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Re-Imaging Limits

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Historically the human story has been fractious and violent, punctuated by moments of grace in which a new insight into our potential breaks through, transforming dominant assumptions and behaviour. The struggles that set the stage for all such moments of grace supply the drive to transform, to heal the wounds we inflict on ourselves, our fellow travelers and also on the world we inhabit. This is a Cosmic love story in which humanity seeks the forever unattainable goal of self and world transcendence through identification with an Other that is greater, more complete, more enduring than ourselves.

This story is played out evolutionarily as a series of identifications which we experience as sentiments that move us from the micro to the macro as consciousness of relationship expands. Thus, early hominids identified with nature, as they were immersed in the natural world, and then with their own groups, as human consciousness evolved. Then, as agrarian societies emerged and grew, people shifted to identification with tribe, village, chief, deity, caste and later city, region, religion, class, and king. Following this, with modernity and industrialisation, we find identification with nation-state, polity, ideology, and institutions; and now, as we enter a post-industrial phase, we begin to identify at a planetary level and look with growing awareness into the universe we inhabit (Bussey 2011). Yet this new phase, requiring as it does a new expression of identity, must struggle to overcome generations of cultural conditioning in which limitation was grounded in fear of the Other and responded to through forms of what Ananta Kumar Giri, in his poser, calls 'hard' identity.

Hard identity promotes a biopolitics in which *life-being* is reduced, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) shows, to static markers such as nationality, heredity, and economic status. In such a context, difference becomes the marker of the Other. It acts as a limit to the possible in any context. The challenge posed by a globalising world is to embrace this Other as an integral part of our emergent selfhood (Sardar 2005). To do so, we must re-imagine limits. Limits no longer refer to a boundary that keeps us in

and the Other out, or that defines, supports, or sustains limitations in the ontological sense. Re-imagining limits invites us to re-imagine relationship. Our limits become relational nets of sense-making in a plurivocal world (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) in which the Other is key to identity. It is in the Other that Drucilla Cornell (1992) argues we find ourselves: this Other is reciprocally part of who we are.

Understood in this way, the limit marker is in the eyes of the Other (Levinas 1998) and beyond these to the Cosmic Other, reaching to the stars. This is pointing to what Bernadette M. Baker (2007) refers to as the 'apophasis of limits' in which we encounter the unconditional as Other and discover ourselves in a tear drop! This rethinking calls, as Giri argues, for a soft or weak identity; such an identity, based on weakness and vulnerability, allows for a sense of belonging that offers us a differential and relational integration into our *humanity-to-come* as Jacques Derrida (2005) might call it. Such a possibility greatly expands the working principles upon which limited identity has been based.

Structurally, such a move calls for human institutions to shift their focus on issues of biopolitical control to considerations of neohumanist cooperation in which our *neo*-humanity, as Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar (1982) argues, is premised on relational consciousness. Cooperation calls for skills that promote what Giri calls 'weak ontology'; such ontology acknowledges internal limits to being beyond mastery. These limits he lists as 'humility, fragility, weakness and servanthood facilitating blossoming of non-sovereignty and shared sovereignties'. Such limits are based on love, not the fear-limits of the geo and socio sentiments that characterise earlier forms of human organisation (Bussey 2006). *Loving limits* acknowledge our own finitude and also that the world and our technologies are also finite.

It is this form of limitation that Ivan Illich (1973) had in mind when he described a world characterised by conviviality. For Illich, conviviality is premised on the acknowledgement of the limits faced by a voracious industrial economy in which humans are the slaves of their tools and their fears. In his analysis, the administrative systems of modernity (schooling, health-care, economics) establish fear-limits that corral people into mental and social cages. Any future worth living in must be free from such cages. The convivial society is one in which integration escapes the reductionist logic of modernity and its systems of control and moves people relationally to new forms of order that allow for soft integration in which relational ethics supplies the critical ethical stance from which to act and relate.

To cultivate such a convivial approach to identity, difference and social cooperation calls for a re-imagining of human limits. Such a

process generates a loving critical method that replaces fear, with its biopolitical paring back of life to juridical essentials, with a politics of possibility. In such a politics, identity is premised on a relational consciousness that promotes adjustment between identity markers and their spiritual, aesthetic, social, and individual functions. I feel that it is this relational logic that lies at the heart of Giri's notion of 'soft integration'.

This relational logic requires a rethinking of integration and limits and proposes identity that is not singular but collective, while retaining the subjective stance as the only possible ethical orientation on which to ground identity and becoming. For me, there is, in this imaginative task, an invitation to rethink humanity on a grand scale via the evolutionary trajectory mapped at the start of this reflection. In eschewing brittle definitions of self and Other we lay the ground work for a reintegrated neohumanity which honours difference while allowing for constantly new forms of meta-awareness to recalibrate possibility.

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