

61. Experiencing Strangeness.

Meaning Perspectives in Encountering ‚Aliens‘.

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Experiencing Strangeness

Meaning Perspectives in Encountering „Aliens“

Pathways Towards Global Thinking

The European patterns of discovering and experiencing the world's foreignness have lost much of their innocent self-certainty. Instead, these "modes of experiencing foreignness" now begin to reveal the ways in which, in the course of our cultural history, we have learned to treat our own and others' difference: by spatial expansion, by mental incorporation, by superimposing our own conception upon the world, and by subordinating other realms of experience and traditions to the perspectivity of our own historiography.

In the face of the precarious global situation into which all of humanity is currently sliding, we can no longer afford such blind ethnocentrism. Challenged by multifarious hazards, our "spaceship Earth" has proven to be far less inexhaustible than it appeared at the onset of human encroachment into the wilderness of an external nature. As cohabitants in an increasingly limited world, we are confronted with the fact that the globe's continents, religions and spheres of life interconnect in an ever-tighter web of mutual dependencies. In the process, remote contexts of life are being pressed into an ever more complex mosaic, bringing together for the first time what was mentally and historically distanced. Foreignness, then, less and less frequently represents an exclusively spatial tension. It appears as a potentially conflictual contemporaneity of different contexts of meaning, between which often lies an unbridgeable historical distance. The spheres of our lives engender ever more numerous areas of overlap and so foreignness becomes to a relationships that intensifies through proximity. Only through direct contact on a personal, social, political, economic or cultural level do we become sensitized for the significance of incompatible „time structures“. This means that a universe of meaning is dependent on its individual context and rhythm of development, from which the respective exterior world is constituted and is ascribed its own specific meaning. Each autonomous system of meaning - be it an individual person, a social group, an institution or a cultural entity - thus possesses its own peculiar past, present, and future. For this reason, they are foreign to each other first of all in their "temporality": they exist in diverging times of their own, with the consequence that, in contact with each other, their divergent histories interlock, in a "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous". This in particular lends our development in world history a novel kind of tension. Foreignness increasingly develops into a "temporal problem" involving a contemporaneity of divergent presents.

Stressful Processes of Integration

What currently may be studied on a reduced scale in the process of German unification and more comprehensively in European dimensions also arises on a worldwide scale: processes of integration inevitably generate painful areas of friction. An external interlocking of various perspectives reinforces the tension gradient between previously distinct spheres of experience and massively confronts what was previously set apart or inaccessible. Thus the development towards overarching contexts of experience in no way creates greater unity, uniformity, or universal accord, but rather to an increase and intensification of rifts between what is perceived as "one's own" and what is experienced as "different in kind". Efforts at understanding thus lead to more intense confrontations with "concrete foreignness" than was the case in times when foreignness was to be sought in faraway places, i.e. when foreignness was still outside our spatial, cultural, and mental ranges of experience.

For this reason, in the contemporary world, reflected and sensitive treatment of foreignness is an important skill which may become something like a key human qualification of our epoch. Intercultural learning therefore reflects not only on special problems of „target groups“ like migrants and the „clash of civilisations“. For adult education and lifelong learning it is more than only a specific topic of interest. When adult learners are confronted with new meanings, that don't fit into their acquired cognitive system there is to be made a decision between „assimilation and accomodation“ (Piaget) Intercultural learning stresses the need for acquiring an new „context of meaning“ by firstly accepting the difference of two autonomous contextes. Intercultural Learning therefore might be seen as a principle of adult education.

Foreignness as Relationship

Foreignness as an experience challenging one's own identity is an indicator and vivid expression of the fact that today we are able to explore novel and "strange" relationships. When boundaries become contact surfaces, foreignness becomes a significant experience. We may therefore note that only when we have moved towards one another will the other's foreignness become discernible. Foreignness is thus a relational term whose significance becomes fully apparent only when we are able to take into account our own part in this relationship. This involves the ability to realize one's own position and angle of vision as one possibility among others, and at the same time to be aware that what we experience as "foreign", as well as the way in which we perceive foreignness, are very much dependent on our own history. Foreignness is thus a phenomenon bound to and rooted in history: It is our own personal and social identity which constitutes the foreignness of the other.

The same of course applies to the respective partner in interaction: From the perspective of the "other side" (which may be another personality, a social group, generation, nation, or culture) what is 'my own' may seem strange in very different and not easily comprehensible ways. The encounter between different systems of meaning thus always involves a clash of different concepts and traditions of what is perceived as strange. Strangers are thus often strange to each other in different ways, and only rarely are they conscious of this fact. Thus the experience of foreignness in another person - say a man towards a woman, a European towards an Asian, or a grandfather towards his grandchild - may again be an alarmingly

strange experience – assuming this difference in perception can be discussed at all. Insight into this complexity of distance even between contemporaneous partners imparts a much more realistic picture of the practical difficulties of understanding that emerge from the accustomed one-dimensional descriptions of the problem.

Thus, in immediate confrontation with the foreignness of an actual counterpart, the partners in interaction are easily drawn into a cabinet of mirrors of mutually unknown "expectations of what to expect": you can never be sure what expectations can realistically be expected from one's counterpart. How much easier were the "classic", standard types of the stranger, such as the itinerant peddler, the conqueror, the foreign sage, the artist from abroad, the refugee, or the returnee, toward whom social regulations largely stipulated what to think of one another and what might be regarded as "strange" in each of its various senses.¹

How much more complex does everyday life become when confrontations with formerly separate systems of meaning are no longer regulated by specially designated roles, so that one has recourse to universal modes less and less frequently. The consequence of this uncertainty about behavior is that the experience of foreignness demands constant reflection. But how can we make this necessary reflection of foreignness permanent within a society and globally between different societies?

Any exchange of exploring glances to the other side, that initially gained depth of field through a more realistic anticipation of the foreign initially, must finally lose itself in a vicious circle of reflection. The experience of foreignness thus dissolves into a relativistic oscillating between interior and exterior, threatening to turn into an unsettling experience of complete lack of orientation.

Foreignness as Differentiation

Thus, in this context, it is theoretically and practically interesting to ask which "modes of experiencing foreignness" which interpretations of mutual foreignness we may expect to meet with in any actual situation of encounter.

A reflected form of encountering foreignness therefore necessarily extends beyond an isolated self-declaration of one's experience of foreignness -as important as this first step is. Openness towards the otherness of a counterpart must moreover take into account the fact that this may encounter unknown forms of reacting to the experience of foreignness.

The possible conceptual patterns of experiencing foreignness thus refer to social cleavages which the (social) environment first offers as differences and which are invested with a special significance. Following Gregory Bateson's formulation, we may state that in this sense a social cleavage becomes „a difference which makes a difference“²

Thus at this stage it remains to be determined which difference will become effective at this elementary cleavage. Its meanings may range from borderline, field of conflict, area of contact, range of experience, source of information, to name only a few of the most obvious variants of possible relations.

¹ Simmel 1983, 509-512; Schutz 1972

² Bateson 1983,453

This gives a distinction a specific significance for instance:

- The foreign as that from some place else, from another country, i.e. something situated beyond a spatially determinable line of division. Spatial conceptions of what is foreign here distinguish between what is "accessible" and what is "inaccessible". This implicates a local accessibility of what was previously set apart. At the same time, this perspective involves a marked stress on the "interior" as a synonym for home, "place of one's belonging", or „sphere of selfhood“ (Eigenheits-Sphäre)
- The foreign as the alien, partly also in the sense of the anomalous, of the inappropriate, the "out-of-place" or unfitting, as set off against the self-hood and the normal, i.e. against the qualities of the self-hood of a system of meaning.
- The foreign as the still unknown refers to the possibilities of becoming acquainted and of mutually acquainting each other with spheres of experience that are accessible in principle.
- The foreign as the ultimately unrecognizable, the "exterior" transcendent to the system of meaning, for which all possibilities of cognizance are excluded in principle.
- The foreign as the uncanny draws its significance from the contrast to the comfort of the familiar. It involves the unsettling experience that even what was "one's own" and familiar may turn into something foreign. The division between "interior" and "exterior" is blurred when the familiar turns unfamiliar .

Foreignness in its Function for Concepts of Order

Modalities of experiencing foreignness may be characterized not only with regard to the shadings of their content; their structural conditions can also be investigated in regard to the structures of order generating the underlying distinction at their base. For all structures of order, keep in mind that social definitions of reality and therefore questions of power and control are involved. "Foreignness becomes virulent in biographical and historical phases in which orders sway and pillars of order shift. Phases of order draw phases of foreignness in their wake with all the signs of ambivalence."³

Forms of experiencing foreignness are expressions of unconscious ordering performances that create on an elementary level of reality a permanent reproduction of patterns of distinction. Such transmitted patterns of differentiation organize the world, make it comprehensible, predictable, and thus to a certain degree controllable. At the same time, however, they always are expressions of a specific standpoint and of a certain self-interest, which in concrete encounter may easily conflict with other perspectives of interpreting the world. For this reason, as politically effective subliminal ordering performances, interpretive patterns of foreignness necessarily turn repressive whenever they define themselves as the natural order and consequently generalize their particular self-interest as an objective or universal outlook. The constitution of a particular view of foreignness therefore serves an elementary function in establishing and upholding structures of order, or, as Bernhard Waldenfels stated: "Each order

³ Waldenfels 1989

constitutes on what it keeps outside." ⁴ Consequently, it is necessary to distinguish not only the multifarious manifestations of experiencing foreignness, but also - in the sense of a phenomenology of foreignness - its underlying structural preconditions. We must ask which „différence directrice“ (directing difference: "*Leitdifferenz*") ⁵ an order is established upon and what consequences this elementary separation has for the respective modes of experiencing foreignness. Metaphorically expressed, this is to say: "Our attention should be directed not only at the possible appearances of the world as they may be observed when encountering foreignness, but also on the 'background of the mirror' that determines what attitudes towards foreignness become available in each case."

We therefore suggest distinguishing possible meaning perspectives of foreignness on the basis of four elementary structures of order:

- Orders of transcendent wholeness: foreignness as carrying foundation and sounding-board of selfhood
- Orders of perfect completeness: foreignness as negation of selfhood
- Concepts of dynamic self-change: foreignness as an opportunity for complementation and completion
- Concepts of complementary order: selfhood and foreignness as an interplay of reciprocally engendering contrasts

The following examines in detail these four concepts of order and their modes of experiencing foreignness. It is a system-theoretically inspired classification of foreignness, that are also providing different meaning perspectives and strategies of „intercultural learning“ in its broadest sense.

First mode:

Foreignness as Sounding Board of a „Sphere of Selfhood“

The first mode of experiencing foreignness rests on a system of order in which the distinction is directed against the foundation of a still undivided basis. Foreignness thus appears as separated originality. The elementary separation is necessary for the constitution of selfhood - for instance of interior and exterior, proximity and distance, civilization and wilderness, waking and sleeping, human and animal, mind and body, etc. - Experience of strangeness is understood as a relation of tension on the basis of an essential mutuality. The experience of separation therefore rests upon the constituting nexus of a "figure" with its "background" against whose indetermination it can manifest itself as specificity. In this interpretation, for a structure of order, foreignness acquires the function of the "original ground", or of general conditions of being - just like „nature“. The demarcation line between selfhood and foreignness thus refers not to a principal rift, but rather to a relation of stressful connection with what is different. Resonance as a existential participation in the mode of affinity, understanding, solidarity, empathy, love, or sympathy makes foreignness essentially

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Luhmann 1984,105; 1995

comprehensible without neglecting or denying the boundary. The Vedic saying: "Tat twam asi" refers to such an interpretation of the other as someone differing from me but originating from the same roots: "Look, the other is quite like you!" - as part of creation, living organism, human being, or conscious self. Thus, this mode of experiencing foreignness acknowledges the constitutive conditions of its order as shared generality. The "own" first emerged from a stepping out, through a fall from the original undifferentiated wholeness, which now becomes defamiliarized as exterior and background and which thus now serves as contrasting surface to one's own identity. In a temporal interpretation, foreignness here appears as the original, without which selfhood could not exist, but from which it must distance itself in the course of the development of identity. This creates a relationship of tension between dependency and emancipatory movement which again results in a curious integrative function of the foreign in the development of identity:

On the one hand the foreignness of the constitutive world foundation becomes addressable only on the basis of an emancipation of selfhood and thus finds expression only through the respective system of meaning. On the other hand, the foreign as exterior world appears as a total dimension of overwhelmingly threatening power. Experience of foreignness as insight into the basis of one's own creaturely, psychological, social or cultural existence can express itself in a fascination with one's own sensitive connection with one's origin, but also as a fearful tremor in the face of threatening disintegration of one's identity. Such a connection of threat and enticement finds expression in multiple variations in indigenous myths, in collective memories of the decline of the Golden Age, in the archaic heroes, but also in the reports of the mystics.

The interpretation of foreignness as discovery and recovery of one's own origin is firmly rooted in European tradition. "(...) As Goethe discovered his Hafis, so Rückert explored the wisdom of the Brahman; and Herder advised us to 'empathize' with every age and place to empathically appropriate through the work of art the essence of the foreign: In this quest one unfailingly found the foreignness one was seeking"⁶ In an ever-renewed "quest for Asia", a mode of experience developed that interpreted Far Eastern cultures as Europe's childhood:

"For Herder, Asia meant innocence, purity, and originality, as origin and deepness of his own occidental being. What especially fascinated him was the idea of oneness behind all existence in Asian thought and the resulting peacableness toward all life."⁷

Like the South Sea islands before, with Tahiti as the metaphor of an earthly Paradise, India in particular became a symbol of the lost human wholeness that Europeans so longingly craved and that was to be recovered only through empathy.

Apart from intercultural understanding, (re-)discovering the universal or existential premise and origin of one's own in the foreign can refer to very different dimensions of experience and may therefore generally be conceived as a recourse to the "Conditio Humana". This meaning perspective rests on the premise of a basic comprehensibility of all forms of human expression, to the degree that one finds access to the common anthropological basis. The

⁶ Krusche 1983,10

⁷ Günther 1988,46

theoretical construction of a "psycho-physical oneness of mankind"⁸ finally establishes the possibility of an "intercultural hermeneutics". On the basis of "existential transcultural experiences" the strangeness of another culture or personality becomes experiencable on the common basis of the universally human, just as every hermeneutical procedure must necessarily presuppose a shared preconception as a basis of understanding foreignness.

Second mode:

Foreignness as Counter-Image

The experience of foreignness has a substantially different context when it arises in a structure of order that demands unambiguity and inner coherence. Consequently there is a tendency to an exclusion of what is different, which it sees as "abnormal" and "alien". In the meaning perspective sketched here, the foreign thus takes on the character of a negation of the self. Here, the latent relationship of the interlockedness of figure and ground can no longer be experienced; instead, the sense of threat focus on a fixed and clearly defined border, which serves the purpose of preserving and protecting the integrity of the self. Thus, the foreign becomes the excluded, which "by its essence" does not belong to one's own and which, as a foreign object, threatens to disturb and call into question the integrity of one's own order. Outside of this sheltering borderline, however, it fulfills the function of a significant contrast, which, precisely as a counter-image, can strengthen one's own identity. He who has never been abroad does not know his homeland; he who has never learned a foreign language doesn't know his native tongue. As a counter-image, foreignness can appear unspecific and general or as a very concrete opposition. Unaccustomed, unusual, unthinkable – the foreign appears as the general negation of the constantly conceived horizon of one's own: the foreign is the monstrosity, that which is not one's own. This asymmetry in the relationship between interior and exterior shows itself in its overemphasis on the inside, which attempts to complete itself in its "being" and to achieve as perfect a self-expression as possible. The metaphors of purity, unadulteration, inner strength, and health, which are characteristic of the structure of order of unity and integrity, thus tend to assign to the foreign a connotation of impurity, adulteration, poison, and dirt.

With the solidification of inner integrity and the outer boundaries, the counter image of the outside world gains a greater degree of specificity, which is clearly dependent on the self-image: the outside is, so to speak, everything that the inside is not. The solidifying shell thus becomes the mirror image of the inside and dichotomizes the system-specific environment in a duality of stark contrasts and "either-or" contradictions: waking consciousness or "unconsciousness", reality or dream, human or animal, man or woman, rationality or irrationality, corporeality or mind, individual or collective, etc.

Since the self-ness of this structure of order self-confidently and unambiguously sees itself exclusively on one side of the dual relationship, the experience of the foreign necessarily gives rise to conflictive opposition. The foreign appears as the "natural enemy". At least it

⁸ Stagl 1981,281

represents a latent threat to one's own identity, a threat finally held at bay only through one's own strength. If the first mode of the relationship between man and woman is difference on the foundation of an androgynous undifferentiated humanness, which regards it as possible to understand the foreign through empathy, then the experience of the foreign as sketched here in its second mode is a basis for the inevitability of the battle of the sexes.

But the more specifically and contrastingly a dual pair of opposites is constellated, the easier the foreign form an equation with interchangeable signs, so to speak. This mode of development is not far from the point where the specific counter-image (Gegenbild) may turn into a model.(Vorbild) Thus, the more intensely the foreign is needed as a normative opposite for the constitution of the self, the more the construction of the "positive side" is bound up with the formation of the "negative side". Thus, beyond the original diffuse field of meanings of the "inappropriate", "impermissible", "sinful", "bestial", and "unimaginably terrible", the foreign takes on the increasingly specific meaning of a seductively impermissible alternative to reduced self-ness. The world of Satan and the Antichrist finally appears more fascinating than the boringness of angels, and the irrational seems "more vibrant" than the dry rationality of a pedantic enlightenment.

The exclusionary function of this pattern of interpretation thus makes even trivial aspects of experiencing and describing the foreign appear mythically dreamlike. Common to the descriptions is the imputation of threat. A form of integration that cannot "indifferently" permit the foreign its own being gives what cannot be subsumed its deeply threatening character as "unconsciousness", "sickness", "irrationality", or "superstition". Thus, for example, through lack of awareness of its own contingency and limitation, reason gives birth to the monsters it is afraid of, as is allegorically depicted in Goya's famous engraving.

The counter-image of the foreign can also turn into the positive opposite of a negatively-experienced self. If progressing processes of exclusion and schism make the "self" ever-more "pure" and "perfect" in a stagnation of its development, then the complex of the repressed and excluded can take on the meaning of a positive alternative. The equation reverses its signs. This explains the utopian character of the foreign as the negation of a reduced and one-sidedly solidified self. But structurally, nothing has changed in this system of order: "Thus, in a sense, utopia is a system claiming to be another."⁹

In the form of a utopia, foreignness takes on the described ordering function of an unambiguous counter-image. Charged with hope, it is an expression of the "inner outside" of a perfected and one-sided system of meaning that demands the regaining of variety, novelty, and surprise, but which is still entangled in the fetters of its basic dual structure. This is the source of a wide variety of myths of criticism of civilization and longing for the natural, with their idealizations of whatever the self cannot offer. If the counter-image of the noble savage or of paradissically peaceful humanity can no longer be sought in a spatially narrowed globe where the contact between the idealized foreign and the "concrete foreign" results in disillusionment, then the only avenue of escape is time. The utopian counter-image can no longer be suspected and sought on distant islands, but must be shifted to the future: the genre of the utopian novel

⁹ Gustafson 1985,292

and social-scientific "futurology" assume the function of imagined travelogues and the myths of discoverers.

In his book "Xenologie. Die Wissenschaft vom Fremden und die Verdrängung der Humanität in der Anthropologie"¹⁰ the African etymologist Duala-M'body urgently and sharply points to the power-instrumentality and aggression of the assimilating co-optation of foreign culture implicit in this mode of experiencing the foreign. Against the backdrop of the pattern of interpretation sketched here, he propounds the idea that European culture, precisely "due to its discontent with itself", "needs the myth of the foreign as a work of art in order to get a grip on itself".¹¹ The perception of the foreign as the counter-image of the self enables a balancing and produces another one-sided and reduced (mirror) image of the Other in order to gain an "unambiguous alternative to one's own experience" and finally to be able to instrumentalize it as a "cultural regulative". In agreement with the second mode of experience sketched above, he accurately writes: "The phenomenon expresses itself comprehensively in the confrontation between the recognized and the denied, the normal and the abnormal, and thus primarily in antinomies."¹² According to Duala-M'body, in this interpretation, foreignness becomes the "stigma of a polarized world", in which the foreignness of other cultures is so fervently desired primarily because one's own can no longer be experienced except from a culturally pessimistic standpoint. "The others are not perceived in their incomparability; rather, they are what one is not oneself," as Petra Dietzsche characterized this mode of experience in her book "Das Erstaunen über das Fremde"¹³

Third mode:

Foreignness as Supplement

As the complexity of a system of meaning increases, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the selective and schematic pattern of interpretation of a dual system of order. Internal differentiation already provides one person, group, or culture with a variety of different environments, and thus also with a spectrum of internal foreignnesses. The ordering power of complex systems thus refers less to a static identity anchored in being, in the sense of "one's own being", than it structures a processual change that has its own logic of development. The productivity of this structure of order is thus based in the regulation of processes of an interiorization of the outside and of an exteriorization of the inside. The relationship between interior and exterior dominating this mode of experience is thus characterized by an interplay of the appropriation of the foreign and of structural self-change. The identity of such an order can thus be understood as a self-regulating growth process driven forward by the alternation of "assimilation and accommodation" (Piaget).

The tension gradient between the self and the foreign is thus based on the significance given to the contact with the foreign for the respective internal stage of development. In the meaning perspective it is no longer a question of opposition in principle, but of temporal problems of

¹⁰ Duala-M'body 1977

¹¹ *ibid*,9

¹² *ibid* 21

¹³ Dietzsche 1984

developments' mutual compatibility. The relationship refers to the interconnection of the developmental and growth processes of a current self with its respective specific outside. For a dynamic structure of order, the foreign takes on the function of external elbow room that aids in discovering impulses promoting development and structural opportunities to learn and in which unforeseen developments also become possible. This gives rise to a mutual relationship between the unexhausted potentiality of a structure of order and the chances of realization for its development. So here it is not merely a question of expanding the self through an assimilative "filling up" with what is always the same, but of the discovery of as yet unsuspected possibilities: "Become who you are." In this, through processes of changing oneself, the interplay of the internal and external foreign helps release potencies latent until now. In this interplay between assimilation and accommodation, we should distinguish between degrees of intensity and levels of depth of the experience of the foreign:

"The foreign would be unknown and unavailable contents and realms of experience; white areas on the map of one's own world, so to speak, indeterminacies for which rules of determination are available, and empty spots that can be filled by means of suitable progress in experience. Foreignness, by contrast, would be something that explodes the existing structures and orders of experience, and thus something unknown in an intensified sense, something for which our coordinate systems of order are inadequate."¹⁴

Especially in its accommodation effect, the foreign here takes on the function of a structural supplement. In this context, the experience of the foreign permits self-experience in the sense of an uncovering of gaps, of lacunae, or, if one will, of "defects". The spatially foreign thus becomes a learning environment for traveling scholars, journeymen, and adventurers, and the foreign teacher becomes the desirable expert on foreign arts or an archetypal proclaimer of secrets and the shockingly unexpected. The resulting fascination of the foreign, which this pattern of interpretation can explain in terms of desire for information, desire for novelty, curiosity, and knowledge transfer, nevertheless greatly depends on the speed and state of development of the "system of meaning" in question. Like all processes with unforeseeably complex inherent dynamics, the relationship between one's own and the foreign poses incalculable problems of prematurity and tardiness. The "non-discovery" of what is "important foreignness" relative to the system, can thus have far-reaching consequences for the further process of development. Against the foil of a "normal biography", of a successful career, or of "healthy growth", this can also be evaluated as a snag in or even as the failure of development. In this meaning, the state of development of a system of meaning can be judged and compared with others on the basis of the degree to which and the manner in which it is in a position to discover for itself "relevant foreignness" and to appropriate it by changing itself. This is true not only for individuals' structural ability to learn and willingness to educate themselves, but also for the ability of social groups, societal institutions, and cultures to productively appropriate their environment.

In a self-understanding expansive in this way, the experience of the foreign is mostly reduced to the function of gathering information, which is useful for the further development of one's

¹⁴ Waldenfels 1987,122; 1996

own. Here, the appropriating system's capacity to process the new and unaccustomed may pose a problem. Then the foreign unexpectedly loses its fascination and turns threatening. Here, unlike in the second mode of experience, the threat to the self is not based on an eerie return of what has been split off, excluded, and repressed, but in an intensified problem of integration that can slip into self-alienation and disparate developments of the self. Foreignness in an existentially threatening sense thus grows out of dynamic orders primarily "from within", through the loss of their "self": like the "Man Without Characteristics", the self splinters into a loose co-existence of unconnected individual parts. In the experience of modernity, foreignness through self-alienation appears as a loss of meaning caused by overburdening the capacity to integrate.

Pleasurable assimilation also always tests internal integration ability, and it is impossible to predict what surprising consequences may be triggered by taking in foreign structures. Expanding systems are confronted with the basic problem, which can never be decided in advance, of whether changing oneself will be an "enrichment" or will lead to disintegrating the system.

For this reason, the pattern of interpretation discussed here cannot be characterized exclusively by its expansive structure of appropriation, but, like all other modes of experiencing the foreign, is thoroughly ambivalent. The centrifugal, outward-striving "assimilative desires" find their opposite pole in the centripetal movement of securing the internal possibilities of processing. The meaning perspective in dealing with foreignness can thus display very different traits, depending on the degree to which the subject is willing to risk submitting himself to an open and possibly even existentially threatening process of development and "culture shock". Here, it is certainly possible to distinguish "rational" strategies of appropriation from the adventurism of a conqueror who loses himself in the outside. The meaning perspective always proves initially unproblematical where the discovery of foreignness can be interpreted as the recovery of split-off possibilities of experience and as the unfolding of latent potencies of the self. But where the accommodation of foreign structures weakens the internal processing capacity and is thus experienced as self-alienation, the expansive pattern of interpretation narrows itself and must seek recourse in the security of the second mode of experience's abrupt boundary-setting.

Fourth mode: Foreignness as Complementarity

Despite all their differences, the variants of experiencing the foreign discussed so far had one thing in common: "The foreign is not left to itself in its specificity, dealings with it do not proceed in partnership and dialogue, but all otherness is appropriated over the shortest

possible distance as a 'one's-own-after-all'.¹⁵ This could be explained by the fact that, for the respective fundamental structure of order, foreignness fulfills an important function in the constitution of identity. Regardless of whether the „différence directrice“ of the "original partition" was conceived as a resonant membrane, a self-reflecting surface, or as a variety of contact sites, what was finally decisive was the fixation on an internal standpoint. But this is no longer the case when the meaning perspective refers to phenomena of an interacting, mutually-creating foreignness. Here a structure of order emerges does not treat "inside and outside" as separate realms, but understands them as aspects of a process of structuring in which a „sphere of selfhood“ and the foreign relativize and determine each other. This allows the reconstruction of the image, much more realistic for today's world, of a "polycontextual" universe, a reality of many autonomous centers. The meanwhile undeniable variety of independent perspectives and equally "possible" interpretations of the world makes it clear that, when various systems of reference encounter each other, no indisputable foundation and no overarching point of reference is available that could decide between them. The idea of a universal rationality becomes just as questionable as a universally observable empirical world.

"Knowledge of the world remains ineluctably bound to local and social processes of constitution. There is no longer any overarching guarantee of the possibility to translate and connect these local stocks of knowledge; epistemology, modernity's fundamental project to secure such translations, is being replaced by hermeneutics."¹⁶

The structures of order of a world interpreted in this way are thus no longer ambivalent, but polyvalent. They refer to a practice of distinguishing, i.e. to an relationship between all imaginable patterns of interpretation of experiencing the foreign. In this, order is sustained by a constant "oscillation" between positions of self-ness and foreignness, which call each other forth in mutual contact. Characteristic of their openness is thus an "interreferentiality and ambiguity of the aspects that do not come to rest and which do not permit the establishment of a pure inner or outer world, of a pure own or foreign world"¹⁷ This kind of an open, dynamic structure will be termed a "complementary order of mutual foreignness". The practical starting point is the experience that the truly alien cannot be understood, even with the best will, and that, in confrontation with ever more numerous complex external realms, the internal ability to process is rapidly overburdened. "Foreignness" can finally be noted only selectively and only incidentally. Consequently, precisely in intense dealings with the lack of comprehension of the foreign, after a certain point, the response is no longer elastic accommodation, but the registration of "incomprehensibility". This in no way signifies a refusal to understand, but the recognition of a liminal experience in the sense of a meaningful insight about a specific boundary to one's own possibilities of experiencing. This interpretation thus draws from the experience the conclusion that there are external realms that, in principle, cannot be appropriated and that, realistically (and not only for reasons of ethical conviction), must therefore be respected in their autonomous value unto themselves. In the meaning perspective of complementary foreignness, threshold experiences are no longer grasped as a temptation to

¹⁵ Krusche 1983,11

¹⁶ Giesen 1991,119

¹⁷ Krusche 1983,11

a comprehensive and thus finally inflationary expansion of the interior, but rather as enforced recognition of a radical, mutual difference, as sensitivity for mutual foreignness.

The function foreignness fulfills for a complementary order can thus be described as an open awareness for new perspectives. The point here, among other things, is also a refusal of the socially preformed antithesis of "either-or". The point is a (possibly desperate) attempt to escape the previously fixed attributions by allowing them to become undecidable. This results in the oscillating movement typical of this kind of concepts of order, various manifestations of which have already been analyzed and described as a symptom for late modern societies.

This is not the place to go into more detail on the first signs of reconstructable structure of order. Important in this context is that this is an expression of resistance against accustomed structures of thought . "Translation" from the "one" to the "other" side and the appropriation of the other in one's own perspective are refused. Instead, one strives to liberate movements of thought and entrusts oneself to what Dietrich Krusche called the "infinitesimal calculus of the historical distance between the partners"¹⁸ In such contexts of meaning, foreignness has the effect of an enzyme of (inter-)cultural and intra-psychic dynamics, and releases a structural explosive power that dissolves the accustomed, unambiguous orientations into a plurality of divergent individual positions. This in turn calls forth the necessity for a "constant reflection on experiencing the foreign". In this, the ordering effort can no longer expend itself in an ever-repeated reconstruction of dualistic attributions, but must relate to the respective practices of experiencing the foreign. Here, as the result of a practice of distinguishing, the foreign becomes recognizable in mutual interaction, but never finally determinable: All that can be observed anymore is how the observer observes the other observers observing observation. Mutual foreignness as complementarity thus refers to the relationship between positions foreign to each other in foreign ways. Thus, in this field of tension, the vectors of differing structures of order overlap and lead to a mutual dependence or describe modes of experiencing foreignness.

In this context, Dietrich Krusche pointed out one of this development's consequences for global communication: Japan has emerged as its own center of world history, independent of Europe, and increasingly developing "historical power". So "a historical foreignness that is Europe-resistant must be taken into account"¹⁹ The future will require "a new understanding of cultural-historical distance" that takes mutual foreignness into account. In the words of the Japanologist Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschnerreit, the observation of mutual difference as the foundation of complementary foreignness means: "The only possibility remaining to us is clearly to recognize our rootedness in our own culture and to develop a feeling for our dependence on our own social norms in thinking, feeling, and acting. Paradoxically expressed, this means: only when we are consciously eurocentrics are we able to perceive the foreign without preconceptions. Seen in this way, eurocentricity is almost a precondition of knowledge."²⁰ In many cases, this can mean understanding how to learn what we do not understand. We can observe what and that we are unable to observe: foreignness renders visible the "blind spot" of our own perceptual ability and thus becomes the difficult

¹⁸ *ibid* 12

¹⁹ *ibid* 99

²⁰ Hijjiya-Kirschnerreit 1988,210

experience of a mutual boundary. This may lead to new forms of "mutuality" that may prove more robust than empathizing with the supposed "universal" foundations of the humane.

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