

# Reflections

## Learning English with Shotaro

This story addresses the difficulties immigrant children encounter learning a new language, but also shows that they are capable of finding their own resources, through friendship, to overcome the hardship and pain of being thrust into another culture.\*

I HAVE SPOKEN ENGLISH for almost fifty years and still haven't forgotten that English isn't my first language. Even now I hesitate as I lay down this first sentence. Does it sound right in English? Is it stilted? Is it correct to say 'I have' and 'haven't' and 'isn't' in the same sentence? I honestly don't—do not, know.

It's strange and possibly absurd that I should feel this way. I speak English perfectly well. I wrote my PhD thesis in English. I think, dream, and live much of my life in the English language. 'You're from Cuba?' people say, surprised. 'But you don't have an accent.' No, I don't have an accent, though as a teenager I tried hard to imitate a British accent, because I considered it more refined than the accent I heard around me as I was growing up in Queens, New York. I spoke to my parents only in Spanish, as I

\* Earlier version of this article was published in the anthology, *How I Learned English*, edited by Tom Miller, pp. 3–7 (Washington DC: National Geographic, 2007).

do even today, because Spanish is the language in which they're most comfortable.

Mami and Papi definitely have accents, thick Cuban accents, when they speak English, and I continue to correct their pronunciation and grammatical errors, as I did as a child. English was always the public language, the language of power, competition, and progress—also the language of solitude, the language where I was totally on my own, without my parents to help me. Now I speak an English that can't be recognized as being from anywhere specific. My brother Mori, years ago, put it exactly right. What I have, he told me, is a 'college accent'. It's the English of a person who went to school, studied hard, and got good grades because she feared if she didn't, she'd be sent back to the dumb class.

No one can tell by looking at me or hearing me speak that another language burns inside me, an invisible but unquenchable flame. No one can tell I came to the English language the way a woman in another era came to her husband in an arranged marriage—trying to make the best of a relationship someone else chose for her and hoping one day she'd fall in love. I'm still waiting. . . I depend on English, I'm grateful I speak English, I wouldn't be a professor, a scholar, a traveler, a writer, if I didn't know English. But I'm not in love with English.



Birthday party in Queens, New York. Left to right: Dinah, Cora, Ruth, Grace, Shotaro, and seated, cousins Linda and Danny. Circa 1963. Photographer unknown.

My mother tongue is Spanish. This is the language I spoke as a little girl in Cuba for the first four and a half years of my life. I'm told I spoke that little girl's Spanish with a lot of spunk. They tell me I was a nonstop talker, *una cotorrita*. But after we arrived in the United States, I grew shy, silent, sullen. I have no memory of myself as a little girl speaking Spanish in Cuba. That's likely why every time I'm in Cuba and encounter a little girl letting Spanish roll off her tongue so naturally, so effortlessly, I want to yell, 'That was me!' That was me, once upon a time—before I became self-conscious about which *lengua*, which tongue, I was speaking.

When we left Cuba after the revolution and went to Israel, I'm told I became fluent in Hebrew. I

might have already known a few words, because in Havana I attended kindergarten at the Centro Israelita, a bilingual Spanish–Yiddish day school founded by Jewish immigrants who settled in Cuba in the 1920s and 1930s. But Hebrew didn't stick in our family. Leaving Israel for New York after a year, we never spoke it at home. Hebrew was the language of the liturgy, and it lost for us its connection to everyday life. Spanish became our home language, and I spoke it with my grandparents as well, not only my Ladino-speaking grandparents from Turkey, but also my Yiddish-speaking grandparents from Poland and Russia.

Just before I turned six, I was dropped into a first-grade classroom at P.S. 117 in Queens, where I was expected to survive somehow, though I was unable to utter a word of English. This was in 1962, before bilingual programs and English as a Second Language were introduced into the public school system. You sank or you swam. You learned English by osmosis, ear training, lip reading, like a baby, without any special instruction and no drop of mercy. Or you failed to learn English and you joined the dumb class where you stayed forever.

In that first-grade classroom, I vividly recall the teacher, Mrs Sarota, writing a math problem on the blackboard. Knowing the answer, I raised my hand. Mrs Sarota smiled and nodded, lifted her eyebrows. She waited, chalk in hand. I opened my mouth, but no words came out. I knew the answer, but didn't know how to say it in English. I sat there. 'Ruth,' the teacher said, 'Do you know the answer or not?' I wasn't accustomed to hearing my name spoken in English. It sounded harsh. Ugly. In my family, I'm called 'Ruti', and the two syllables are said slowly, languorously.

'Well, Ruth?' The teacher spoke my name like an insult. I tried sign

language, writing the answer in the air with my fingers. Soon the other children were giggling and pointing at me, as though I were a monkey escaped from the zoo. Ashamed, I lowered my head and pretended to disappear. I retreated into silence for the rest of the school year.

By second grade, I was in the dumb class and definitely felt I deserved to be there. Although the school claimed not to make any distinctions, as kids we knew that, for each grade, there was a dumb class made up of children who'd flunked the previous year. To be in the dumb class in second grade was a sure sign you'd gotten off to a terrible start in life. Things had to be pretty bad for a kid to flunk first grade. The teacher acted as if we were not merely dumb, but deaf as well; she repeated things and hovered over us, watching as we wrote in our notebooks, ready to pounce on our mistakes. Some of the kids in the class were slow learners, but a few were more impaired, like Grace, who had a large head and wore shoes several sizes too large and was so friendly you knew something had to be wrong with her. In those days, the dumb class was also where they put the foreign kids until they could speak and prove to the world they were actually smart and had just needed to learn English—or until they revealed that deep down they really *were* dumb.

Shotaro, a boy from Japan, was also in the dumb class because he spoke a language that wasn't English. As the only two foreign kids, Shotaro and I became close friends. His bangs were lopsided and he was a head shorter than me, so I felt protective of him. We looked at picture books together and read to each other and played tag and hopscotch during recess. Shotaro was the only boy I invited to my birthday party in second grade (my brother Mori and cousin Danny were there too,

but they didn't count). He came outfitted like a little man, in a gray suit, white shirt, and maroon tie. I wore one of my old handmade Cuban dresses that barely fit me, but which I still adored. Not long after, all the dresses from Cuba disappeared from my closet; my mother gave them to my younger cousin Linda and it pained me terribly to see her wearing them.

One of the pictures I most recall from those years, which I've since lost, is the Polaroid of a cluster of girls around an M&M-studded cake, with Shotaro and me in the middle of the group beaming from the sheer joy of standing next to each other. I think Shotaro and I learned to speak English only because of our urgent need to communicate with one another, though there existed an understanding between us, mysterious and deep, that went beyond words.

We both did well and got good at English. By the end of the school year we were sprung from the dumb class and assigned to a regular third-grade class. But Shotaro and I didn't continue together in third grade. His family decided to return to Japan, whereas for my family, it had become clear, there wasn't going to be any return to Cuba.

I was sad to see Shotaro go. He gave me a going-away present that I still store at my parents' house with other keepsakes from my childhood. It was a pair of miniature wooden male and female dolls, outfitted in matching kimonos and nested together in a silk brocade box. Maybe the dolls were intended to represent the two of us, a girl and a boy, who grew into the English language together, during a year spent in the dumb class. Neither of us spoke the other's language, so English was our common tongue—English and a faith that we weren't dumb, that what we were was dispossessed, dislocated.

RUTH BEHAR



**Ruth Behar** is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, where she is also affiliated with programs

in Women's Studies, Latina/o Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Jewish Studies. Besides her academic work she is a poet, essayist and filmmaker. Her newest book is *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (Rutgers University Press 2007). She has also written, directed, and produced a video documentary called *Adio Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey*. E-mail: rbehar(at)umich.edu.

.....  
**From knowledge to action—  
 and back again**

IN THIS PRESENTATION, I will look at the theme of our workshop—research, personal engagement and the role of objectivity in this meeting—from the perspective of hermeneutics. My creed involves the assumption that everything I say, everything I do, every artefact that I make is a creative interpretation or reinterpretation of words, roles, behaviour and stories that have been transmitted to me via several different traditions. To live as a human being in a community is to be part of a continually ongoing reinterpretation of traditions, in which you listen, receive, interpret and create something new as a variation of things made before by others.

In my childhood we used to start each new school year, and often even start every new day, by singing a hymn beginning with the words: 'Spirit of truth that speaks from above. . .'. Literally the text referred to the Holy Spirit, but in the context of the school many teachers interpreted it as symbolically refer-

ring to the spirit of knowledge and reason. The aim of the education was to guide us pupils closer to the truth, implying that the teachers had in their hands, if not the whole truth, then at least the tools we needed in order to move closer to the absolute truth. The question of objectivity was clearly not raised in that situation.

Today this understanding of learning as a one-way transmission of facts from an educator to a student is more or less passé. Today truth is regarded as being contextual, related to social, ideological and geographical conditions.

But this should not, however, lead us to the conclusion that the notion of truth can be easily forgotten. There are many situations in life where we can more or less spontaneously distinguish between what is true and what is false, between a truth and a lie, between being truthful and an act of betrayal.

How, then, should we understand the notion of truth in a workshop where the academic world meets art, focusing on activism and personal commitment? I have divided my contribution into three parts.

**1. From knowledge to action**

When we ask ourselves how knowledge and action are interrelated, I think that many of us answer that we need knowledge in order to act in an appropriate way. I take environmental issues as an example.

We need knowledge about the problems which pose a threat to our environment. We need knowledge about how we are contributing to this disastrous development in our own ways of living. We need knowledge about how we should change our behaviour and habits.

But this simplified understanding of the relation between knowledge and action risks leading to an attitude characterised as *laissez-faire*. Because knowledge is given

the absolute priority, we feel that we have to postpone our actions until we have reliable enough knowledge. But when or how do we know that we have reliable knowledge? Almost daily we read about scientific results that contradict facts we have previously taken for granted. Whom shall we listen to, when scientific results seem to be contradicting each other?

This is a problem not only for the individual, but also for politicians. They would like to have clear and undisputable facts at their disposal, when they make their decisions. Scientists, on the other hand, tend to value a continuing development of ideas, critical re-examinations of thought and disputes that inspire new ideas. In this sense scientists are much closer to artists than to politicians.

The postponement of the 'final truth' is desirable in the sense that it prevents us from falling into the trap of dogmatism or even fundamentalism. Like Moses in the desert, we are walking towards a goal that we know we will never reach. Moses was told already at an early stage that he himself would never enter the Promised Land. Still Moses continued to lead his people towards that goal. The postponement of the absolute truth is an expression of an epistemological humility that should be a characteristic trait of all our searches for knowledge.

But this necessary postponement of the absolute truth should not be used as an excuse for not acting at all, or not acting yet. If we wait for 100 per cent certainty we will never change our life styles. There will always be scientists with different opinions concerning the causes of and the solutions to threatening dangers in the environment, in the same way as there always will be different opinions about the value of a certain piece of art.

As a scientist or as an artist

you can't know for sure how your work will be received. This does not, however, prevent most of them from publishing or performing. They take the risk of letting their contribution be interpreted and debated by the community to which they belong. The value of a scientific or an artistic contribution is thus bestowed upon it by the members of its community—other scientists, artists or critics.

If I return to the question of environmental activism, this line of thought leads to the conclusion that the value of a certain deed is not dependent upon how perfect the knowledge behind the act is, but on how it is received and interpreted by others. This does not, however, imply that knowledge is of low importance, but it does mean that knowledge cannot and should not be separated from action.

## 2. From action to knowledge

'Learning by doing' may be a cliché, but as with most clichés it has a kernel of truth to it. In his classic novels, Feodor Dostoyevsky expressed the idea that love and charity may be a road towards wisdom. In his case this wisdom had to do with a fuller understanding of the mystery of God. When a human mind reaches the borders of divine mystery, it has to swallow its pride and return to humility. By loving your fellow human beings, and by sharing their misery, you will not find certainty, but you might, in moments of grace, move closer to the truth. You will become more human, and, as a consequence, more divine.

By doing things we consider to be good, and by acting together with others pursuing common goals, we will acquire knowledge that we can never take in on a purely theoretical level.

## 3. The gap between our ideals and our behaviour

Why is there a constant gap between the ideals I profess and the way I actually live? Empirical surveys have shown that citizens here in Finland would like to live in a more ecologically sustainable way than they do. This is probably something we all know already without empirical surveys, but even so, it is sad to notice this discrepancy between words and deeds, especially when you find it in your own life.

Incarnation is a central theological concept in Christianity. It means to become flesh. The *typos* for this movement from words to embodiment is the birth of Jesus Christ. God's *logos*, God's wisdom and love, became visible in one man, according to Christian theology.

In the Christian teaching the disciples of Jesus are encouraged to follow him in this movement where love becomes visible and real, becomes flesh, in a way of living characterised by compassion and a willingness to share.

This is, of course, not always the case. The gap between our faith and our deeds are witnessed and mourned already by the apostle Paul. He confesses that he does things that he wouldn't like to do, and leaves things undone that he knows would be right.

Who can save us from this pitiable state? Paul puts all his hope in God, but if we look at the question from a more mundane point of view, I would venture to put my hope in democracy.

I know that this may sound a little bit pessimistic, but I think that we need politicians that have the courage to create a legislation that enforces us to live in accordance with our own ideals. In this sense politicians can make it easier for us to be part of an incarnation, through which the ideals we profess become more visible in our daily life.

This should not be understood as a call for authoritarian leadership or some kind of 'green dictatorship'. It is democracy I am putting my hope in; a democracy which makes it possible for you to regularly vote for candidates that share your values. Neither should this be understood as a way of escaping our individual responsibilities as citizens and consumers. But when I look at my own life style, I have to admit that I fail in my daily choices over and over again. I am too lazy, too ignorant, too selfish to succeed in living in constant harmony with the environment and my fellow human beings. But I am, however, also from time to time, able to make good decisions. And I might be able to make this right decision on Election Day.

By electing a politician that is ready to challenge me and constrain me and make it easier for me to live in a more green and ecologically friendly way, I am building a fragile bridge over the gap between my ideals and my actual way of living. This is of course not the only way to build this bridge, and it is not sufficient in itself. But it is a means given to me by the democratic society; a society in need of our support, especially after the tragic events in Norway this summer.

BJÖRN VIKSTRÖM



**Björn Vikström** is a bishop in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and received a Doctorate in Theology from Åbo Akademi University. He has formerly

worked both as pastor and as a researcher. He has published books and articles on hermeneutics, interdisciplinarity, environmental ethics and postmodern ecclesiology. E-mail: [bjorn.vikstrom\(at\)evl.fi](mailto:bjorn.vikstrom(at)evl.fi).



.....

## Rethinking *Aboagora*

THE FIRST *ABOAGORA*, organised jointly by the Turku Music Festival, the Donner Institute (Åbo Akademi University) and the Department of Cultural History (University of Turku), focused on reconsidering not only what the notion of Enlightenment entails, but also on what kind of ramifications it has had over the centuries. The task was obviously overwhelming since the question of Enlightenment lies at the core of Western thought. On the other hand the theme was fruitful because it facilitated a critical discussion of the universalist undertones of the Enlightenment as well as on the Eurocentricism inherent in the idea itself. The aim of *Aboagora* was furthermore to bring the arts, humanities and sciences together, to blur categorical boundaries and stimulate discussion about the borderlines. When the Enlightenment is understood to be a particular intellectual movement of eighteenth-century Europe, emphasising the power of reason in order to advance knowledge, it can be argued that actually those social practices that have separated the arts and sciences were produced, to a large extent, by this movement. Therefore, in order to be able to bring the arts and sciences together in new ways, the heritage of the Enlightenment has to be re-examined.

*Aboagora* concentrated first and foremost on discussing the heritage of the Enlightenment. On the opening day, the sessions chaired by Yehuda Elkana and Helga Nowotny focused on rethinking the incompleteness of the Enlightenment and how its legacy could be developed still further. Yehuda Elkana spoke especially strongly in

favour of global contextualism and stressed the importance of rearranging the academic curriculum in order to make it possible to go beyond the categories emphasised by the Enlightenment. The second day brought up both the concept of culture which is closely related to the idea of enlightenment, but also the Enlightenment as a historical period. While the image of the



Correggio's *La notte*. Gemäldegalerie Dresden.

Enlightenment is often associated with Scottish, English and French developments, it is equally important to pay attention to other parts of Europe: the influence of the German *Aufklärung* was particularly distinctive in the Baltic Sea region. It is fascinating to notice how the French influences were at the same time echoed by the intellectuals of St Petersburg. The last day of *Aboagora* moved forward to consider the role of the researcher—on the one hand in relation to artistic work and on the other hand in relation to personal commitment and emotional response. *Aboagora* ended with Ruth Behar's autobiographical lecture, inspired by Astor Piazzolla

and the Argentine tango, and was highlighted by Behar's own dancing of the Finnish tango 'Siks' oon mä suruinen'.

Up to its very last minutes *Aboagora* emphasised music and sonic spheres. Still it remained a rather unarticulated point that Western culture has been highly 'scopocentric'. It can well be argued that, over the centuries, the Enlightenment itself has contributed to the ways in which our thinking employs visual signs and metaphors. Already the Bible refers to 'light' as something that is linked with understanding. The New Testament includes the famous words of Christ: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12.) The right belief is thus connected with light, and illumination, while those who do not believe are unavoidably destined to wander in the shadows. This idea became concrete as visual forms in the arts, especially in the Renaissance paintings where Christ was often depicted as the source of light. In the fictional world of the image there was no physical source for lighting, and indeed it was the face of Christ that

seemed to be the mysterious origin of the light beams which, again, were reflected on the other figures of the image. An illuminating example of this is *La notte* by Antonio da Correggio (1489–1534), showing the Holy Family in the stable. St Mary is holding her baby, Joseph is standing on the left, while angels are guarding on the upper left corner, and a view outside the stable is opening on the right. The face of the Divine Infant seems to light up the whole stable, and the brightness of his face radiates from the manger, illuminating especially the head of St Mary.

It may be suggested that the



Joseph Wright: *A Philosopher Lecturing with a Mechanical Planetary*. Derby Museum and Art Gallery.

Enlightenment concurred with the phrase 'I am the light of the world,' but the subject of the sentence, 'I,' did not refer to Christ, or to the idea of religious illumination, but to human reason, the *ego*. It was the critical reflection of the 'I' that was seen as the light of the world. This shift of emphasis can be exemplified by comparing Correggio's painting with a later image by the English artist Joseph Wright (1734–1797). His painting *A Philosopher Lecturing with a Mechanical Planetary* was completed probably in 1766 and portrays a company that is gathered around a model of the universe. Here the source of light is again invisible, or there seems to be no clear explanation for the question of where the rays of light are actually coming from. It is obvious that the company is illuminated by the model itself, by the scientific accomplishment which is

the product of human reasoning. In WRIGHT's painting, 'I' is 'the light of the world.' It is noteworthy that the contrast between light and darkness is much harsher than in Correggio's *chiaroscuro* where the shift from light to the shadows is soft. A black shadow can be seen behind the philosopher, the main character of the painting. It also seems that, in Wright's painting, the light radiates evenly in every direction, and everybody becomes 'enlightened' by the planetary model.

As this example shows, the critical mind, human thought, was depicted in visual terms in the same vein as religious conviction had been characterised for centuries. This is still true today: we describe things as *illuminating*; we *see*, *highlight* and *reflect*, and in academic discourse visual metaphors are a commonplace, as if the things we see are more central to our under-

standing than those things we only hear, smell and touch. As a conclusion, I found the way *Aboagora* blended music, the pleasures of the ear, together with academic discourse, most inspiring. Still, the obvious visual connotations of the Enlightenment were not consciously reflected upon—if I again may use an old visual metaphor. It remains to be discussed what enlightenment would mean if we deleted the idea of light, and the idea of knowledge as radiation, and replaced it with other sensory metaphors.

HANNU SALMI



Hannu Salmi is professor of cultural history at the University of Turku and the chair of the International Society for Cultural History. E-mail: hannu.salmi(at)utu.fi.



.....  
**Endnote on the In-Between**

IN THIS ISSUE of *Approaching Religion*, we have gathered a number of presentations stemming from proceedings at the art and science event *Aboagora* in August 2011. Under the heading ‘Rethinking Enlightenment’ many ideas and perspectives, convictions and hypotheses, and predictions for the future as well as analyses of the past have been presented, giving rich testimony to the discussions and artistic explorations that took place during those summer days in Turku, Finland. From the opening words of Yehuda Elkana to the closing words of Helga Nowotny, a string of fresh and inspiring pearls was composed out of the different workshops, lectures and concerts that together formed the extraordinary event. I am deeply grateful for having received the opportunity to take part in the organisation of this cultural experience, as well as the opportunity to welcome several of the speakers to publish their contributions in our journal.

Some of the *Aboagora* workshops have been thoroughly documented in this issue: especially the sessions ‘Rethinking the Notion of Culture’ and ‘Eighteenth Century Enlightenment and Its Legacy’ are richly represented. Other sessions are represented by only a single piece, such as Ruth Behar’s literary excerpt read during the workshop ‘Between Art and Research: Rethinking Professional Borderlands’ and Björn Vikström’s personal reflection, initially presented within a workshop entitled ‘Research and Personal Engagement: Rethinking Objectivity’. Nevertheless, I feel we have succeeded in catching the atmosphere and spirit of the event in this publication. As my co-organiser Hannu Salmi contends in his reflection above, however, rethinking is a process that, at this retro-

spective point in time, should be directed also towards the *Aboagora* itself, to evaluate the outcome of our discussions and find viable and interesting routes for the future.

In addition to the conventional information about schedule and practicalities, the programme booklet composed for *Aboagora* also included a collection of personal statements by the participants, giving the audience a glimpse of the personalities and values of the academic lecturers. The speakers were all asked to answer three questions:

1. Mention three words that describe what culture means to you.
2. Enlightenment: what are your immediate associations?
3. ‘Between Arts and Sciences’ is the subtitle of *Aboagora*: what do you think can be found there, in-between?

The answers to these questions proved not only amusing, but also deeply engaging and full of diversity and nuance. Among the notions most frequently used to describe culture, one finds words such as sensual, creative, human potential, colourful, curious, imagination, tradition and freedom. But also other, more challenging ideas are aired: ‘A condition for real democracy’ (Jean-Louis Fabiani); ‘Tickling humanity awake’ (Giovanni Frazzetto); ‘Home—with an open door’ (Heli Rantala). As Professor Dan Sperber concludes: ‘I see culture as an anthropologist and hence I see it everywhere. . . , in our smiles, our steps, even our dreams.’

Similarly, the immediate associations evoked by the notion of the Enlightenment show some recurring features: reason, progress, clarity, science, education, empowerment and critique—but also critical appraisals of its shortcomings, such as one-dimensional knowledge and

insensitivity. Helmi Järviluoma-Mäkelä points to recent debates within the philosophy of art, focusing on the inclusion of all the senses—feeling and understanding as well as being and knowing—into its scope. Light as the metaphor for the Enlightenment, hence, needs to be approached not only as a visual metaphor, but as a feeling, experience, taste and narrative as well. In my view, several of the contributions to this issue embody this vision.

What, then, can be found in the in-between territory where art and culture meet, the very space where *Aboagora* sought to take form? This question begets the most imaginative answers by the speakers. To mention only a few examples: ‘Life itself’ (Måns Broo); ‘A rich source of creativity that avoids either-or’ (Helga Nowotny); ‘Healthy reactions to the omnipotence of science’ (Tage Kurtén). Being in-between can double one’s chances of being understood, but it can also, as was brought forth several times during the conference, be a stressful, confused and rather lonely place. Not everything is innovative and progressive just because it is out of line with the past, but nevertheless it can also be a place for fruitful reinvention. Thus, Dan Sperber answers the question of what is to be found in the in-between accordingly: ‘Dogmatically, nothing; creatively, everything.’

The notion of the between has been a key concept within my own research into interreligious dialogue and interpersonal relations for a long time (see e.g. Illman 2010 and 2011). Academic writing is usually concerned with big words, such as understanding human nature, culture, history, life and death, justice, disease and so on. The *Aboagora* event, however, pointed to the possibility of exploring new perspectives by turning the order around and starting with a small word;

one that usually hides between the grand ones and is hardly ever noticed, a linguistic miniature that due to its timid character seldom comes into focus in the course of any lengthier analyses: the between.

In Martin Buber's understanding, interpersonal dialogue begins in the realm of the 'between': it is a relationship that is only represented in the engagement of one person with another, that is, 'between' them (Buber 2002: 9). The between cannot exist independently of the persons encountering each other: it is an opening that is unique to and reconstituted in the meeting of I and Thou. The life of dialogue is thus, following Buber, a moral question of affirming the reciprocal space of the 'between.' To its external forms, the between can be a modest space in time: the other may be met in such 'unpretentious yet significant' corners of existence as a glance of a stranger passing by in a busy street (Buber 2002: 5).

Instances of being in-between are often regarded as empty middle ground; interspaces to be covered as quickly as possible in order to get to something more important. To be in-between is experienced as an anomaly, neither this nor that. Such irregularities destroy our patterns of reality; they defy our sense of orderliness. But still it is indeed these in-betweens that actually make us human: the space of the between allows us to find our own voice and gives us the opportunity to step forward with our own perspectives on the world. Therefore, it is above all in the space of the between—messy and unstable, porous and evasive—that it is worthwhile to call oneself human. Dogmatically, there may be nothing; but creatively—even everything.

RUTH ILLMAN

Docent **Ruth Illman** is a senior researcher at the Donner Institute in Åbo, Finland. She received her doctoral degree in comparative religion from Åbo Akademi University in 2004 and has since then worked as a research fellow at Tampere Peace Research Institute and as a lecturer of Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University. She is the editor of *Approaching Religion* and editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Temenos*. Her main research interests include interreligious dialogue, peace research, philosophy of religion and Judaism. Her book *Art and Belief: Artists Engaged in Interreligious Dialogue* will be published by Equinox Publications in 2012. E-mail: ruth.illman(at)abo.fi.



### References

- Buber, Martin, 2002. 'Dialogue.' In: Martin Buber (ed.), *Between Man and Man*. 1–45. New York: Routledge. (First published in 1930.)
- Illman, Ruth, 2010. 'The Realm of the Between: Reflections on Interpersonal Relatedness.' In: Antti Laato & Pekka Lindqvist (eds), *Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times*. 13–28. Leiden: Brill.
- 2011. 'Reciprocity and Power in Philosophies of Dialogue. The Burning of a Buddhist Temple in Finland.' *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21 (1): 47–63.