this very dilemma serves as a “force of innovation” because it compels people to fight suffering even if it cannot be fully grasped on a cognitive level (Wilkinson 2005). In other words, the witnessing of people in suffering, whether through television images or by moving around, would cultivate the moral duty to act in order to alleviate this suffering.

In order to illustrate this argument, Wilkinson refutes various proposals stating that the repeated and accelerated presentation of human suffering in the media numbs people and makes them indifferent. For Wilkinson, to the contrary, learning about the pain of others brings about compassion. He writes:

I have sought to highlight the historical peculiarity of cultural circumstances in which we accept without question that the spectacle of human misery *should* move us to pity, and that on this basis, we *ought* to take moral responsibility for the needs of strangers in faraway lands. (Wilkinson 2005: 156, emphasis original)

The “peculiarity of cultural circumstances” mentioned by Wilkinson could be described as the “acceleration of pace [which] increases the number of such shocks and surprises” (Connolly 2000: 610). In an essay discussing Virilio’s reflections on speed (1986), Connolly argues that

[...] the contemporary accentuation of tempo in interterritorial communications, entertainment, tourism, trade, and population migration exposes numerous settled constituencies to the historical basis of what they are and

the comparative contestability of faiths and identities they have taken to be universal or incontestable. [...] the acceleration of accidents and surprise, listed by Virilio as effects of speed, can also function over time to disrupt closed models of nature, truth, and morality into which people so readily become encapsulated [...] (Connolly 2000: 597–8)

Being exposed to various situations, in sum, tends to favour what Wilkinson calls a “moral duty”, what Connolly designate as “cosmopolitanism”, or what I refer to as transcultural competence. At the core of these reflections is the idea that this urge to enter into contact with the feelings of others is not a universal characteristic of humanity, as Kant suggested. Connolly argues instead that what drives transcultural competence are a set of “regulative ideas” or “idea-feelings” that are consolidated into ethical sensibility. They tend to become real for people, but “there is no cosmic guarantee that it must be there in everyone” (Connolly 2000: 612). Yet, I would add, moving around and being exposed to the feelings of strangers inspires people to critically analyse who they are in relation to others, coming to term with their “comparative contestability” and “exploring creative lines of connection to other orientations” (Connolly 2000: 611).

Our ethnographic data constantly shows how women compared their situation and feelings with that of others they encountered on the bus and at the workplace. Not only are these acts of comparison often resulting in framing their situation as unjust, but many of these women began to engage politically. Canvassing for a neighbourhood organization, acting as health promoters, or participating in the big marches against immigration reform in 2006, are all examples of political engagement. In many ways, mobility-induced emotions have political consequences because they participate in the formation of political subjectivities.

If we look at those emotions at a larger scale, the globalized fear of terrorism condenses similar mobility-induced emotions crystallized here as the fear of the Other. It is mostly at a macro scale that mobility-induced emotions are studied. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, the political ramifications of fear, insecurity and anxiety have been treated in numerous books. Among others, Robin (2004) focuses on political philosophy, while Stearns (2006) takes a more sociological approach to how fear is being manipulated. We are used to thinking of the manipulation of fear by the media, the State, advertising companies, and religious leaders, etc. (see Klein 2008, for an example). The mechanisms through which fear is actually manipulated is however less studied.

Massumi (2006) offers an explanation based on the theory of affect described above. Exploring how the color-coded terrorist alert system works in the United States, he argues that because of its vagueness, such a system does not aim at people's cognitive abilities. Instead, an orange level alert aims at irritating people's bodies. Indeed, when the U.S. government imposes a higher level of security checks as the color-coded alert levels change, it never reveals the origins of the potential threat. A change of color remains intentionally opaque to people's rational understanding of the threat. Instead, the closer the alert level is to red, the more intense people's fear will become. Bodies react to these signs as they are attuned to the "affective modulation" designed by the U.S. government. The government knows people will react affectively to these alerts, yet they cannot predict how each person will act in response to the feeling of fear they are experimenting. Such a modulated system of manipulation, concludes Massumi, indicates that political strategists are able to work with affect and perceptive systems. They are willing to accept that by irritating bodies, rather than addressing people's rational understanding, they cannot predict where people's affective reactions will bring them. They know people will feel afraid, but they do not know how each

individual will manage this feeling. Will they be paralyzed? Will they panic? Will they obey? Will they act indifferent?

This uncertainty indicates that in order to analytically understand the political consequences of mobility-induced emotions, it remains important to observe how globalized fears are experienced individually. The analytical focus on the embodied experience of fear reveals that the political reaction to anxiety generated by globalized events is both repressive and impulsive. There is no doubt, U.S. anti-terrorist measures are curtailing civil liberties, restricting mobility, and stigmatizing the Other. These measures are operating mainly in the mode of repression. In addition, if we observe closely the scale of individual experience, such global events also serve as forces of impulsion. Let us use an example described by Robin (2003) in order to illustrate this point:

In early November 2001, while traveling to Los Angeles for an academic conference, I happened to take the shuttle train from Penn Station in New York City, where I live, to Newark Airport. It was about 3:30 on a weekday afternoon, and the train was crowded with commuters. After I found my seat, I noticed a man two rows in front of me, wearing a turban, sitting alone. For the next ten minutes, crowds of people streamed into the car. When the train finally pulled out of the station, every seat was taken—except for the one next to the man with the turban. At the Newark stop, he got up to go, and for the first time, I saw his face. He had a full beard and was sporting dark, almost aviator-style glasses. He was wearing gray dress pants, a plaid jacket, a sweater vest, and a tie. Smack in the middle of his left jacket lapel was a large button with letters curving around the top, spelling out “I am an American Sikh.” Underneath the caption flew an American flag, and underneath the flag, “God Bless America.” (Robin, 2003: 47)

In this transcultural moment, a man was compelled to make a political statement by wearing a button. He was more than compelled: he was coerced, without the direct repressive force of the police, but nevertheless coerced. He felt the urge to make this statement in order to alleviate the fear he was inciting in people on the train. Here, the encounter with the Other is dramatically transformed as globalized fears related to a world event affect people's social and bodily ability to relate. In the train, people around that man felt fear and disgust through their body, to the point that they refused to sit next to him. That man, in return, felt the intense pain and threat of being the focus of such globalized affective flows, as if his body was carrying the stigma of a world event. It is this pain that was the impulse to wear the button. This example underscores the importance of analysing the political consequences of transcultural exchanges simultaneously at the global and bodily scales. As International Relations teach us, power relations shape these transcultural exchanges. Yet, to fully understand the constraints and opportunities emerging out of these exchanges, it is also important to recognize the affective flows and feelings experienced by individuals in these transcultural moments.

Conclusion

The "American Sikh" described in Robin's example is strikingly more *transculturally competent* than the other passengers on the train who refused to sit next to him. He was able to manage his own fear and pain by making a political statement, while other passengers could not transform their feelings of fear and disgust into a creative exchange with the man. The following concluding remarks are intended as a reflection on the uneven distribution of transcultural competence. As people become more and more mobile, and as the world becomes more and more globalized, transcultural moments are exponentially multiplied. Perhaps, and this is the main message I would like

to convey in this paper, it is time to work on a more equal distribution of transcultural competence.

The notion of transcultural competence is inspired by Welsch's idea of "transcultural effectiveness" (2002). In discussing the strong magnetism exerted by Japanese art, Welsch argues that the power of great work is derived from the fact that they are able to move people of all cultural background. Some pieces of art exert a strong attraction on people that are not familiar with the cultural context in which the piece was created. Welsch explains:

As distant as those works or conceptions may be in time and space, we yet feel, strangely enough, that it is we who are at stake here. Irresistible fascination is the outset. We sense a radiation emanating from these objects: though not made for us, they seem to approach us, to address us, we are strongly attracted and even fascinated by them. They appear to bear a promise—one, perhaps, of unexpected insight or of future enrichment. In any case a promise we should respond to. They seem to bear potentials able to improve and enlarge our sensitivity, our comprehension and perhaps even our way of being. (Welsch 2002)

Such works of art, he concludes, are transculturally effective. Could we transpose this notion to people? Some people are more effective in relating to others despite distances in time and space (across cultural contexts). Welsch identifies "attraction" as the main mechanism for transcultural effectiveness, which means that one feels compelled because one can recognise oneself in the object of attraction. In order to speak to people across time and cultures, an object must be attractive: it must transmit affective flows (a "radiation") that people can sense in their bodies.

In order to transpose this idea to people, it seems more appropriate to speak of sensitivity rather than attraction.

Indeed, it seems ludicrous to posit that some people are more culturally attractive than others. Yet, it might be useful to recognize that some people are more sensitive than others to the affective flows present in transcultural encounters. In many ways, this sensitivity results from experience. The more one experiences transcultural moments, the more one becomes transculturally competent. As the domestic workers we followed in Los Angeles learn how to move around the city, they become more and more skilled in managing the emotions generated by mobility. Experience also brings them to transform their attitude towards astringing commutes: from suffering they often come to be creative with their commutes. They seize opportunities for learning, gathering information, developing friendships, politically mobilizing, etc.

In sum, I have argued here that it is important to analyze the political consequences of transcultural exchanges at the scale of globalized power relations and individual embodied experience. We know that globalized emotions such as the fear of terrorism (which is in fact a fear of the Other) are shaped by power relations. One of the common tools used by governments to increase their power over their designated enemy is the manipulation of fear. If we look closely at how governments manipulate fear (following Massumi's analysis), it becomes clear that they do so by mobilizing affective flows more than by addressing people's rational abilities. This suggests that understanding conflicts in transcultural exchanges requires attention to affect, and particularly to the individual experience of feeling affective flows traversing their bodies.

Some people are more competent than others in managing the feelings generated by encounters with the Other. Transcultural competence could thus be defined as the ability to make the most out of transcultural moments. This ability results from the development of a sensitivity to affective flows gained through the cumulative experience of transcultural exchanges. Connolly (2000) has called this the development

of “idea-feelings”, which regulates interactions with the Other. Whether at the global or bodily scale, transcultural exchanges can be painful and conflictual, but also creative and liberating. This is most visible when we look at how individuals manage the emotions experienced as they move around and live transcultural moments. Such moments appear when people experiment fleeting exchanges across differences (oftentimes as they move around), and when they are able to seize the energy liberated by affective flows. The example of domestic workers in Los Angeles illustrates how transcultural moments participate in the formation of political subjectivity and can generate pain, frustration, joy and liberation.

Transcultural moments intrinsically involve feelings and affects. They cannot be reduced to a superficial celebration of ethnic diversity. Being transculturally competent means much more than being able to impress friends with knowledge about various cultures and travels. Transcultural competence is not a matter of class (although transcultural arrogance is), but a matter of emotional experience. And experience is gained largely through mobility.

In closing, it is worth noting that some people may be incredibly transculturally arrogant, showcasing how they have witnessed “a Korean at a croissanterie ma[king] an iced cappuccino for a young Japanese boy surrounded by the East Wind snack bar and Panda Express, Fajita Flats and the Hana Grill. [... then waking up in] acupuncture-loving Santa Barbara” (Iyer 2000: 27), but they simply swirl around without *feeling* transcultural exchanges. Let me use again Rubén Martínez’s words to warn against such superficial fascination. He questions the hipness of superficial diversity:

I once lived in Mexico City, although I’m not sure.
I know I had an apartment on street [sic] called
Avenida Veracruz, in a middle-class neighbourhood
called Colonia Condesa. [...] Condesa looks a lot like

a neighbourhood in another city I also think I once lived in, the Silver Lake district of Los Angeles. [...] In either Condesa or Silver Lake, it's easy to have sex with someone of a different skin color. In both places there are a lot of people in various shades of brown in addition to the whites, as well as Asians and blacks. [...] Part of me very much wants to belong to Condesa or Silver Lake or both. They're undeniably sexy. But I'm not sure either place is substantial. Sometimes I get the feeling this paradisiacal tableau has been imagined into being by the middle class. (Martínez, 1998)

Martínez is right, such mixing is exciting but not necessarily transcultural, for transcultural spaces emerge out of shared moments of emotions, not out of the juxtaposition of ethnic attributes.

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