ABSTRACT. Against present trends towards the homogenization and the hegemony of one world intellectual "koine," the author underscores the richness contained in the plurality of intellectual styles, discursive paradigms and cultural configurations. He shows that all encounters encompass a tragic dimension, that of power and dependence, that cannot be neutralized by the most sensitive individual empathy. Seven rules are finally offered for guiding Western and non-Western scholars on the road towards the transnational and transcultural dialogue.

SOMMAIRE. La richesse que représente le pluralisme des styles intellectuels et la multiplicité des configurations discursives et culturelles est mise en parallèle avec l'appauvrissement qu'engendre le processus d'homogénéisation et d'hégémonie croissante d'une "koine" intellectuelle à prétention universelle. L'auteur souligne la dimension tragique qui s'inscrit dans toute rencontre, une dimension de pouvoir et de dépendance qui ne peut être annulée par les meilleures qualités individuelles d'empathie. Pour guider les scientifiques tant occidentaux que non-occidentaux sur la voie du dialogue transculturel et transnational, l'auteur présente brièvement sept règles.

"The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land"

Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1153)

For there to be a truly international dialogue in the humanities and social sciences, two kinds of boundaries have to be opened up simultaneously. First the boundaries within the Western world itself, between the different Western countries which have their own set of traditions, deeply rooted in the political, philosophical, humanistic and cultural history of each nation; second the boundaries that divide the Western world as a whole from the other nations in Asia, in Latin America and in Africa. In order to adequately understand the difficulties of contemporary dialoguing among scholars from diverse traditions, we have to become fully aware not only of different conversational styles, of specific cultural roots and turns of mind, but also of world geo-politics that give power to a few and impose dependance on others through the hegemony of a limited number of languages and the dominance of certain theories and intellectual styles.

The irreversible plurality of the main intellectual configurations in the Western countries challenge every effort of homogenization; these configura-
tions are effects of socio-historical circumstances and causes of thinking and practices which mould intellectual life of later ages in each nation. National intellectual configurations should be examined in their socio-cultural aspects, as intellectual styles which characterize whole communities sharing a common heritage, language and identity; in their philosophical and literary components, as dominant ways of thinking and expression which have been crystallized by indigenous classical authors in canonical works which serve for the socialization of new generations; and in their politico-economic dimension, as the domination of certain national cultural configurations at any one moment is largely the outcome of the struggle for power between nations. These elements converge in a web and texture which create specific configurations at the core of the practice of intellectual life in a given country and in a given era and which link successive generations of scientists and humanists to each another.

The historical barriers that handicap the participation of Third World scholars in international debates have recently been breached; voices from the inside, local experts, have entered the academic scene, articulating original discourses which challenge anthropologists, “the experts in difference.” How can someone be affected by the other? What is the spirit which favors the ultimate aim of cross-border dialogue? To enhance our appreciation for where each of us speaks from and to transcend the limits of our respective intellectual traditions, I strongly argue against present trends towards the imposition of one world intellectual koine and rather underscore the richness contained in the diversity of vocabularies, assumptions and discursive paradigms historically and contextually elaborated in different national intellectual traditions.

In reference to the remarkably diverse but convergent papers presented in this issue on “Traversing Boundaries,” I address a fundamental paradox: how can the author speak locally, using indigenous vocabulary or a national intellectual tradition and still participate in wider international debates with colleagues who speak in different styles and hold alternative paradigms?

FROM INTELLECTUAL INSULARITY TO HELLENISTIC AMALGAMATION

Three decades ago, C. Wright Mills (1959) noted in his critical overview of the state of Anglo-Saxon human sciences that thinkers as well as the population at large are usually bound by the private orbits in which they live and their vision is limited to the close-up scenes of their daily environment. Trapped and immersed in immediate locales, practitioners of human sciences have to make an intellectual shift in order to become aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own thinking and the course of world intellectual history. It was in the name of imagination rather than science that C. Wright Mills challenged the insularity of scientific thinking and proposed a model which links