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The Question of the Other



Experience of the Other

Opening: *Picture magic*. — In his famous studies of religious rituals, which were published in 1931 under the title *The Golden Bough*, James George Frazer denounces the magic use of pictures in such a way that all kinds of otherness lapse into a sea of superstition. Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer are no less famous.¹ He writes: "Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of one's beloved. That is *obviously not* based on the belief that it will have some specific effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at satisfaction and achieves it. Or rather: it *aims* at nothing at all; we just behave this way and then we feel satisfied. One could also kiss the name of one's beloved, and here it would be clear that the name was being used as a substitute." In order to dissipate the suspicion that the savage may live in a pure fantasy world he notes: "The same savage, who stabs the picture of his enemy apparently in order to kill him, really builds his hut and carves his arrow skilfully and not in effigy." The tenor of Wittgenstein's critique is as follows: things become incomprehensible, senseless, irrational if we confuse the symbolic effects on life with real effects on nature, yielding to certain prejudices we have inherited. "What a narrow spiritual life on Frazer's part! As a result: how impossible it was for him to conceive a life different from that of the England of his time!" Through these remarks runs a common thread, leading from strange things through our practice of the strange to ethnology as a special kind of research dealing with what appears as culturally strange or alien. In all these cases we are faced with the problem of how to face otherness or alienness without taking away its sting.

The Rise of the Alien in Western History

The rise of the alien resembles the sunrise. Just like the sun it appears suddenly. At the same time it does not resemble it because, unlike the sun, whose rising we are accustomed to, the alien surprises us. It goes beyond our expectations, it is not easy to grasp, it enters unsummoned. But precisely in this odd way it does belong to our everyday life, appearing as something unfamiliar within the familiar. First, there is the law of hospitality which, applicable to strangers or foreigners in this or in that way, belongs to the basic elements of every culture. In our Western culture, the Hebraic tradition of the Bible demands a special respect for the status of the alien. The Greeks, who conferred on Zeus the epithet Ζεὺς ξένιος, i.e. the God of aliens or of guests, had numerous legal prescriptions governing the special status of all those who were not full citizens of the town.² Islamic culture, arising on the borders of deserts where travellers are more in need of the assistance of others than elsewhere, regulated the coming and going of guests in its own way. Guests may stay for three days and during this time everything is at their disposal. After that they either become integrated or they have to leave. Apart from the realm of hospitality, there is the common phenomenon of the foreign language, the *Fremdsprache*. In German we have some special expressions centred on the alien. Let me mention the behaviour of the baby, which as a rule at the age of about four months learns to discriminate between the familiar face of the mother or a motherly person to which it responds and unfamiliar faces from which it turns away. In German we call this discriminating behaviour *Fremdeln*.³ Further, there is the clinical phenomenon of alienation or *Entfremdung*, which gained an important socio-pathological significance in the writings of Karl Marx. Finally, there is the artistic method of alienation or *Verfremdung*, which Bertold Brecht made famous in the art of theatre. He learned about it from the method of *ostranenie*, introduced by the Russian formalists who for their part referred back to Aristotle. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (see III, 2-3) unusual expressions are characterised as alien (ξένον or ξενικόν). For us Germans, the poetry and the music of the Romantics is full of motifs touching on the alien. Take only Schubert's *Winter Journey*: "Fremd bin ich eingezogen, / fremd zieh ich wieder aus." "As a stranger I arrived, / as a stranger I leave again." I am quite certain

that in Eastern traditions one could see the continuation of this theme in one way or another.

But if we turn to the great Western philosophers the scene changes. By no means does the phenomenon of the alien belong to the fundamental equipment of occidental thought. For centuries we find only what I call a *relative* kind of alienness, dependent on a limited standpoint or on early phases of development. We do not find a radical kind of alienness which goes down to the root of things and cannot be derived from anything else. In Aristotelian terms: only an alien *for us* is accepted, but not an alien *in itself*. Take the overwhelming vision of the cosmos. The cosmic order encompasses everything and everybody. The cosmos is like a great house (*oikos*) overcoming the distinction between the own and the alien: after all, it is our house and we inhabit it jointly. In this way the phenomenon of the alien is domesticated, which literally means: adapted to and integrated into one's own house or home.⁴ Thus the Greek words used for the alien, i.e. ξένον or ἄλλοίον, are far from being key terms. At best we find some important, but rather eccentric, figures who are apostrophised as strange(r) (ξένος or ξένη): Diotima in the *Symposium*, the stranger from Elea in the *Sophist*, or Socrates himself at the beginning of the *Apology*.⁵ Generally speaking, all human beings have the same *logos* as their common *logos* (κοινὸς λόγος), and the more rational we are, the less alien we are to each other. However that is only half of the truth. In the 5th century B.C. the difference between Greeks and barbarians emerges. This distinction did not yet exist in Homer's epics, written in the 8th century, which came to be as canonical in Greek culture and education as the Bible or the texts of Confucius did elsewhere. In the *Iliad* Hector, fighting on the Trojan side, is not at all inferior to Achilles, the great hero on the Greek side. The barbarians, so called because they stammer incomprehensible words, are indeed alien, not on the horizontal axis as other people but on the vertical axis as inferior people. It is interesting to see that the difference between being reasonable and being barbarian arises at the same time as a strict monopolisation of the *logos* took place and the fratricidal war among Greeks was clearly distinguished from the war of extermination against barbarians (see Plato's *Republic* 470 b-c).⁶ The following centuries in Europe had their own barbarians in terms of savages,⁷ pagans, Huns, Turks, Gypsies, *vaterlandslose Gesellen*.⁸

enemies of the people, *Untermenschen* and so on. Traditions are not always edifying.

The situation we have outlined begins to change with the modern era, although this change is charged with all sorts of hesitation, delay and compromise, persisting until today. The fact that the phenomenon of the alien has finally crossed the threshold of problematization goes back to a double mutation in Western culture, a mutation in modern *rationality* on the one hand and in the role of the modern *subject* on the other hand. Reason as an all-encompassing order and the subject as the central figure are the two points of attack. Apart from that, the two maintain a strained relation with each other: reason stands for what we have in common, whereas subjectivity has at least in part to do with what belongs to me as an individual. In any case, radical alienness enters the scene only under the condition that alienness reaches the core of Being and the heart of the self. Consequently, reason or order dissipate, and the subject becomes decentred. This process has the effect that human beings will never be completely at home in the world, and that nobody can claim to be the master of his own home. There are some early signs of change, such as the Hegelian-Marxian concept of *Entfremdung*, i.e. alienation. Nevertheless, *passing through the alien* is not the same as *being provoked by the alien*. The philosophy of *Entfremdung* only flirts with the possibility of *Fremdheit*. The undermining ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are more radical. But it is only in the 20th century that the question of alienness or otherness becomes a central philosophical issue, sketched by Simmel, Benjamin, Adorno and Bloch, systematically elaborated by Husserl, finally radicalised by French phenomenologists and by those who make common cause with them. Thus the motive of alienness or otherness has become a sort of touchstone for what I call the *Verfremdung der Moderne*, i.e. a process through which modernity discovers its own fissures and abysses.⁹

Linguistic and Conceptual Shades

The alien emerges as a peculiar phenomenon which does not simply yield to the general logos of the phenomena. Linguistic observations and conceptual analyses show clearly enough that the alien is a highly complex phenomenon. In German we have the one word *fremd*

which contains different shades of meaning without disintegrating into pure homonyms. In the well-known classical and modern languages of the Western world the word *fremd* has to be translated by different words, dependent on the shade of meaning involved.

Fremd means first that which lies *outside of one's own domain* (see ξένον *externum*, *foreign*, *stranger*, *étranger*).¹⁰ As far as I can see, the Chinese word *wài*, connecting being alien with being outside, fits into this line. The contrast between inside and outside returns on the social level in terms of insiders and outsiders, of in-groups and out-groups. One could also mention the *peregrine*, derived from the Latin word *peregrinus*, which literally means "roaming through the fields (*per agros*)." This is also what the *Landstreicher* i.e. the tramp does, or the medieval *pilgrim*. In Latin a foreign word is called *vox peregrina – Wort aus der Fremde*.¹¹ From the world of music we know the *Peregrina-Lieder*, composed by Hugo Wolf. They go back to a series of poems which the Swabian poet Eduard Mörike, fully bewildered and embarrassed, wrote about a foreign girl, a *Mädchen aus der Fremde*. As we can see, being outside or coming from the outside is not only an issue for police stations and immigration offices, although it is never free from political connotations.

The word *fremd* means secondly everything *which belongs to others* (see ἄλλότριον, *alienum*, *alien*, *ajeno*). This second meaning opens a field of questions that is no smaller than the previous one, revolving around problems like having something, taking into possession, being the individual or collective owner of property. The dimension of having, which stands in contrast with the dimensions of being or doing, is deeply rooted in our bodily dispositions. Being at hand presupposes hands which grasp and seize, sometimes clinging to what they touch. But the states of having are also embedded in institutions of property. They are based on economics, politics and law, and they are interrupted by gestures of giving which pass beyond the symmetry of exchange. The concrete forms of possession and ownership find their echo in general ontological features. The *property* somebody has acquired is extended to qualities, ascribed to persons as well as to things. Whereas the Latin root word *proprietas* is related to *proprie* (= near by), which has a local basis, in German *Eigentum*, *Eigentümlichkeit* and even *Eigentlichkeit* are more directly connected with a process of *Aneignung* (appropriation). The process of appropriation reaches in Hegel the heights of the Spirit, passing

through all kinds of otherness, but ultimately returning to itself, thanks to the cunning of dialectic reason. We will later see to what extent the experience of Otherness is overshadowed by attempts of appropriation.

But *fremd* has yet another meaning. It means, thirdly, that *which strikes us as heterogeneous, as fremdartig* (see ξένον, *strange, étrange*). This last shade of alienness evokes in particular the very experience by which something appears as alien, breaking up the "community of genera," the κοινωμία τῶν γενῶν (see Plato's *Sophist* 250 d ff.), evoking "another genus" and generating feelings of astonishment, of perplexity, of bewilderment, of anxiety. Philosophers would be more attentive to the phenomenon of the alien if they took astonishment or wonder not merely as the first step towards wisdom or knowledge, but as the initiation into "another state" (Musil) that we will never leave behind. At this point philosophy crosses paths with ethnology as a specific science of the alien, which has, however, its own burdens.

The Same, the Self and the Ambiguity of Otherness

To begin we have distinguished between three aspects of alienness which can be summarized as the aspects of *place, property, and manner*. Now it seems that these different aspects do not have the same weight. The first appears to be decisive, not only in order to grasp the phenomenon as a whole, but also in order to discover the radicalness of the alienness we have in mind.

This pre-eminence becomes obvious as soon as we confront the special phenomenon of the *alien* with the category of the *other*, one of the most traditional forms of ontology. What we encounter as alien is not simply something other or different. If we continue using one and the same term, speaking in both cases of "the other" or of "l'autre," as the French do,¹² the term otherness becomes ambiguous. Without trying to prescribe a general use of language, I myself prefer to cultivate a difference between *Andersheit* and *Fremdheit*, which is quite common in German¹³ but not in English. Therefore I shall frequently use the more current term "otherness" when speaking of alienness, but in any case it should be clear what we are speaking about. Otherwise all our reflections will become confused or, even worse, they will lead back to the philosophical shortcomings we want to overcome.

The difference between the two forms of otherness comes out clearly when we consider what the opposite to each type of otherness is and how the two oppositions are formed. As we will see, the genealogy and, at the same time, the topology of alienness differs considerably from that of simple otherness. Otherness, first analysed in Plato's *Sophist*, comes about through a process of delimitation (*Abgrenzung*) which opposes the *same* (ταυτόν, *idem*) to the other (ἕτερον, *aliud*). When distinguishing between apple and pear, between table and bed, nobody would claim that the one is alien or foreign to the other. The one is simply different from the other, it is what the other is not. The relational proposition "A is not B" can always be reversed to yield "B is not A." From the viewpoint of a "third" party who draws the distinction, both sides are at the same distance, just as in the case of the judge or the arbitrator who makes a neutral decision, standing above the parties involved. The alien, in contrast, does not arise from a mere process of delimitation. It emerges from a process which is realised simultaneously as an inclusion (*Eingrenzung*) and an exclusion (*Ausgrenzung*). The alien is not opposed to the same, rather it refers to the *Self* (αὐτός, *ipse*), to myself or to ourselves, including the "sphere of ownness" (see Hua I, § 44) from which it escapes. What is alien does not simply appear different, rather it arises from elsewhere. The sphere of alienness is separated from my sphere of ownness by a threshold, as is the case for sleep and wakefulness, health and sickness, age and youth, and no one ever stands on both sides of the threshold at the same time. This also holds true for the difference between human beings and animals or for the difference between genders and between cultures. There is no "third man" necessary to differentiate the male from the female, since male beings distinguish *themselves* from female beings, and similarly female beings from male beings. Nor is there a cultural arbitrator to divide European and Far Eastern cultures from the outside, since Europeans must have distinguished *themselves* from Asians before such a division or comparison can be made.

Moreover there are many historically and culturally diverse ways of distinguishing oneself from the other. As far as the Western world is concerned, we have already mentioned the rather aggressive exclusion of the so-called barbarians and their followers, and we have pointed out the fact that the Greek manner of seeing things in black and white occurs rather late, due to a certain monopolisation of the

"logos." The isolation of Japanese culture from all foreign influence, which lasted for two centuries up until the modernisation efforts during the Meiji period, belongs on a completely different page of history. On yet another page appears life under Turkish rule in the south-east part of Europe, something that has had an effect up until the recent war in the Balkans. There is no "alien" as such, there are rather different styles of alienness or otherness. Otherness has an occasional character. As Husserl would say, it is relative to changing standpoints. A placeless "alien in general" would resemble a "left side in general" — a monstrous idea, confusing place indications with conceptual determinations.

We may conclude that the distinction between the Self and the Other, between ownness and alienness, cannot be reduced to two terms. Rather it refers to two different *topoi*. The experience of the Other cannot be included in any ontology whatsoever, as an ontology would subordinate Where-questions to What-questions; on the contrary, it requires a new kind of topology or, when we include the descriptive part, a new kind of topography.

Alienness as Incarnate Absence

Moreover, the alien's place is a peculiar place. It resists any attempt to insert it into a local grid which would be accessible to everyone; it can only be reached by crossing a certain threshold. It was Husserl who put the question of the otherness of the Other in a new and radical way, and who at once gave it a paradoxical turn. In his *Cartesian Meditations*, which go back to his Sorbonne Lectures of 1929, he characterises the experience of the Other as the "verifiable accessibility of what is originally inaccessible" (Hua I, 144, Engl. 114). This definition shows some remarkable aspects.

First, the alien is not defined by what it is. An ontological kind of question would presuppose that the alien is embedded in some essential structure that can be known in advance. Nor is the question of the other reduced to the question of how to know it. To ask how we gain knowledge of the other would still presuppose too much, namely a pure fact we know or do not know. On the contrary, to define the alien by way of its accessibility means that the path of approach pertains to its very being. It is what it is in appearing in this or that way. In other words, we are confronted with a

phenomenology of the other whose *logos* is drawn from the phenomenon itself.

Secondly, the paradoxical definition, which combines possibility and impossibility in a peculiar way, points to the fact that alienness has nothing to do with mere lack or deficiency — as if the alien were something not yet or no longer known, but waiting to be known. On the contrary, absence, distance or inaccessibility constitute alienness or otherness as such.¹⁴ In this regard the phenomenon of alienness resembles the past which cannot be grasped in any other way than by its after-effects or by recollection. The alien does not simply dwell elsewhere, it reveals itself as an "original of the elsewhere" (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, p. 308, Engl. p. 254), as a form of *atopia*, quite in line with Plato who in his *Symposium* uses Alcibiades' voice to describe Socrates as an *atopos* — as somebody strange and placeless. Whoever or whatever appears as alien is never completely in place.

We shall now enter into different dimensions of the alien, each of them leading to specific problems which will be further deepened in the following lectures.

My Own and the Other's Alienness

First, the alien does not simply emerge outside of myself, it already appears within myself and within ourselves in terms of an intra-subjective and intra-cultural otherness. There is not just another or a second I, an *alter ego*, but rather, as Rimbaud puts it, we must concede: "I is another" (*Je est un autre*). The *I* is not a superior person who, at least for a certain time, presides and governs speech, holding the title of the speaking subject. From the very beginning of speech I speak and am spoken to at once, exactly as indicated by the agrammatical twist of Rimbaud's saying.¹⁵ Let us give some examples. As a being that is born I find myself living in a world that I did not create. I bear names that I received from others, primarily the "first name," the "given name" or *Rufname* (in Chinese: *ming* or *naming* = literally milk name) which we directly owe to others, secondly the "surname" or "family name" (in Chinese *xing*) which has its origin in the chain of generations; and as we know the series of name-giving does not stop there. Further, I discover myself by and in the Other's eyes as I do in the looking-glass, which is, so to speak, a glass looking back at me. In this way I find myself marked by a chasm which

prevents the person who says *I* or *je* from coinciding with the spoken *me* or *moi*. Descartes could have discovered this if he had paid more attention to the saying of the *cogito* and not only to being and knowing it. The contextuality of the *I*, which is never fully individualised and always bears features of a nameless no one (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, p. 299, Engl. p. 246), comes to light better in languages like Japanese where personal pronouns show a greater variability than in our Western languages and where sentences are less personalised. Our languages are much more person-centred and so it is hard to find equivalents for such a Japanese sequence as: *nani shiteruno* (literally: "What doing?") — *ongaku o kitterundayo* (literally: "Listening to music"). Things are similar in Chinese, where we find sentences such as *bu gan* (literally: "not dare"), which leaves it open who at what time and in what way does not dare. The German Sinologist Georg von der Gabelentz, from whose Chinese Grammar (1960, p. 118) I take this example, explicitly warns against personalising something which displays impersonal features, and Nietzsche also mocks our mania for assuming that wherever there is a deed there must be a doer (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, aph. 17, KSA, vol. 5, p. 31). But is it really the case that in such cases we are always confronted with a deed, as the grammatical form of the active verbs suggests? When Lichtenberg advises us to say "it thinks" (*es denkt*) as we say in German "it is lightning" (*es blitzt*) and when other writers heed this advice (see below p. 43), they question the overly simple assumption that everything occurring *to me* is caused *by me* — as if we were the master of every idea that comes into our minds. Otherness originates in ourselves; it comes upon us at home. I call this dimension of alienness *ecstatic alienness*, referring to the fact that somebody is or gets outside of himself. This reminds us of Plato's *Phaedrus* (249 c) where the *mania* of *eros* is presented as a sort of ecstasy: the lover steps out the customs of his ordinary life. One may also mention the motive of "ecstasis," related to Heidegger's concept of "ec-sistence" (see Kwan 1995, p. 269 f.), but it makes a considerable difference whether this sort of "out-boundness" (*ibid.*) remains within the hermeneutic circle circumscribing my own possibilities, or whether it goes back to an experience of the alien which starts from elsewhere.

This may be illustrated by a famous haiku written by the itinerant Japanese poet Basho: "Living in Kyoto / at the call of the cuckoo / I

long for Kyoto." The call of the bird may be very familiar, nevertheless it can startle us out of what is common or ordinary. It may do this time after time, as long as we are ready to be surprised, listening to the echo of absent sounds or voices in what is present. Or to quote from Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, one of the rare examples of explicitly intercultural borderline poetry: "Unmöglich scheint immer die Rose, unbegreiflich die Nachtigall" i.e. "The rose always seems impossible, the nightingale inconceivable." Someone who disregards his or her own otherness finds only the same things and the same self everywhere, no matter how many countries and seas are crossed.

If we now turn to the alienness of the Other, we find something which seems to be much easier to accept. But what does this really mean? Let us again start with a Cartesian story. In the second of his *Meditations* the philosopher presents himself, sitting in his armchair, thinking and doubting. He imagines the case that hats and clothes pass outside before his window, and he wonders how he can find out whether these are not mere dummies but living people like himself. What is interesting for us is not so much the arguments the philosopher gives, but the sheer assumption that the existence of the Other depends on my judgement, as if I were a policeman before whom others have to prove their identity. What is dubious from the beginning is the basic presumption that my gaze out of the window precedes the Other's gaze from outside the window. This kind of philosophy squares with Alberti's theory of painting which compares the look at the canvas with a look through the window. However assuming that there are others like me who only complement my position in the world, and that they do this in terms of an *alter ego* presupposing my own ego as the *first ego*, is far from all our experience of the Other; it is a mere construct. Provided that I experience the Other in terms of a lived and incarnate absence, I feel myself seen by the Other before I see him or her, I feel myself spoken to before addressing him or her, I feel myself seized by the desire of the Other before seeking him or her. The Other's gaze, voice and desire constitute the very event of becoming visible, audible or desirable, and this event exceeds everything that can be seen, heard or striven for. As Paul suggests, the Other is a sort of double, the shadow of myself, too close to be avoided, too remote to be grasped (see below pp. 47, 76). I call this kind of alienness *duplicative alienness*.

This further kind of alienness is again given poetic expression in Goethe's *Divan*. In his poem *Gingko Biloba* Goethe takes the split leaf of this time-honoured Eastern temple tree as an example of the lover and the poet doubling himself in the Other: "That I am one and two."

Presupposing that we distinguish between the otherness of oneself and that of others, one may ask which comes first. My answer would be: neither of them is first. If I become myself only by being touched by the Other and responding to his or her appeal, the two dimensions intersect: I am outside of myself precisely in being duplicated by the Other, and I am duplicated precisely in getting outside of myself. More about this will be said in the following lectures on responsivity and our bodily experience.

Alienness Outside Order and Below Order

A further dimension of alienness arises from the web or network of order. By order we mean certain dispositions of things, corresponding to certain connections of ideas, both subject to certain rules. The Greeks called order *cosmos*, which has a connotation of beauty, or *taxis* which has a military connotation, referring to the formation of troops on the battlefield. The meaning of order still remains double-edged, oscillating between disposition and command. The German word *Anordnung* means both. But for classical Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle order was mainly rooted in the nature of things, not unlike the ideas of Confucian ethics. Greek cosmology was integrated into the Jewish-Christian vision of a created order by Augustine, the author of a book specifically on order (*De ordine*), with the result that the order of things was now sustained by divine commands. In contrast the modern concept of order, which emerged at the time of Descartes and Hobbes, is deeply marked by contingency. Things are what they are, human beings are who they are, but the course of things and human affairs could be to some extent different. Assuming that there is more that is possible than what actually becomes real does not mean that everything is possible. Ulrich, the protagonist of Musil's *Man without Qualities*, puts this in theological terms. He gives Leibniz a slap, presuming that God would prefer to speak of his world in the *conjunctivus potentialis*: "God makes the world, thinking it could just as well be different" (1978,

p. 19). This combination of creativity and contingency finds a distant echo in the motto which the Chinese painter Liu Guo Song uses, struggling with a certain traditionalism for which "learning is like building a pyramid." The motto is: "To be different before being good."¹⁶ Or should we say: "To be different in being good"? In any case, what is at stake here can be put quite well in phenomenological terms: something appears *as something, as somebody*, but in such a way that it appears in this way *rather than in another*. This "rather"¹⁷ has to be connected with something like a principle of insufficient reason, because every order which could be other than it is turns out to be selective and exclusive. As Nietzsche points out, every process of ordering can be characterised as a process of "equalising what is not equal."¹⁸ The surplus of otherness or of heterogeneity which exceeds the given order may be called *extraordinary alienness*.

But alienness is not only to be encountered beyond the given order as its other side, we also find it on this side of order. Whatever or whoever is *put in order* without previously *being in order*¹⁹ crosses a threshold, once emerging and then sinking back. This happens in processes such as awakening and falling asleep or being born and dying, which always have something uncanny about them.²⁰ Such threshold experiences, traditionally accompanied by specific rituals of passage, pertain to the pathetic background of our experience. The type of alienness which characterises these infra-ordinal experiences, which all take place either on this side or on the other side of a threshold, may be called *liminal alienness*. This sort of alienness is represented by mythical images such as *chaos* (i.e. the yawning abyss), *tohubohu* (i.e. confusion, pêle-mêle, *Durcheinander*) or the *raw or rude* (i.e. the unformed). Instead of remaining caught in the alternative of either rationalising the sphere of myth or leaving it to pure esoteric trends, we should direct our attention to the zones of the chaotic which constitute the margins of and the holes in our ordinary life. Even Husserl, whom nobody would suspect of being an irrationalist, takes disorder (*Unordnung*) as a primary phenomenon (*Urphänomen*) (Hua XI, 134) i.e. not as the negation of order but as its birth-place. There are many motifs such as the abyss of freedom, evoked by Schelling, Kierkegaard and Heidegger; the nightly confusion of our dreams, interpreted by Freud as a mighty imagery; the positive indeterminacy of the open horizons of our experience, explored by Husserl; the vague experience which has found its

proper elaboration in terms of a Fuzzy Logic, or chaos theory, which relies on incalculable shifts that interrupt our calculations.²¹ Both limit-states, the one preceding order and the other exceeding it, touch each other, with the effect that extraordinary alienness has its infra-ordinary roots. The path from the *mythos* to the *logos* cannot be reversed, but there are cross-roads and transfer-points through which alienness continues to invade reason and order.

Ways of Appropriation

It would be a great illusion to expect that one day otherness or alienness will bloom like a thousand flowers. Throughout the course of our history we have come across a resistance to alienness, and this resistance does indeed have certain features in common with the type of resistance that psychoanalysis struggles with. The experience of the Other largely coincides with the history of its appropriation. It has often been claimed that Western thought and practice has to be characterised as an attempt to appropriate and dominate the world. Thus, at the beginning of the modern era Descartes proclaims in his *Discours* (AT VI, 62) that human beings should become "masters and owners of nature," and this inevitably includes the mastering of others and of ourselves. Similarly, according to Locke, it is labour that gives a "right of property," extending from one's own person to the work of our hands and changing nature from a "common mother" into a supplier of "the almost worthless materials" (*The Second Treatise of Government*, V).

The process of appropriation is based on what C. B. Macpherson (1962) has called "possessive individualism." This involves the atomisation of the world into individuals, and from everyone's struggle for self-preservation arises a strong barrier between the spheres of oneness and alienness. Now appropriation is realised by different forms of centrism. First there is a kind of *egocentrism* that reduces the alien to the own. The other appears as my double (*alter ego*), as a variation or extension of the own. The well-known method of empathy presupposes that I have something of my own that I can put into the other's soul or mind. This sort of egocentrism, centred on the ego and its own sphere, is complemented by a *logocentrism* centred on the logos as a set of common goals or rules, reducing the alien to the common. In this respect the own and the alien are

nothing more than parts of a whole or cases of a rule. Subjectivity is overcome by transsubjectivity, which leaves no real room for intersubjectivity. *Ethnocentrism*, centred on the "we" of one's own group, tribe, nation or culture, can be taken as a collective form of egocentrism, but in its specific forms, especially in the form of *eurocentrism*, it should be interpreted as a mixture of ego- and logocentrism.²² When we refer to Europe, we often do so in a particular way, for we do not consider and defend it as one culture among others, which would be completely legitimate, but as the incarnation or vanguard of mankind. What does not fit into the scheme of great Reason, true Faith or real Progress is marginalised or, ultimately, eliminated. Thus the figures of the wild, the child, the fool, or the animal are heterogeneous figures, populating the borderlines of an all-encompassing or all-regulating reason. The history of crusades, of colonisation and missions could not have been what it was, namely a mixture of ignorance, curiosity, arrogance and good will, without such a fixed idea propagating the theme of the appropriation of the world.

At present, there are many signs indicating that this process of appropriation, so typical of our Western civilisation, has come to a dead-end. Egocentrism has been increasingly undermined by a *decentring* of the individual and the collective ego. I shall never be able to say in a complete way what or who I am. There are always voices behind me of which I cannot take possession. The place from which I speak is always displaced; I am here and elsewhere, and that means there is no simple centre of speech. Similar things could be said about any attempt to feel completely at home in one's own tribe or nation. Recent forms of nationalism or tribalism are, at best, to be interpreted as filling up a vacuum of sense or as an inappropriate reaction against various forms of over-universalism. With regard to the process of logocentrism, according to Foucault and others we are confronted with a *dispersion* of reason. Reason is dissipated into rationalities, into forms and into worlds of life, which are not subject to one and the same standard and paradigm. There are heterogeneous and incompatible orders that cannot be realised simultaneously.

Does this mean that we are left with nothing but differences and pluralities? If this were true we would stagger from one extreme into the other. But considering the fact that the own is what it is only in

contrast to the alien, we become aware that both originate from one and the same process of *differentiation*. In the social field, this process takes different forms and reaches different levels. In Husserl's words we can speak of an *Ineinander*, an *inside each other*, and in the words of the German sociologist Norbert Elias or Merleau-Ponty we may speak of a *Geflecht* and of an *entrelacs* or *entrelacement*: an *intertwining* of the own and the alien.²³ All that leaves behind any form of ontological or sociological atomism. Atomism may be the result of social processes of over-individualisation, but it will never be the starting point. But instead of going into the details of a general theory of social order, I prefer to take a look at the work of those people whose task it is to come to terms with the alien: I mean the ethnologists.

The Paradox of Xenology

Let us go back to an earlier step of our reflections. If it is true that experience of the other means "accessibility of what is originally inaccessible," how can we make it accessible without diminishing and abolishing its alienness? To claim that every appropriation is limited because of the open horizons of experience and understanding will not suffice to break or stop the process of appropriation. Even in this case the alien would be only relatively alien, as something which has not yet been given or understood, but is awaiting givenness or understanding. Phenomenological experience and hermeneutic understanding, although each directed towards the other, remain ambiguous as long as they cling to a logos encompassing both — the own and the alien.

Ethnology as an empirical science is confronted with this problem in an even sharper sense. If every science consists in determining what is undetermined, in explaining and understanding what cannot be explained or understood, then ethnology as the science of the alien would be a science that tends towards its own abolishment. The more it succeeded, the more it would cancel itself, losing itself by losing its object. This is so because a determined, explained or understood alien would cease to be alien. The alien would vanish. This is what I call the paradox of a science of the alien.

The dilemma of science working against its own project may be the reason why, since Rousseau's days, ethnology has been accompanied by a certain uneasiness or even by a sort of guilty

conscience. The dilemma is part of every kind of ethnology that preserves its philosophical impulse, questioning the other or the alien rather than only collecting strange and exotic things. It is not surprising to see that a certain shift has taken place recently within the field of ethnology.²⁴ This can be clearly shown by considering a certain tension within the work of Lévi-Strauss, the most important ethnologist of our time.

In Lévi-Strauss' work we find two contrasting trends. On the one hand ethnology is practised as a *science of the universal* in terms of *transcultural* structures and codes, reducing the alien to a preliminary form of alienness which, in the long run, will turn out to be a pure variant of invariant rules and structures. But on the other hand, ethnology retains the paradoxical form of a *science of the alien* based on the experience of the other, and understanding the alien as an *intercultural* phenomenon that changes from epoch to epoch, from region to region. Thus Lévi-Strauss characterises ethnology by a movement of *détachement* and *dépaysement*, which comes close to the phenomenological *epoché*, inhibiting the presumptions of one's own culture (see *Structural Anthropology* II, ch. 2). In the same context he quotes from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1986, p. 260) in which the author writes: "When one proposes to study men, one has to look close by, but in order to study *man* one has to learn to cast one's glance far."²⁵ The ethnological view allows us to see ourselves from a distance, from outside.

This has as its consequence a *doubling* and *multiplication* of ethnology. As the French ethnologist Marc Augé (1989) remarks, first, ethnology is split into an ethnology of the other (allo-ethnology) and an ethnology of ourselves (auto-ethnology). But the latter can once again be multiplied into an ethnology exercised *by ourselves or by the other*. As Husserl already presumes, "for myself I am also a stranger for those who are strangers for me" (Hua XV, 635). Thus we can find ethnological studies of Western culture practised by Chinese or African people, breaking the Western monopoly. There is room for more than just one science of the alien, because the concrete forms of alienness differ from each other like the foreignness of foreign languages differs from one language to another. The different forms of ethnology are something like the prolongation of two gazes which cross each other but do not converge. You will never catch sight of me where I see you and

vice-versa — I will never catch sight of you where you see me. In a related sense, the science of the alien is an occasional science relative to the standpoint of the investigator in the same way that the so-called occasional expressions such as “I,” “you,” “here,” and “now” refer to the speaker’s situation.

But if it is true that the different ways of looking at the other and the different investigations of the other do not converge and do not lead to a universal consensus, how is it possible that we nevertheless have intercourse with each other, living in a common world? How is it possible to understand the other “without sacrificing him to our own logic or our own logic to him”? It is Merleau-Ponty who poses this question in his paper “From Mauss to Lévi-Strauss” (in *Signes* 1960, p. 144). He answers the question by going back to a specific form of ethnological experience that is capable of testing the self through others and others through ourselves. The ethnologist is able to have this experience because there is a “wild region of himself which is not invested in its own culture and by which he communicates with the others” (*ibid.*, p. 151). If we were completely at home in our own culture, the other would remain completely outside of it; there would not be any threshold between our own world and the alien world. A threshold, that is, as a place of passage or transition that we cross but do not surpass in a definitive way.

The same problem was articulated by Lévi-Strauss in one of his last publications. At a conference on the topic of “The place of Japanese culture in the world” held in Kyoto in 1988 (published 1990 in a Japanese journal), Lévi-Strauss starts out from a certain incommensurability of cultures. This leads him to the dilemma that we have no common criteria for judging foreign cultures because either we take them from our own culture, breaching the rules of objectivity, or we take them from the foreign culture, giving up our own standards. Faced with this dilemma, Lévi-Strauss invokes the attraction (and, we should add, the repulsion) of the other culture: the invitation, incitation or appeal to which the ethnologist’s look responds and which initiates his research without being integrated into its results. This kind of attraction is the intercultural and also the ethnological phenomenon *par excellence*. Renouncing this phenomenon means renouncing the ethnological experience from which every science of the alien has to start. This science escapes from its self-dissolution only if the alien is more than something not

yet known or understood. But what is this “more” that attracts or repels us, what does it mean? What kind of *logos* might be capable of doing justice to it?

The Question of the Other

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