

## THE BOUNDARIES OF ORDERS

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### ABSTRACT

With contrast to traditional orders such as the Greek cosmos which pretend to have no outside, modernity is marked by two discoveries: the discovery of ourselves, finding never their definitive place within a given order, and the discovery of contingency, which has the effect that every order could be other than it is. Till today this double problematic leads to an endless series of compromises, turning around alternatives such as individualism and holism, particularism and universalism, relativism and absolutism and so on. Against this sort of escapism the author argues that there is a constitutive paradox of selfbounding orders, unable to take hold either inside or outside. From there arises a special sort of impossibility, not to be understood as something which cannot be realised, but as something which permanently challenges our individual and collective possibilities. We call this the alien. Living with the alien we live on the borderline.

Orders do not merely have boundaries, ordering processes create boundaries. Things are what they are by separating themselves from other things - as stones, plants, animals or human beings, as natural or artificial things. However, when it comes to human beings, the concept of boundaries is a particularly restless one, as those boundaries are constantly questioned. The human being, characterised by its behaviour which is channelled neither by instinctive regulations nor by artificial programmes, is a creature that is not enclosed by fixed boundaries, but rather relates to its boundaries in a certain manner. That goes for boundaries of place and time, which define our concept of here and now, for the limits imposed by prohibitions, which restrain our desires and deeds, and for the limits of understanding, which curb our thoughts. Therefore it is no wonder that the question of the limits of existence and the boundaries of the world should have been among the major themes

in the history of mankind, be it Jehovah, who separates light from darkness, be it the boundaries of the soul, immeasurable by anyone, be it the modern philosopher, who marks out the boundaries of pure thought, be it the systems theorist, who summarises the majestic gesture of creation to a minimal formula: "Draw a distinction!"

All this goes to show that drawing boundaries, which leads to different sorts of orders and structures, does not merely have a pragmatic and regional, but also an epochal character. It may be assumed that each epoch (more specifically: each culture, society, environment or form of life) behaves within certain boundaries, but that the relation to the boundaries, which is always accompanied by a certain policy, is subject to substantial variation. The way boundaries are dealt with, is a clear indication of the underlying spirit of that epoch; it may also say something about that which has moved the Modern Times for so long, what has preceded them or undermined and overtaken them. The recently crossed threshold which leads into the new century is definitely a very particular boundary, and we do not have a suitable language for it. A threshold would not be a threshold if it could be crossed in both directions, or if it could be integrated in a computer programme. Maybe thresholds can only exist as a consequence of a certain hesitation, that does not enter chronological history and that breaks Schwager Kronos' 'rattling daily grind' (Goethe)<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Boundless Universe

For the sake of contrast, let us begin with the boundless universe, represented in our cultural tradition most succinctly by the Greek cosmos. The cosmos depicts a classical form of order, as for long it played a paradigmatic role. The cosmos does not embody one order among a range of other possible orders; it merely embodies the order as such. The only alternative is the unordered complexity of chaos. Within this cosmos each being has its own limited shape (*peras*), the *boundaries* of which

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<sup>1</sup> I first developed the further used ordering concept in *Ordnung im Zwielficht* (1987) (transl. *Order in the twilight*, 1996) and picked it up again for my studies of strangeness. See chapter 8: "The orderly and the extra-orderly" and chapter 9: "Threshold experience and drawing boundaries", see B. Waldenfels (1999b) for further information.

circumscribe that being in itself and distinguish it from its surroundings. The clear-cut shape is conveyed into the conceptual definition (*horismos*), and since Plato it is dialectics that have conceived of any being as the relation between the same and the other. This horizontal plaiting is complemented by a vertical hierarchy, the proportions of which correspond with the degree to which the reasonable whole is reflected in the individual being. In that sense humans rank above animals, Greeks above barbarians, men above women, the contemplative above the active. The contribution to reason, which allows access to the law of the whole, is decisive for the individual being's place in the hierarchy.

This relation structure, in which all differences are relative, has a lower and an upper boundary. The lower boundary is formed by the *individual*, an *atomon eidos*, which cannot be divided into further entities, without destroying its identity. The upper boundary is formed by the *universe*, a *hen kai pan*, which itself cannot be ordered in or under anything else; the world is an entity 'from which nothing is excluded', as state the Aristotelian Physics (III, 6, 207 a 8). In simple words: the cosmos is an *order with no outside*, having only internal boundaries. Whoever crosses the boundaries of the cosmos, either enters the bad infinity of an endless, bottomless and pointless *apeiron*, or is lifted to extreme heights like Ikar, whose storming of heaven was paid for with a fatal crash.

However, the idea of a closed and an all-embracing cosmos that reserves a suitable place for each being and traces out its paths, is based on the dubious assumption that the place where the whole shows and expresses itself as a whole, is still thought of as a place within that whole itself. The psyche, which is 'in some sense everything', becomes the stage of the very order to which it mimetically adjusts itself. The cosmos thus appears as an order which unveils and expresses *itself as itself*, by changing all conditions into moments of itself. This order with no outside corresponds with a *thought from inside*, a *penser du dedans*, to alter Foucault's famous title, and in the whole this thought would be on itself. Yet, even some Ancient Greeks refuse to accept this view, be it Socrates, this *atopos*, who lives in his city although as a live question mark, be it the platonic *Mania* of poetry and eros, be it the sophists, who counter the true *Logos* with the artificial tricks and techniques of *Lexis*, be it a tragic figure like Oedipus, who sees no sooner than when blind, chained to his ominous fate, which isolates him and labels him as a displaced person

(*apolis*). Such marginal figures, whose anomaly makes normality less secure, are also found in other places. For example, mystical sidestreams tend to accompany the main stream of devotion to the law and text reliability, with a ghost of heterodoxy and anarchy. That goes for Jewish or Islamic tradition as well as for Christian tradition. Even Saint Paul dissociates himself from ecstatic rhetoric, in which the *glossa* or the *lingua* unfolds a speaking ability that has freed itself from individual steering or public control. The speech which evaporates in the cosmos of what is said, is replaced with a speech which does not say anything and is therefore meaningless. The 'charismatic' that Max Weber sets against the everyday life of the institutions, makes itself felt in every place and is an indication that any normality, even the cosmologically theologically or cosmopolitically emulated normality, leaves out something that expresses itself in anomalies and frays into a *lunatic fringe*.

## 2. Ownness, Alienness, Contingency

A global order is not conceivable unless the place from which the whole unfolds, evaporates in a specific whole. What we call modernity, can be described as the questioning of this wholeness vision. The self-misunderstanding of a Kosmotheoros, which reckons itself part of the scene it beholds, is breached, and the pretended order turns out to be the result of an order-establishment. The two leading revelations for this are (1) the discovery of a self that says 'I' before it is named 'subject', and as a result of that conceit blows up the relations structure of the whole, and (2) the discovery of a radical Contingency that does not only use the open plays of an order, but also affects the order itself<sup>2</sup>. Such an order can not only degenerate into disorder, it can also turn into a different order; it can be different from itself. Descartes' Cogito, for example, not only contains his pinnacle of thought but also the idea that God could have created different mathematics<sup>3</sup>. The orders in which we act turn out to be merely potential orders<sup>4</sup>. The decisive factor here is that the motifs

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<sup>2</sup> For order and contingency, see also chapter 8 of *Vielstimmigkeit der Rede*.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Descartes' lettre to Mersenne from April 15th 1630.

<sup>4</sup> See also Robert Musil (1978), p. 19.

of subjectivity and rationality, which cause us trouble even in the present, act as a double motif. The modern subject appears as a being that is looking for its place but doesn't have it, and that can no longer act as a substitute for a single rationality.

For this double motif to be taken serious in its radicality, means an altered problem of drawing boundaries. The self, which lives in its own sphere and conforms to its own cultural order - even in the fields of sense and language, will no longer be reduced to something same that is separated from the rest in the context of a whole or universality. Selfness and ownness are the results of drawing boundaries that distinguish between an inside and an outside and thus adopt the shape of *internal* and *external boundaries*. Ownness arises when something withdraws from it, and exactly that which withdraws is what we experience as alien or heterogeneous. This separation of the *own* and the *alien*, effected by no third party, belongs to a different dimension than the distinction between *same* and *other*, which is backed by a dialectically created whole. Or to say things in the mother tongue of western philosophy: the other (*heteron*) and the alien or strange (*xenon*) are two different things. The strangeness of a guest<sup>5</sup>, of another language, another culture, the strangeness of the opposite sex or that of 'another state' (Musil) can by no means be reduced to the fact that something or someone appears to be different. Building materials such as wood and concrete, or types of wine such as Beaujolais and Kaiserstühler are usually different from one another, but no one would say that they were strangers to one another. Strangeness or alienness implies the own range and the being of a self (*ipse*), and this self must not be confused with a same (*idem*), which is discerned by a third party.

### 3. Modern compromises

Nietzsche writes: "I think it's important to get rid of *the* Universe, the

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<sup>5</sup> Just like the stranger from Elea, which Plato presents in *Sophist*.

unity [...]. We should smash the universe; drop our respect for it [...].”<sup>6</sup> No one could say that Modern Philosophy has got even with the consequences of bounding orders. Until now we have tended to accept compromises, wherein the contamination of self and same has played a substantial role. The ambivalence used in assessing the new ordering potential also affects the most recent conflict between representatives of modern and postmodern philosophy. Consider the motif of a self that says ‘I’ and thus dissociates itself from the whole. The ‘I’ literally means an exception. To connect the Cartesian Ego directly to egocentricity would be making things too easy. It would also neglect the restlessness that speaks from this radical self-reflection, the very restlessness that pushes the philosopher to search for an unshakeable foundation. Though this search is bound to be unsuccessful, the question remains what is the cause for that search. Even if the question “*Who am I?*” tends to change too quickly into “*What am I?*”, this peculiar question, which short-circuits the questioner and the questioned, already contains a taste of Rimbaud’s “*JE est un autre*”. However it may be, the discovery of a self, whose selfness separates it from the relations structure of a natural and social universe, is treated wrongfully if it is regarded as a mere *particularity* or *detail*. At the end of the line we’d only be in the conflict between *individualism* and *holism*, between *particularism* and *universalism*, a conflict that still lingers but has never brought in much. Since a whole cannot be conceived of without the parts in which it articulates itself, and since general regulations are of little use without the particular circumstances wherein they apply, the conflict leads to a great coalition where Aristotelians are seated beside Kantians, hermeneuticians beside universal pragmatists, with an internal exchange of ministerial posts in both parties. However, in order to upset this harmony, one would only have to remind of the fact the origin of I-You-Here-Now is not at all related to elements of general classes of meanings, but that these indexical or occasional expressions are demonstrative words that refer to the place of speaking, a place that opens up fields of experience, language and action, before it can be made subject to a determination of place itself. The place that is spoken about does not coincide with the place of

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<sup>6</sup> Author’s translation of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 12: *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885-1887*, Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari (eds.), München 1988, p. 317.

speaking, and the same goes for the moment in time. Even as someone who says „I“, I am not a countable element of a class or a member of a whole. The I of the process of speaking, clearly distinguishable from the I of the content of what is said, is not a countable thing that could be put in the plural just like that, and the same goes for the You. It should thus be understood that within the Ancient Greek thought, „I“ and „We“ do not play a thematic role, except in the initial concept of a „for us“ (*pros hemas*), which tends to be taken in by an existence „on one’s own“ (*kath’hauto*). The explosive power of I-speech is also lost, if the I is reduced to a general I-function. Here it would be useful to protect Descartes against his transcendental-philosophical heirs.

Things aren’t much better with regard to the second discovery, which ascribes an irremovable contingency to the orders. If the *ability to be different* or the *ability to act differently* is seen as a larger or smaller kind of *arbitrariness*, then this interpretation calls for the antipode of *necessity*. With respect to legitimacy claims, we are led to the conflict between *relativism* and *universalism*, the weapons of which have now become as worn-out as those in the conflict mentioned above. Once again a simple fact should be remembered. The establishment of orders, and their legitimacy, including genealogy of true and false, of good and evil, is neither relative nor absolute. It is not at all valid, since the fact that there are binary standards itself is not subject to these standards, except if their genesis is once again covered up and the respective opposition is hypostatized. Each order has its blind spot in the form of something unordered that thus not merely constitutes a shortage. That goes for moral orders as well as for cognitive and aesthetic orders. This explains why modern authors struggle so hard with the *Incipit* of their novels; from the very first step both writer and reader could walk into the trap of a ready-to-use order. ‘There are orders’, and this ‘there are’ outruns all attempts of justification, as it is a basic assumption of any such attempt. In other words: the fact of reason is not reasonable itself. What is commonly called postmodern philosophy, could mean a.o. that some battle grounds have lost importance - which doesn’t mean that the problems which originate from the modern subjectivity and rationality could not reoccur at another place.

#### 4. Paradoxes of self-bounding

It is no secret that nowadays paradoxes have a certain boom. Paradoxes are, literally, opinions that conflict with the prevailing opinion (*paradoxan*). Like all 'para'-cases (cfr. parasite, parapsysics, paralogism or parapsychology) paradoxes assume a normal state of things. But as long as paradoxes only deviate from prevailing opinions, they can be substantiated and made strong against all opposition. Things are different when an assumption conflicts with its *own* preconditions, causing the strengthening of one assumption to become the weakening of the other and vice versa. In order to keep assumptions from becoming frail, it is often tried to unsharpen the paradoxes, as is the case with the famous paradox of the lying Cretan. The distinction between object- and meta-language makes it possible for a statement to cause its own downfall, as the act of saying it can no longer be part of the contents of what is said. However, this methodical solution is based on the aforementioned bounding, that happens from outside; two levels of speech are distinguished. The analysis and its solution are situated at the level of what is said. Thus neglecting the event of saying and saying- itself, which presents itself in what is said, without being spoken out. In speech acts such as "I promise you that ..." we meet with a self- referentiality, which leads e.g. to the fact that the Cretan always involves himself in whatever he talks about. Also the well-known distinction between the contents level and the relations level cannot be applied *to* speech just like that, as this distinction itself is always found *in* speech itself.

Something similar occurs in the case of self-bounding, where that which bounds itself, is a result of the act of bounding - not as in the event of a third party that separates one thing from another, without getting involved in this separation itself. The fungi expert is neither poisonous nor edible, just like the judge in his capacity of judge has no share in the deeds of the accused. However, what happens when someone apologises, or is 'eaten up with sorrow'? It's easy to think of examples where we are faced with something strange, from which someone bounds *himself* and his own, without there being any *third party*. Think of the difference of nearness and remoteness in time—space, as in the distinctions here and there, now and then or some day; think of the



alternating worlds of waking and sleeping; think of contact with the dead<sup>7</sup>; think of interpersonal relations like those between man and woman, between child and adult; think of social exclusions as a result of class, profession and culture; or finally, think of the boundaries of normalisation, that separate the healthy from the ill, the blameless from the criminal, the orthodox from the heretics, the insiders from the outsiders. Whoever ascribes to oneself one of both states, or feels himself belonging to one of both domains, will find oneself at one side of the threshold. And transitions like falling asleep or waking up, becoming ill and getting well, getting old, retraining or being converted, do not mean that one adopts another or a neutral position, but rather that one becomes someone new. To what extent awakening relies on a merely corporeal self-orientation, is shown by Proust, whose *Recherche* starts at the threshold of waking and sleeping. Such experiences, where the own is confronted with the strange, are cross-border [grenzgängerisch] experiences *par excellence* and - as we will see - also cross-personal [doppelgängerisch]. The following considerations go back to the aforementioned double nature of bounding, as I will speak of both the implications of bounding off from something, and the implications of bounding in and bounding out.

The first aspect concerns the self-referentiality of the act of bounding off. The operative boundary is not something that is just accidentally found or given a place by someone. In this respect the line on the blackboard is misleading. The act of drawing a line takes place when something separates itself from another; it is neither visible nor tangible; it can only be grasped as a trace of drawing boundaries. The act of drawing boundaries can thus be compared to the act of making a contract, an act which does not become part of the contract itself, which however becomes indirectly tangible in one's altered obligations and commitments. The act of drawing a boundary takes place at a zero-point, which lies neither at this nor at the other side of the boundary. The acting boundary

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<sup>7</sup> See also the frightening, any calendric memory omitting 'conversations with the dead' in Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955), which presume an 'architectonic' or 'vertical past' in the sense of Merleau-Ponty (see also *Le visible et l'invisible*, 1964, p. 296 ff.). I owe the reference to Juan Rulfo to Vittoria Borsò, whose book *Mexiko jenseits der Einsamkeit – Versuch einer interkulturellen Analyse* (1994) contains an interesting view of the motif of the strange in contemporary literature and literary theory.

is thus neither a definable thing, nor nothing, as without this boundary there would not be this or that, there would not be I or the other. *The self-reference of drawing boundaries lies in its self-withdrawal.*

The second aspect concerns the self-referentiality, which appears in bounding *oneself* and leads to an in- and outbounding. This *oneself* is neither the veiled subject of a personal act of bounding, nor the objective result of someone else's act of bounding, but within the act of bounding its shape stands out, as a cavity, as *an inside, separating itself from an outside* and thus produces a *preference in the difference*. Formally speaking, this means that that *which* separates itself is being marked, while that *from which* it separates itself remains unmarked. In this lies an asymmetry, without which there would be no self that could adopt the viewpoint of another or a third party. This one-sidedness, which is inherent in the contrast between the own and the alien, can be illustrated by the aforementioned examples. The Here and Now, that separates itself from the distance, the past and the future, is part of the distinction, and at the same time it acts as the place where the distinction occurs. The same goes for any other distinction. It is not a matter of distinguishing a neutral, body-, gender- or ageless third party, between man and woman, between adult and child, and it is not a matter of setting a transnatural or transcultural third party against Germans and French, Europeans and Asians. Germans much rather distinguish *themselves* from French, like female creatures distinguish *themselves* from male creatures, and he or she who distinguishes him- or herself in this way, cannot become who he or she really is unless in that distinction. Whoever distinguishes (or separates) him- or herself, is on one side ; the alien or strange in the sense of that from which he or she separates him- or herself , is on the other side. *The reference to the alien lies in the withdrawal of the alien.* The fact that this asymmetry doubles and multiplies, does certainly not lead to a symmetry. The *syn-* of symmetry depends on the fact that the own and the alien are subject to a common point of view or a common rule. The 'equalisation of the non-equal' mentioned in Nietzsche's *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne (On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense)*, *equalises* what is not equal. Normalisation as a selective form of ordering, which begins already in the orthoaesthesia of sense, cannot be conceived of without the shadow of the heteroaesthesia, and the same goes for orthodoxy, orthology and orthopraxis.

The paradox of self-referentiality is even strengthened by the fact that

the first aspect of self-referential bounding off and the second aspect of bounding oneself in and bounding the strange out slide into each other in the form of an *reference to the alien within the self-reference*. As a result of an inevitable self-thematising, the self enters the ordering net that it designs. The physical Here can be located, comparable to the red dot or arrow on a street map, indicating the position of the user. Likewise the Now can be dated and indicated on a calendar. The body reveals itself as a body-embodiment, which continually avoids the reflections of consciousness and resists our initiatives. "Par la fatigue le 'corps' devient chose étrangère", says Valéry<sup>8</sup>. In another way this goes for the ecstasies of pleasure and pain, when we – as bodily beings – lose ourselves. That doesn't concern isolated instances of good or bad luck; the self-withdrawal rather belongs to the state of the body, which does not only see but can also be seen, does not only hear but can also be heard, does not only touch but can also be touched. The modern contrast between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, but also the newer contrast between software and hardware is thus by-passed. A similar thing occurs on the social level, which is realised in the shape of an intercorporality (*intercorporéité*). The I as 'privileged member'<sup>9</sup>, without which there would be no other, at the same time discovers itself as an ordinary member of a group it helps to constitute. The I is an other, as the alienness begins in one's own house. The reference to the strange within the self-reference, as a result of which no one is merely who they are, causes the chain of self-doubling that occurs in different circumstances in the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, as well as Foucault and Luhmann. These doublings should not be confused with reflections of a reflexive self-consciousness which is at the same time subject and object, neither are they related to the intersubjective dialectics of recognition, wherein one subject finds itself in another subject. The bodily self-withdrawal, which becomes clear in the difference between functioning and thematising, much rather corresponds to the difference between

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<sup>8</sup> "Tiredness turns the body into something strange." Paul Valéry (1973), p. 1137. For the state of the body as simultaneity of self-reference and reference to the alien, see my explanations in both initial chapters of *Sinnesschwellen, Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden, Band 3* (1999a).

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Husserl (1954), p. 188 (Engl. transl. p 185).

*énonciation* and *énoncé*, between *saying* and *what is said*, when we consider the fact that the event of saying something never gets absorbed by what is said. One should also think of the seeing-event of the eye, one's own eye as well as that of another; the eye is not part of the sight it observes<sup>10</sup>. From a more general point of view we can say that the restlessness, which ceaselessly leads to self-doublings, springs from the fact that the place where boundaries are drawn, is situated neither inside nor outside the orders, but both inside and outside at the same time. Self-withdrawal means that moments of the alien in oneself, moments of the alienness in the given order are virulent. The double play, as Foucault shows, becomes a jigsaw puzzle, if one tries to catch up with the seeing in the seen, with the saying in the said, with the thinking in the thought, instead of thinking of these doublings as part of the game itself.

## 5. Possibilities and impossibilities

A form of thinking which surrenders to the paradoxes of a self-bounding, and therefore self-exceeding order, produces a number of thinking patterns that do not fit into the framework of traditional thinking<sup>11</sup>. *Deviations* from an order, which play an important role not only in the modern poetics, but also in the self-organisation of nature, do not say that there is something that deviates, but the deviation rather springs from the self-deviation of sight or speech, which escape from themselves. Another thinking pattern is that of the *surplus*. A speech and act that moves along the boundaries of the given orders, on the one hand lags behind itself, as it brings more possibilities into the game than it can contain, on the other hand goes beyond itself, as it touches impossibilities of the invisible, the unheard and the unthought. Increase and decrease in meaning, both of which belong to the forms of a non-classical art, are indicative of a

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<sup>10</sup> I have dealt with this aspect in *Antwortregister* (Chapter. III, 10) from the viewpoint of a 'bodily responsorium', for which the doubling of the body in reflection and echo plays a special role.

<sup>11</sup> For the importance of the extra-orderly see also *Ordnung im Zwielflicht*, (transl. *Order in the twilight*), p. 189-194 and the references to the motif of the surplus by Adorno, Bataille, Heidegger, Husserl, Lévinas, Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty (ibid. p. 235 ff.). Despite the heterogeneity in the details, there are some remarkable overlaps.

surplus or lack of sense, which finds no place in the classical patterns of the fulfilment of desires and commands. As a 'non-fixated animal' which finds itself forced to invent and create orders, man reveals himself both as a surplus- and shortage-being at the same time. He can rely on nothing, not even on natural or essential needs, and he can concentrate on no fixed goals, not even on regular ideas, which require standards and criteria. 'There are orders', this flexible basic fact refers to orders that are indeed subject to necessary and restrictive conditions, for which however no satisfactory reasons can be found. Orders create possibilities and impossibilities, but something that is not made possible is the creation of new orders itself. Here we find a moment of factual un-conditionality amid the experience. Radically alien is exactly that which can be anticipated by no subjective expectations and by no transsubjective conditions for possibilities. The remaining experience, which exceeds the existing orders, finally joins a *shift of space and time*, based on the fact that the self-reference never unites with itself, that - as we have seen - the place or time of speaking never coincides with the place or time one speaks of. Self-withdrawal means that something is there by being absent, that something is near by moving far away. This shift starts with one's own birth, which is never fully one's own, as it is never actively experienced and is never a subject of free choice. This complication of one's own past is expressed playfully by Lawrence Sterne, who delays the birth of his hero again and again, yet at the same time anticipates it in impossible phrases like "I am not yet born".<sup>12</sup> The birth concerns me, and yet I cannot attribute it to myself like an act that I myself have completed. Each birth is a premature one, and each baby is a latecomer, and this delay repeats itself wherever anything new that breaks through the existing measures comes into being. Each new forming thus reveals itself as a *deforming* of formations. A first speech and a first act are therefore impossible, just like a last word and a last deed. An 'absolute present', which would gather in it all sense, belongs to the phantasms of traditional orders that deny their origin.

The alien, that exceeds the play of possibilities as something extraordinary, can to that extent be regarded as something im-possible. Both

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Sterne (1950), p. 33. And also Carlo Levi "Tristram Shandy non vuol nascere, perché non vuol morire." (quoted after Italo Calvino (1988), p. 46).

hyphens indicate that that which exceeds the orders does not lead into an opposite world, but into an opposite of this world. However, the question of the possibilities and impossibilities of experience, speech and deeds, shows an ambiguity with which our considerations reach their extreme edge. The question that rises concerns the aforementioned relation between self-reference and reference to the alien. The reference to the alien can be interpreted in two ways, as a *boundary* of one's own capacities or a *questioning of the own*.<sup>13</sup> We find the first possibility in the system theory of Niklas Luhmann, who reflected upon how to deal with boundaries with rarely seen obstinacy and flexibility, but who also persistently halted at a specific boundary. For him, reference to the alien means a self-reference shifted in time. Each observation that means something and therefore distinguishes it from other things, can itself become the subject of an observation of oneself or another. The only thing that remains strange is the *operatio pura* of the person who observes, which vaguely reminds us of the *actus purus* of Aristotelian theology. The blind spot of observation is not erased but wanders from one systemic position to another. Other than is the case in the framework of communicative reason, which always involves the strange into a communality, systemic reason leaves room for alienness. However, those mean nothing more than *excluded, under certain circumstances (re)includable possibilities*. Alienness mark boundaries of ability, boundaries of the own, a common or operative ability. No doubt, the self-reference keeps the primate, even when the boundaries of self-determination are obvious. This primate is only changed into its opposite, when the self submits to an alien power and therefore recognises the alien as the indisputable master. It seems as if both extremes of a functionalist misjudgment of the alien and a fundamentalist idealisation of the alien were fit to strengthen each other. The game of possibilities would then be opposed in a new reality, as was already indicated in Musil's Kakania. Moral observers and moralists give each other a lot to do, as either party

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<sup>13</sup> Hermeneuticians like Gadamer or pragmatists like Rorty, who appeal to the traditions they belong to, take a vague position in between. Although the alien is not entirely left out of the discussion, it is only involved to the extent that it also 'belongs' to it, so that the questioning of the own eventually comes down to a questioning of the own by the own. One stays among oneself, regardless whether the tradition is ascribed 'strong reason' or a 'weak reason' in the sense of Gianni Vattimo.

is out for attacking the other in the back. The moral observer is reminded of his observer's morality, the moralist is reminded of his hidden amorality. This, too, predicts a long-term struggle which can be tested loudly at objects like at the memorial for victims of the holocaust.

Is that all? Can we think of nothing else along the boundaries of orders but an antithesis, nothing else but a polemic complementarity of self-reference and reference to the alien? An alternative would be the return to a *self-reference within the reference to the alien*, a responsiveness that allows for the inevitability of demands to be combined with the invention of our own answers. For im-possibility can also go back to alien demands, which thwart our own ideas and desires, and break through common regulations. An alien demand would be precisely that which – in its singularity – backs out of both the centralising power of the own and the equalising regulation of a common order. In an emphatic form of being different, the other takes the shape of a double: I am withdrawn from myself in the other<sup>14</sup>. Others are the likes of me, but through this likeness, which would change everything into an exchange according to the motto: “You to me as I to you”, runs a breach. This breach, which is at the same time a breach in the self and a breach in Being, as it cannot be brought back to the inadequacies of a limited view, cannot be repaired, neither by the old cosmo-theological nor by the new consensual reason. However, the alien, that grows from this breach, is at constant risk of being outplayed by normalisation measures. Yet the alien cannot be erased as if there were a fault-clear programme. Its resistance results from there being no equivalent for that which escapes from the order, not even a moral equivalent. For any order, the alien remains an intruder.

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<sup>14</sup> See also the short poem „Narciso“ by Susana Romano-Sued: „No habrá amor para ti pues no hay un doble.“ (1997, p. 19).

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