

Exposing Nicolescu's Hidden Third: A Re-View

Gary P. Hampson

What a delight! The genre of *The Hidden Third* already heralds the topic rather like M. C. Escher's *Drawing Hands* drawing itself. Liminality landing between prose and poetry, science and art, philosophy and spirituality, *The Hidden Third* charismatically disseminates a new renaissance transmission, one highly pertinent for contemporary times. Dramatically juxtaposing the insightful, the critical, the humorous and integrative, its 'prose poetry' parataxis fires up from the inside petit-theoretic explosions: philosophy of science profundities, lucidities of logic, critiques of civilisation, gems about God, and even ontological orgasms. Leaving the reader breathless. Re-imagined, re-generated. Mind duly sanctified.

This cosmodern powder keg is written by Basarab Nicolescu, a Romanian theoretical physicist working in Paris who, *inter alia*, founded the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research and Studies in 1987. *The Hidden Third* is William Garvin's potent English translation of the 1994 *Théorèmes Poétiques*. Sitting in reference to the three pillars of transdisciplinarity – multiple ontological levels, the logic of the included middle, and complex interdependent epistemology – it is radically transdisciplinary in nature, brazenly 'transversing' such disciplines as physics, philosophy, religion, poetry, sociology, and education.

Approach

Nicolescu's transdisciplinarity is as a bridge-building "attempt to rediscover an equilibrium between knowledge and being" (5.1). As colleague Edgar Morin has indicated, such an approach demands a new meta-dialogue between humanistic and scientific cultures – one that honours both poles, not just 'hard' science: a *paradigm of complexity* is required. As such, the epistemological challenge involves moving away from the 'tower of babel' of fragmented knowledge – not toward a uni-layered unity but rather toward complex coherences. As Julie Thompson Klein, specialist in interdisciplinarity, has indicated, philosophy, hermeneutics and education are central to this quest – fields with which *The Hidden Third* creatively engages.

Going beyond the dualistic limitations of classical (Aristotelian) logic, *The Hidden Third* resonates particularly with the transdisciplinary pillar of the logic of the included middle. In this regard, Nicolescu states: "The logic of the excluded middle is adapted to describe a single level of reality. It's therefore necessary and useful: it makes us survive. But it also prevents us from living" (10.7).

A key formal underpinning explicated by Nicolescu here is Kurt Gödel's set of incompleteness theorems. This theoretical rooting can be identified as highly significant in relation to the quest for apt global mindset change (as I have elsewhere indicated). The global context is enhanced by Nicolescu's emphasis on *in vivo* knowledge – transcending merely *in vitro* knowledge. Whilst Nicolescu does not unfortunately use *The Hidden Third* to foreground particular 'wicked problems' such as the ecological problematique including climate change – a cause nonetheless taken up by such writers as Sacha Kagan – the book nevertheless foregrounds the *structural* need for the apt transformation of global worldview from that of modernity to that of *cosmodernity*, within which such wicked problems can achieve a more fitting address.

Worldview

Nicolescu's conception of cosmodernity – a new worldview informed by quantum physics moving "from the universe-machine" (7.64) conception underpinning modernity "to a living universe" (7.64) – can be generatively contextualised in relation to neighbouring identifications. Notable

examples include David Ray Griffin's *reconstructive postmodernism*, Arran Gare's research on *cosmological postmodernism* and my conception of an *eco-logical* worldview. The significance of integral approaches – including those of Aurobindo, Gebser, and Wilber – as well as Roy Bhaskar's philosophy of critical realism should also be mentioned in this context. The complex relationship between the cosmodern and the modern is exemplified by Nicolescu's reflection that "whilst severely criticising it, I'm not against modernity. I'm for cosmodernity" (7.58). In such statements, perhaps paradoxically, Nicolescu echos the semantic complexity of the 'post' in post-modernisms.

As for the esoteric character of *The Hidden Third's* cosmodern worldview, one might say that much of the modern worldview was initially esoteric to the medieval; likewise, much of the cosmodern could be identified as esoteric to the modern; yet from *within* any particular worldview, the form of expression that might be otherwise seen as esoteric becomes identified and experienced as *exoteric*. What were once marginalised esoterica become brought to the centre, expressed, exonerated: a new exoskeleton landscape of the explained (with associated new vistas of the unexplainable).

The general point is that we are on the cusp of actualising a new type of lifeworld – a new renaissance – through aptly configuring new thinking, a new worldview, the temporal scale of which can be measured in hundreds of years as indicated by the advent of modernity following traditional/medieval worldview(s). As Nicolescu indicates, "there can be no New Renaissance without a radical change of mentality" (4.44) – one reconfiguring reason, aesthetics and spirit from the dissociated to the complexly integrated, a regeneration of renaissance ideals, a new ecology of mind. The profundity of such regenerative spiritual landing can be exemplified by such gems as: "Some say God is the ego made absolute, but it's precisely the ego that says that" (11.8); "The shortest path from the infinitely small to the infinitely large is through the infinitely conscious" (13.4), and "The Devil tells me: Go to the Devil! God tells me: Go to the Devil! Who to believe?" (13.21).

Style

Regarding *The Hidden Third's* aesthetics, its philosophical prose poetry can be understood in relation to the idea that *poetics* could form being a type of postformal evolution of the notion of formal theorising (as I have elsewhere indicated). One aspect of this is that "we need to start by setting free the imprisoned meanings of words" (4.44): a construct-aware orientation toward words for a newly oriented world. Specifically, *The Hidden Third* is written in a style which uses phrases as discreet quanta, in which phrase clusters act as kind of zen koan, *pointing out instructions* rather than the semantic flattening implicit in the "plan" view of ex-plan-ations. Sometimes paradoxical, the semantically open clusters evoke a new type of sense, a sensing forward and into, a lyrical labyrinth revealing transversal borders, a 'transpoetics' speaking new languages beyond yes and no to the yes beneath both. Particles of insight, waves of empowerment.

Questions

Within this positive frame, various questions might arise. The following three regarding involution, dialectics, and sexual metaphor are perhaps indicative.

Regarding involution, it's great that this valuable concept is firmly put on the map by Nicolescu, a concept unduly marginalised by modernity. Nonetheless, questions arise. For example, Nicolescu states, "Good is anything serving evolution; evil, anything serving involution ..." (1.21). What enables Nicolescu to contend that involution is necessarily associated with evil? Nondual spiritual traditions' interpretation of involution as the manifestation of the divine into the physical universe would surely not indicate this; neither would Gurdjieff's problematisation of the good/evil binary;

perhaps Nicolae Niculescu the physicist is referring to the materialist interpretation of involution as entropy?

Regarding dialectics, both dialectics and the hidden third are forms of non-binary thinking – a necessary habit in an apt new worldview. *The Hidden Third* makes an exceptional contribution to non-binary thinking. The potential of the notion of dialectics – including the ‘dialecticalisation’ of dialectics – suggests to me not only a generativity regarding that which is beyond the two and between the two but that which is within each of the two, too – a forever fractal complex dialectics of identity, both hidden and revealed, a post-Derridean non-dialectical dialectics: dialectics as martial art, a cosmodern Taijitu. In many ways *The Hidden Third* exudes a sensibility resonant with this understanding. So the question arises: why is this quality not be reflexively addressed in relation to the notion of dialectics?

In terms of sexual metaphor, I love Nicolae Niculescu’s general integration of the metaphorical/metaphysical use of the sexual realm, concurring that in many contexts, “asexual metaphysics merely accentuates the noise of words” (7.42). Given that the Hidden Third valorises diversity of apt perspectives, and, indeed, advances the notion of *trisexuality*, the question arises as to why a diverse approach to sexual practices does not appear to have been taken with respect to the metaphor of masturbation which The Hidden Third only identifies in a negative fashion. Could not the cosmos be conceived of as a Profound Sacred Act of Divine Masturbation?

Then again, in the spirit of the Hidden Third, might not such questions be regarded as necessary grit in the book’s oyster?

Ends-In-View

To conclude: the world urgently needs a transformation of worldview, a change of heart, a change for the better, a radical shift from late modernism to cosmodernity, a reconstructive postmodern eco-logics, complexly integrating apt spirituality, ethics, aesthetics and reason. We collectively need a wake-up call to the ecological catastrophe now in plain sight; and an awakening to our true spiritual nature. The rich portals of Nicolae Niculescu’s *The Hidden Third* help empower such a transmission. As Nicolae Niculescu concludes: “When ‘I’ embraces every cosmos with its light, it can finally say ‘I am’” (13.118).

Filled with with food for thought, this noetically vertiginous book is for academic adventurers, pilgrims of postmodern poetics, seekers of soul: a playful, controversial, compelling work bringing the outside in for the generative Other; a quest for our eyes to be opened wider toward that which is sewn into the fabric of every physical vibration: a Hidden Theosophia.