



THE WANDERER BETWEEN WORLDS: MY FRIENDSHIP WITH ANTONIO

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One summer afternoon in the late 1980s, the telephone rang – I was still living near Freiburg at the time – and a student from Mexico City asked me if he could meet me and visit the Freiburg Husserl Archive. The student, Julio Beltran, reported that he works with Professor Antonio Zirión Quijano in Mexico City and told me about Antonio Zirion's dedicated efforts to promote the dissemination of the phenomenology of Husserl in Mexico and beyond in Latin America. I haven't heard anything more from this student but the encounter with him was the beginning of my friendship with Antonio.

For a long time we had only written to each other, Antonio reported to me at regular intervals about his research and his intensive work translating Husserl into Spanish. It took a few years until we first met in person on an autumn day in 1995. The occasion was a conference I had organized in October of that year at the Catholic Academy in Freiburg, dedicated to the translation of texts by Husserl and Heidegger. This conference was part of a project sponsored by the European Union with which Klaus Held and I wanted to support our colleagues in St. Petersburg and Moscow in their translation of the two phenomenological classics into Russian. The conception of this and two other conferences held in Prague and St. Petersburg in the following years was that not only colleagues from Russia should participate but also people from other countries who were involved in translating Husserl and Heidegger into their language. And, of course, Antonio was not to be missed there. At our first meeting he already awakened in me the irrepressible desire to visit this wonderful country of Mexico in the near future through his vivid stories.

But another five years passed before we met the next time. This time the occasion was a major conference of the Spanish Society of Phenomenology

founded by Professor Javier San Martín and directed for many years. The conference was organized by Javier's successor as President of the Society, Professor César Moreno Márquez, in November 2000 in Seville in a highly professional and opulent setting. It was a great pleasure to see Antonio again on this occasion, in this historic city which, as the main hub of Spanish maritime trade, had such a fateful position for its links with Latin American countries, a fact that the *Archivo General de Indias* bears witness to today.

Another nine years were to pass before we met again – but this time, in 2009, on Mexican soil! Antonio had prepared everything to the best of his ability, with his own extraordinary accuracy and casual care – the virtues of a philosophical translator, even an intrepid wanderer between worlds, who perseveringly keeps his eyes on his destination. The external occasion was a conference of the *Círculo Latinoamericano de Fenomenología*, which Antonio and his collaborators had carefully prepared down to the last detail, and which took place from September 22-25 in Morelia in the state of Michoacán – Antonio's residence and, alongside the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, his second place of activity. My wife Cornelia and I arrived at September 19 at the airport of Mexico City, where Antonio was already waiting for us.

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Then an accident happened for which I still feel embarrassed today. I had, for whatever reason, set my watch wrong before arriving at the airport, so that it was an hour slow. As a result, whenever we thought we would be on time, Antonio had already waited an hour for us. Antonio's truly noble character forbade every word of criticism, he did not even express astonishment. The consequence was that this went on for two more days and only ended when I looked at a church tower clock with horror – but by then we were already in Morelia. Antonio's serene stoicism saved the situation but my conscience continues to punish me for my carelessness at that time until today.

The fourteen days that Cornelia and I were allowed to spend in Mexico, in Morelia and Mexico City, were dreamlike for us. It already began in Mexico City, where Antonio had booked a small, very comfortable family hotel for us – very close to the quarter where he grew up and his parents lived. Although Antonio was busy organizing his big conference he took care of everything with great, completely unobtrusive consideration. He personally drove us to Morelia together with Professor Natalie Depraz and her two daughters, who came from France, showed and explained to us on the way the wonderful scenery that passed us by, and in Morelia made sure that we lacked nothing. For the time after the meeting, he had organized a course at the university in a small circle, which I held over three days on the concept of life in phenomenology, and in which Antonio participated from beginning to end.

The conference also gave the opportunity to meet again with other long-standing friends, especially from Buenos Aires Professor Julia Iribarne and Professor Graciela Walton and her husband, Professor Roberto Walton,

and Professor Luis Román Rabanaque, who had come to Morelia with his family. After we had visited the surroundings of Morelia up to Pátzcuaro and the lake of the same name with the island town of Janitzio together with our friends from Buenos Aires, Antonio took the time to show us on another day, together with his assistants Alberto García Salgado and Ignacio Quepons Ramírez, the ruins of the ceremonial center of Tzintzuntzan, the old capital of the Purépecha culture, and to spoil us richly in local restaurants. A special highlight of these days was a garden party to which Antonio and his wife Claudia invited the conference guests in their house.

A very great gift for me was the performance of the Spanish translation of my stage play *Reino de sombras, de sombras lleno, Husserl y Heidegger sobre el tiempo, la vida y la muerte* at the Teatro Ocampo in Morelia. Ignacio and Alberto had been pressuring Antonio in advance until this certainly not easy undertaking, which brought the treasury of the Philosophical Institute of the University of Morelia to the brink of ruin, could be realized. Years before, Javier San Martín had already prepared a translation of the German text, which Antonio looked through and made available to the director of the performance, Roberto Briceño. The result, Mauricio Pimentel acting as Husserl and Roberto Sosa as Heidegger, was very impressive. The performance closely followed my text and was more in keeping with my ideas than the original version performed at the time in the Freiburg City Theatre with its naturalistic stage design and the conception of a “scenic reading”. I still think back on this with great gratitude and only hope that the finances of the Philosophical Institute have meanwhile recovered from the wound I inflicted.

Three days before our departure Antonio brought us back to our hotel in Mexico City. In the two remaining days we had the opportunity to visit the huge ruin city of Teotihuacan in the north of Mexico City – the fulfillment of a long awaited dream – as well as the heart of the city with the Museo del Templo Mayor of the Mexica Tenochtitlan and the Cathedral at the Zócalo, the big central square, and on the last day the Museo Nacional de Antropología. Before that, on the day we returned to the city, there was still time to tour the grounds of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which Ignacio and his girlfriend showed us. We visited the Museum of Contemporary Art there and saw the impressive building of the Central Library created by Juan O’Gorman in the early 1950s; he also designed the extraordinary mosaic façade surrounding the building on all four sides, which depicts stages of Mexican history.

We picked Antonio up from his office and at the end of the day we went to a restaurant together. It was raining cats and dogs that night and we were the only guests. Unforgettable pleasure was offered not only by the once again excellent food but also by the unique personal ambience. The waiter, whose age could be estimated between eighty and ninety years, a very lean man with striking features and bushy, long gray eyebrows on his pale face,

served us silently with professional movements that had become somewhat shaky in the course of many years of routine. The rain drummed against the windows, and it was a bit as if a servant of Dracula had been ordered to us. The affable innkeeper, whose somewhat stocky figure, in contrast to his subordinate, announced that he was obviously a lover of his own cuisine, reported that the wine we had ordered was unfortunately not available. The boy of the restaurant had taken the key of the wine cellar with him when he left, so that he is not able to serve the kind of wine we wanted but assured us with the most innocent expression on his face that to compensate he can offer a much more expensive sort. Rarely had a visit to a restaurant been so memorable for my wife and me. A photo that shows us in a good mood also gives evidence of this remarkable evening.

As far as I remember, Antonio and I only met once again in September 2011, on the occasion of the 4th Conference of the *Organization of Phenomenological Organizations* (OPO), which was organized under the leadership of Professor Agustín Serrano de Haro in Segovia. I very much regret that it has not yet happened that Antonio was a guest in our Faculty in Prague. A consolation for this were and are the contacts with his excellent disciples: Alberto and Ignacio, Marcela Venebra, with whom I had the pleasure to exchange oikological thoughts, and Guillermo Ferrer, who is living in Germany since many years and translated one of my books into Spanish. In them, Antonio was and is always present, and I admire with what great devotion the Master dedicates himself to his students, not only philosophically and academically, but also in everyday life, as a true father would do. Antonio's deep seriousness in philosophical matters and his sober work ethic, the accuracy of the word and the never-ending patience of thought characterize his wanderings between the worlds of language and life and are reflected in the academic work of his disciples. Thus, the wonderful coincidence occurred that thanks to Antonio genuinely Husserlian virtues could awaken to new life in another cultural area, so that from there, on the shoulders of Antonio and his students, they now wander the world.