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Fragile Pluralism

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ABSTRACT This essay first appeared in German in Magdalena Tzaneva, ed. *Nachtflug der Eule: 150 Stimmen zum Werk von Niklas Luhmann. Gedenkbuch zum 15. Todestag von Niklas Luhmann* (8. Dezember 1927 Lüneburg – 6. November 1998 Oerlinghausen). Berlin: LiDi EuropEdition (2013), 73–100. A shorter version of the essay was published in Hans-Georg Soeffner, and Thea D. Boldt, eds. *Fragiler Pluralismus*, Wiesbaden: VS Springer (2014), 207–24. The present translation for *Entangled Religions – Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer* is by Nicola Morris.

The article describes the emergence of pluralism within the process of globalization and the impact of this development upon individuals communication and the definitions of the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’. The author illustrates the pitfalls of the human tendency to view the world from an ethnocentric perspective and with the corresponding attitude. He argues that in ‘open societies’, successful citizens will be capable of recognising and articulating distinctions between individuals, as well as between groups, beliefs, lifestyles and attitudes. These citizens must also be aware and capable of adapting for their purposes the full repertoire of language games and role games in their social world, in order to perceive and utilise comprehensive systems such as frameworks for cooperation. These skills will help them implement ‘maxims of communication’ and ‘existential hypotheses’.

KEY WORDS Pluralism (ethnic, religious, cultural); first and second order constructions of meaning; pluralistic societies; intercultural translation; maxims for communication; ethnocentrism; identity formation; immigration society

Preliminary Remarks - Theories and Facts of Society

“But it could make sense to search for theories that do more justice to the facts than the optimistic-critical traditional ways of thought within our discipline – justice to those facts with which society constructs itself.”¹

Every ‘cultural heritage’, including that of our discipline (whether it be optimistic-critical or not), has the tendency to become discursively fixed and closed off. This backwards-looking constriction of our mental horizon hinders or occludes our perception of new social realities just as much as a pronounced restriction on our thoughts about a particular scholarly paradigm. It has, however, always been the chief civic duty of the citizens in a republic of scholars not only to scrutinise what ‘one’ believes to know with certainty or what ‘one’ should think, but also to ask oneself – for whatever reasons – what can be regarded as a ‘fact’ or ‘facts’.

If we are talking about ‘facts’ that – as Luhmann emphasises – are ‘constructed’ by society itself, we are dealing with two dimensions of construction: the ‘first-order construction’,² which is achieved by ‘the’ society (however this may be conceived or determined), and the ‘second-order construction’, namely the reconstructive and constructive formulation of a scholarly analytical instrument.

It is obvious, however, merely from the way the problem is formulated in this essay, that the fundamental distinction between ‘first- and second-order constructions’ requires augmentation. Increasingly in modern societies, scholarly knowledge not only permeates everyday knowledge

1 Luhmann (2006), 150.

2 On the differentiation between ‘first and second-order constructions’ see Schütz (2010), 329-79.

but frequently also 'discursively' dominates it: the 'first- and second-order constructions' are so telescoped into one another that people often resort to scholarly interpretations for an everyday understanding of human action – whether in the form of political, educational or therapeutic consultation, or in legitimising a *Weltanschauung* (view of the world) that lends 'meaning' and direction to everyday practice.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that figures of self-interpretation and semantics in modern societies refer to the *Verschränkung* (interlinking or entanglement) of the range of such constructions, constituting a semantic network with discursive points of connection: pluralism, world society, cultural conflict, cultural comparison, ethnocentrism, mainstream culture, collective identity, etc. Each confrontation with these figures of self-interpretation accordingly demands not only a historically reconstructive analysis of the main concepts of contemporary semantics, but also requires us to lay bare the problematic situations to which these semantics and ideas about the self are responding.

The Initial Position

Almost all contemporary societies have a pluralistic structure. The 'world society' – the *Weltgesellschaft* introduced by Ferdinand Tönnies in the late nineteenth century as a social science construct – is also marked by religious, ideological, national, 'ethnic', political and economic pluralism, although the extent of that pluralisation varies considerably. Some Asian societies such as Indonesia and Malaysia are notable for their comparatively high degree of religious homogeneity despite 'ethnic' heterogeneity. In other societies like Japan, the opposite is the case. Although central

Europe, the USA, and the 'extreme case' (in terms of immigration) of Singapore are essentially all based on the same economic system, they are extremely heterogeneous in almost all other respects. And while such migration flows (both immigration and emigration) are leading to greater heterogeneity in almost every part of the world, the practice of extending economic ties results in a concomitant increase in supranational economic coordination. IT and media, too, are based on the same technical standards and comparable formats worldwide, at the same time as they preserve, emphasise or reinforce national, 'ethnic' or religious differences.

What, however, can be observed in all these societies – admittedly to varying degrees – is that world views, religions, moral concepts, national or 'ethnic' backgrounds can become interlinked/entangled not only within a community, but also 'within' an individual,³ shaping the way they interact. For instance, if a Catholic Bavarian forester were to convert to Zen Buddhism and teach meditation to novices in the USA, s/he would be following – with some intriguing variations – in the footsteps of a figure who is still pre-eminent, namely Saint Paul: a Jew who converted to Christianity, and a Roman citizen who became a charismatic roaming missionary, establishing religious communities in Asia Minor and Rome. Thus, we can see that societies as early as the pluralistic mosaic-like Roman empire were affected by these entangled, intertwining influences.

The spread of Christianity and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation marked an end to this religious heterogeneity – at least in Europe. It only recommenced in the early fifteenth century, when the conquest

3 I have taken the term *Verschränkung* (meaning interlinking or entanglement) from Klaus E. Müller, who in turn borrowed it from Schrödinger's quantum physics. Müller uses the expression, however, more in connection with the terms 'corresponding behaviour', 'correlation' and 'complementarity'. His reference points differ from mine in being reciprocities *within* relatively closed 'archaic cultures' (see Müller 2010).

of Ceuta in 1415 and the opening of the Gibraltar Straits heralded an era of rivalry between European explorers. European nations were the expeditions' home turf, the point from which they departed and to which they returned, as well as the base (one that was initially taken for granted) for expeditions, military campaigns and raids, for colonisation and religious missions. Just as Marco Polo had done in the late thirteenth century, these European nations discovered other 'ancient' centres and inadvertently founded new ones which later achieved independence. In this manner, Europe gradually, unwittingly, yet inexorably decentralised itself and its perspectives.

In the course of this development, the 'internal conditions' for the social system of each country were increasingly defined by means of their 'external conditions' - at least in the case of the dominant exploring nations Portugal, Spain, England, the Netherlands and later France.⁴ Without consciously being aware of it, Europeans were thus inevitably confronted with the 'practical cross-cultural comparison' imposed 'automatically' upon all states and societies, traders and military personnel, missionaries, explorers and emigrants, as soon as they engage in processes of exchange or confrontation, in an interactive sphere governed by the pressure for a reciprocity of perspectives. Incidentally, a determined rejection of this reciprocity is also an expression of the same pressure. However, the centralised perspective of European nation states - i.e. the view from 'inside' to 'outside', observing the 'external conditions' via the 'internal conditions' - seduces us into transposing those terms which the nation

4 On the distinction between 'internal conditions' and 'external conditions' see Tenbruck (1992) and Soeffner (1995).

state has developed for observing itself, including concepts about society, to whichever 'external condition' happens to be under scrutiny (see below).⁵

At the same time, there is a prevailing understanding – in the social sciences as elsewhere – that the act of comparing and the ensuing comparison are invariably fundamental components not just of everyday interaction, but also in the study of society. Neither Emile Durkheim nor Max Weber doubted that the sociology of religion or indeed any other form of sociology, whether empirical/descriptive or analytical/theoretical, had to be approached comparatively. However, the exact nature of the *tertium comparationis* (the third part of the comparison, i.e. the quality that two things being compared have in common) for a sociological comparison remains unclear, particularly when the question of being 'between' cultures is posed with respect to the 'cross-cultural comparison' (see Matthes 1992).

Reference to a *tertium comparationis* (whether formulated, imagined or analytically constructed) has long been a problem for historically based humanities and social sciences. This is because specifying an implied/imagined third part, whose 'elements' to be compared are also constructed as such and correspond to one another despite their differences, can justifiably be accused of limiting perspectives and is, moreover, open to suspicions of contingency.

So, when comparing religions, we generally imagine an 'Occidentally' influenced religious concept as a third part. And the definitions of the word Occidental, in turn, vary between the nebulous and arbitrary. Moreover, the practice of positing monotheism as the third part in a comparison of Judaism, Islam and Christianity creates difficulties not just for Muslims and Jews with respect to Christian notions of the Trinity. Comparing the present

5 A – significant – oppositional movement presents the idea of cosmopolitanism, developed during the philosophical Enlightenment, particularly by Kant; see his *Anthropology*, his essay on *Perpetual Peace*, and especially his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (Kant 1991).

and past, traditional and modern, pre-industrial and industrial, modern and post-modern societies is ultimately based on a concept of development, evolution or progress which almost always remains imprecise. What is missing, above all else, in the explicit formulation or implicitly imagined ideas of the third part is reflection upon a *quatum comparationis*: one's own point of view and its socio-historical *Seinsgebundenheit*, or existential bondedness (a term borrowed from Karl Mannheim). Everyday pragmatism is rather different, for actors are always compelled to imagine their own standpoint and assert their own interests.

In light of this problem, the question posed by Joachim Matthes over two decades ago about where 'between the cultures?' is located logically leads us in three directions. Firstly, it seeks the standpoint/position of the comparer. Secondly, it expounds upon boundaries being drawn between cultures. Thirdly, it aligns itself against the reification of cultures. There have been many repeated attempts to define the term 'culture', rendering the concept so diffuse that it now cannot be pinned down. Max Weber was one of the first to seek a way out of this 'definition dilemma'. He countered the reification of culture *itself* or of individual cultures with the capacity and tendency inherent to the *conditio humana* of ascribing "cultural significance" to *all* 'meaningful' human activities, consequences and formulations.⁶ Whether art and science or economics, politics and technology, "the analysis of [any] cultural *significance* of the concrete historical fact" affects human activity and human signification generally.⁷

The question, then, of what culture 'actually means', and how it can be precisely defined, must be replaced by a question about the attitude and

6 See, for instance, Weber (1973), 146–214, particularly 214. See also the battle of the 'specialists' (*Fachmenschen*) against the old 'domain of cultivated persons' (*Kulturmenschentum*) in Weber (1949), 77.

7 Weber (1949), 77.

position with which we approach human action and its consequences (see Soeffner 2000, particularly 174ff.). Since human nature is disposed to be 'artificial'⁸ and 'culture' is an expression of this artificiality, we are always "cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude toward the world and to lend it significance" (Weber 1994) and to approach it with an attitude that is economic, political, religious, pragmatic in everyday life *and* cultural too. This endowment is something that connects all people. It is there before cultural patterns are consolidated, has no 'between' status, and is the precondition for 'cultural' stereotypes being recognised as such and overcome.

Fundamental Problems, 'Existential Hypotheses' and the Cambyses Syndrome

The fact that we as "cultural beings [are] endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude toward the world and to lend it significance" is just as much an aspect of the *conditio humana* as the basic assumption underpinning every social action (i.e. related to Others) that we could adopt the position of our opposite number – despite all the empirical evidence of failure in applying this assumption, the *more or less effective assumption that precedes every social action*, of 'reciprocity of perspectives' (see above; see also Mead 1973, 129). Without this 'universal' pressure (*ibid.*) socially inflicted upon us as animals to co-orient with Others, we would be able neither to recognise our own standpoint nor draw comparisons and establish differences.

8 See Plessner (1975). "Das Gesetz der natürlichen Künstlichkeit", 309ff.

In that respect, comparisons and thus 'cultural comparisons' too have not only been the "ineluctable and mandatory practice of all societies" (Tenbruck 1992, 14), but also one of the elementary preconditions for every form of sociation. Accordingly, this "universal practice of reciprocal cultural comparison" (Tenbruck 1992, 14-15) from which human history gained its dynamism, and continues to do so, is far ahead of the 'scholarly cultural comparison'.

One frequently overlooked consequence of this, which similarly comes from the assumption that it is in principle possible to exchange standpoints and perspectives, is the enduring assumption in everyday communication that it is 'obviously' possible to understand the opposite party's language; this is an assumption fed by the conviction that, 'in principle', reciprocal translation between different cultural and national languages is 'obviously' possible.

Significantly, it was during a period of intense activity for scholarship on intercultural translation that Wilhelm von Humboldt took a stand against this common conviction. In concrete terms: Humboldt believed that in every single cultural language and in our approach to the symbolic worlds they each represent, there are people practising and appropriating world views which are formed in part by language. Consequently, as Sapir and Whorf later radically posited, each of the 4,000-plus languages on our planet stands for a specific symbolic system and the world view embedded within it (see Whorf 1963). Thus, each language tends to represent its own universe. The trend which can currently be observed of transferring this hypothesis to street slang, local dialects or technical jargon makes the underlying problem all the more acute, once more indicating the attempt to derive - with respect to the comparability of world views - a 'theoretically justifiable' relativism: the position of non-positioning in decisive indecision.

According to the central argument of this 'position', if each world view has its own truth, the ultimate conclusion is that there is no truth. Irrespective of the fact that the truthfulness of this deduction and the standpoint from which it has been formulated both remain unclear, from the language theories referred to above, it [the deduction] can only be substantiated by means of oversimplification. Neither Johann Gottfried von Herder, with his belief that all peoples on earth are equally close to God, nor Humboldt with his language theory, claimed that every single people and their language were *absolutely relative* in comparison with other peoples and languages. Rather, it is self-evident to see them as *relatively absolute* (see Stagl 1992, 69).

As with languages and the world views embedded within them, the same is true of their representatives: the people who live in them, who have to make themselves 'translatable' and (more or less) understood if they want to engage in social action. Ethnologists and cultural anthropologists in particular have to ask themselves the question posed by the German-Japanese Shingo Shimada to his eminent Japanese colleague Tamotsu Aoki: What does it mean to be a "Japanese anthropologist? Is he not himself a translation?" (Shimada 1992, 69). And what about all those people who are forced into 'practical translations' in everyday life, because they are a Somali married to a Swede, a Japanese to a Frenchwoman, or an Afghan to a German?

Joachim Renn has derived two unambiguous questions from the ambiguous formulation in German: '*die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*' (the task/surrender of the translator).⁹ Firstly, he asks what has been 'surrendered' to the translator. Secondly, when does the translator have to 'give up'

9 The phrase is taken from the title of Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*. The essay is generally translated as *The Task of the Translator*, but the word *Aufgabe* can mean both 'task' and 'give up/surrender.'

on account of the insurmountable boundaries of untranslatability of a linguistic expression and its overall symbolic representation? (see Renn 2006). Both questions refer ostensibly to the reciprocal translatability of various collective languages; however, they essentially already capitulate, firstly, at the difficulty of 'framing' individual sensations, perceptions and experiences in a collective language, and secondly, at the listener's or reader's attempt to crystallise the individual, specific meaning from this framing, which the speaker/writer has similarly sought to communicate in his/her use of language, beyond collective semantics.

Precisely this difference between individual ascription of meaning and collectively formulated language is one of the reasons why we are forced to communicate with each other; there is uncertainty, firstly, about whether we can appropriately express what we 'really' mean in the acquired language, and secondly, related to this, about whether we are 'really' being understood. Georg Simmel's assertion that we communicate *not* because we understand each other, but rather because we are aware of the potential danger of misunderstanding each other (see Simmel 1958, 257), describes precisely the underlying problem elaborated by Helmuth Plessner in the 'fundamental anthropological law' of 'mediated immediacy' (see Plessner 1975, 321ff.): namely the pressure to express what is individually and immediately experienced through collectively devised means of communication.

This fundamental problem is at the heart of all 'maxims for communication': the *assumption* that the standpoints are exchangeable (see above); the *assumption* that people can understand each other; the *assumption* that the opposite party can 'essentially' express themselves sensibly; the *assumption* that we could all speak the same language and – if not – that the languages could at least be mutually translated (see above).

All these assumptions are characteristically 'existential hypotheses': they are absolutely essential for our sociation.

At the same time, the irreversibly hypothetical character of these maxims for communication stands for the *fundamental fragility* of human communication and cooperation. Particularly because these 'existential hypotheses', with respect to ascribed or perceived 'cultural differences', produce a further *fundamental assumption* for people co-existing with and in the midst of difference: that we are all cultural beings. From this, it follows that whatever the Other or Others create/s, whatever they believe in and the way they live, has cultural significance (see above). This is an assumption that is continually being challenged by the basic distinction between 'we' and the 'Others'.

The Greek historian Herodotus provides an early illustrative record of the attitude resulting from this conflict-ridden constellation, when he writes: "I have no doubt that [the Persian ruler] Cambyses was completely out of his mind." Cambyses had mocked the cult-images of other peoples and ordered them to be burned. According to Herodotus: "It is the only possible explanation of his assault on, and mockery of, everything which ancient law and custom have made sacred."

He continues:

"If anyone, no matter who, were given the opportunity of choosing from amongst all the nations in the world the set of beliefs which he thought best, he would inevitably - after careful considerations of their relative merits - choose that of his own country. Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and the religion he was brought up in, to be the best; and that being so, it is unlikely that anyone but a madman would mock at such things."

The whole point of this extract is that Herodotus initially emphasises the ubiquitous ethnocentricity – the ‘fundamental distinction’ between ‘we’ and the ‘Others’ – in order to pose a concluding question which exploits the power of the similarly fundamental assumptions of ‘reciprocity of perspectives’ and the fundamental ‘meaningfulness’ of the Other’s actions. Anyone who confronts these existential hypotheses is crazy, or to put it more abstractly: “The validity of the norm is demonstrated through its transgressions.” (Luhmann 1995, 234).

The same is true to an even greater degree for pluralistically conceived contemporary forms of sociation. The language problem becomes all the more highly charged through the emergence of a ‘global idiom’ which, although labelled as ‘English’, corresponds to neither British nor American English. It is characterised by a vast number of varieties, each of them with specific idiosyncratic phonetic influences; bizarre distortions or adjustments; variable ad-hoc rules or semantics, and a rapidly growing vocabulary which borrows words from a whole range of languages. In addition, it is liberally peppered with pragmatically sourced neologisms for specific fields: economics, fashion, politics, pop culture, information technology, etc.

Exacerbated by the extinction of small indigenous languages and national languages being reshaped by a world idiom, this development is largely determined by the United States, in its capacity as an imperial power *and* a prime location for economics, culture, IT, and knowledge. This encourages – almost inevitably – the resurgence of the ethnocentrism debate, not only in cultural or postcolonial studies, but also in assorted politically correct ‘philosophies’ that extend into everyday life. The standard distinctions between I/you and we/the Others are supplemented by differentiating between first/second/third world, or the diametrically opposed Global North and South.

Current (and past) debate on ethnocentrism represents a discourse on power, interests and ideology that has been influenced by the Cambyses Syndrome, namely casting aside and repudiating the existential hypotheses. While the opponents in the discussion resolutely proclaim their own position, they are unwilling to exchange opinions. In this inverted ethnocentrism, the openly accused is confronted with a new, covertly occupied and represented ethnocentrism.¹⁰

Moreover, current argumentation suggests that Eurocentrism – and indeed ‘western’ ethnocentrism in general – has been debunked by its victims, the formerly colonised or ‘non-western’ peoples. The opposite is actually the case. The debate, conducted primarily in Europe and the ‘western world’, has raged unbroken since it was first sparked at the Spanish court over 460 years ago in 1550 by the monk and priest Bartolomé de las Casas, who later acquired fame as the ‘Apostle of the Indians’. As a missionary, he supervised the export not of economic goods but rather of European ideology, including the view deeply rooted in Christianity that everyone is equal before God, as well as the concepts of guilt, atonement and responsibility that go hand in hand with altruism (see Soeffner 1995, 16).

It was las Casas’ legendary and well documented disputation with the humanist J. G. de Sepúlveda in the presence of theologians and imperial advisers in Valladolid, but mainly his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1541/42) that took the first steps on the logical but increasingly

10 At a theoretical level this debate is conducted via the labels of ‘postmodernism’ or ‘post-fundamentalism’. There is an explicit demand either to relinquish the ‘singularity of a standpoint’ (Badiou 2010) or formulation of one’s own position, or, following Carl Schmitt’s friend/enemy distinction, to construct a radically opposing indefinitely remaining accrued item beyond the ‘enemy criterion’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2006). See Badiou and Tarby (2010); Laclau and Mouffe (2006); on the discussion of theory Moebius (2009); Moebius and Reckwitz (2008).

convoluted path towards a scholarly treatment of ethnocentrism. Rousseau's natural philosophy introduced the next stage.

In a departure from expectations, Christian ideology and 'secular' enlightenment now reinforced each other. Rousseau conceived a virtuous and unadulterated primordial natural state which was only tainted by civilisation, a place where 'simple peoples' lived before emissaries from civilisation tore them away and brought the lost, otherworldly Christian paradise into this world. Civilisation itself was the fall of mankind: Adam and Eve, good but untamed, still existed. They lived in the worldly paradises of distant islands and 'new worlds', which had to be rescued along with their unspoiled inhabitants. Admiring them and invoking them as witnesses against the limited perspectives and perversity of the European (later 'western') world became both a duty and a fashion, as with Diderot's *Supplement to the Voyage Bougainville*. Yet at the same time the slave trade and exploitation of the colonies continued unabated.

Here we can already discern something that later becomes all too clear: the theory of ethnocentrism and its condemnation, particularly in the form of colonial Eurocentrism, are not the products of colonised victims, but rather (like ethnology and folklore, systematic ethnology and systematic comparative cultural studies) 'western' creations, interpretations of the unknown/the Other as characterised by Christianity and the Enlightenment in the name of enlightened self-interpretation, but also an attempt at overcoming guilt and self-exoneration by accusing oneself, confessing and actively repenting. The decentring of the scholarly perspective is by no means an 'accidental' result of the self-interpretation. Moreover, the process of decentring also reveals the characteristically Christian pre-scholarly motif of the perspectival turn in permitting oneself extenuating circumstances by means of sustained self-accusation and demonstratively

showing an awareness of guilt.¹¹ These days the 'moral entrepreneurs' and profitable non-profit activities of a globally operating 'faculty club' - the Davos culture - are dependent on this motif for their continued existence.¹²

It is almost impossible to say for sure whether the new approach to other cultures envisaged by this attitude produces a completely fresh perspective on the unknown Other or rather conveys new insights into oneself. What is certain is that cultural studies which reflexively interweave an understanding of oneself and understanding of others, observing oneself and observing others, are wholeheartedly bound to the norm of reciprocity. And this norm provides for relativising one's own perspective, but equally refers to the universal claim of the maxims of communication and 'existential hypotheses'.

This claim, however, does not legitimate any radical relativism, despite the diversity of perspectives that emerge as a result. It precisely does not permit everything to be valid in the same way, aiming instead for the Other to be made *intersubjectively and comprehensibly* understood and thus generalisable, and seeking an ability to recognise or reject something with justification.

The durability and sustained attractiveness of the ethnocentrism debate can primarily be explained by its associated moral elements, but as commendable as these may be, their analytical value is doubtful. For these spheres of discourse are directed at larger things: ethnos, culture, religion, etc. Bearing in mind the observation that pluralistically conceived forms of sociation are fundamentally characterised by the "generalisation of alterity" (Hahn 1994, 162), both the backwardness and cultural inflation

11 See here Sumner (1907) in particular. Referring to these efforts to achieve redress, Sumner declares the 'practical cultural comparison' which has always taken place in intercultural processes of exchange to be a 'pseudo science' (Sumner 1907, § 28).

12 See Berger (2002).

of the basal phenomenon of alterity within the scope of this discussion become apparent. Moreover, it consequently becomes possible to ignore those historically documented attempts in the past to understand alterity not just as the cause of this exclusion but also as the impetus for inclusion.

Some Attempts to Overcome Difference by Including Difference¹³

The Europe of the Enlightenment and the subsequent era of profound social, political and economic (i.e. industrial) changes, nicknamed the *Sattelzeit*, or 'saddle period' by Reinhart Koselleck (1979, XV), was marked by revolutionary experience and revolutionary collective self-interpretation. In this Europe - France, to take one example - differences in the estate (i.e. social order), religion and 'ethnicity' among people from the same country increasingly threatened to take on a meaning of their own, something that would in turn destroy the state as a political and territorial unit. The idea of the nation state was the solution to this threat.

Abbé Emmanuel Sieyès expressed this answer in 1789 in a manner that was both succinct and wide ranging. "What is the Third Estate?" he asked. "It has hitherto been nothing and it must be everything. The Third Estate - that is the nation." A nation of equal citizens, irrespective of estate or background or belief, would 'remove' the existing social boundaries and issue constitutional safeguards by belonging to a nation. All mechanisms of discrimination and exclusion would be overcome by including all citizens in a higher entity.

13 See Luhmann (1995). "Inklusion und Exklusion", 237-64.

The territorial state thus adopts a model – admittedly one excluding other states while removing internal distinctions by law – that had already been outlined by Kant in the Enlightenment era for the world citizens of a world state. In light of the crisis of the nation state, this model, described in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” has recently been taken up again in modified form by Jürgen Habermas (see Kant 2009).

This idea of removing distinctions precedes such ‘worldly’ proposals and fuels a universally conceived notion of equality underpinned by ‘otherworldliness’: the idea that all people are ‘children of God’, whether masters or slaves, men, women or children; Jews, Romans, Greeks or ‘Barbarians’. In the process of transforming itself from a ‘Christian’ to an ‘Enlightenment’ Occident, Europe shifts the idea to this world, installing the state and civil law in place of a divine sovereign. Yet it continues to rely on the might of a concept that claims to be able to free itself from the influence of ‘first-order constructions’ – the primordial differentiation of I versus you, we versus the Others – in favour of a ‘higher second-order construction’: a specifically Occidental image of itself. Both ideas of inclusion – whether underpinned by otherworldliness or conceived by the world – continued to have an influence in other observations of the self by philosophers and authors in the nineteenth century.

What is constitutive to this image of the self, however, is modern philosophy (examples being Descartes and Spinoza) and that of the Enlightenment era (represented by figures such as Kant). It is in the smallest social unit, the individual, that they find the element that is common to all people and that links them: the disposition to be the ineluctable location of primary cognition and action. This *subject* now – in the face of ever more forms of pluralistic sociation – is increasingly forced to carry out this interweaving of observing the self and the Other.

While in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it is notably the 'obvious' self and the 'manifest' exotic Other that are addressed through the comparison of internal and external conditions (see above), it is later in the 'realistic novels' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, to take two examples) that the 'self' is reflected in the 'Other' and breaks apart. Parallel to this guided journey – through the Other of the external condition – of the observing, experiencing subject into one's own ego, a similar development is taking place at an early stage in the observation of the internal condition: the perception of the Other in one's own country. This is the discovery of the 'vagabond' (Grimmelshausen 1670), the beggar (in John Gay and J. C. Pepusch's *Beggar's Opera* 1728; and in Charles Dickens' nineteenth-century novels), the criminal, the outsider and those who are socially invisible (in Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* 1842/43; similarly in novels by Honoré de Balzac or Émile Zola). Here too, we are sometimes startled or horrified when our attention is directed towards people who are not 'us', but who we could be(come) through a cruel twist of fate.

Reflecting and breaking the self by means of an external Other, which can become a component of one's own self, is not all that unrelated to discovering an inner Other, an almost inaccessible stranger who has always been part of one's own ego. Thus, in anticipation of psychoanalysis, 'dark romanticism' traces the 'dark sides' of human life and encounters a *terra incognita* that necessarily belongs to the ego although it is unknown and uncanny.

That an ego is thrown back upon itself but finds no stability there, experiencing itself simply as an echo of its own cry for help, as in the anonymous 1805 work *The Nightwatches of Bonaventura*; or for it to 'split', threatening to lose itself and its centre as in E. T. A Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*, written a decade later – this is all part of a fundamentally new

experience not just for literature, but also, subsequently, in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard.

Later still, in the twentieth century, Helmuth Plessner ascribes an 'eccentric positionality' to the human being that lacks a centre (see Plessner 1975). But Kierkegaard had already found a succinct and precise formula for this relational being: a person is a relation who relates himself to himself and, inasmuch as he is directed at a social 'outside' "has himself outside itself within himself" (Kierkegaard 1987, 259; see also Soeffner 2010, 173). Unmistakably, the discussion on identity, which was previously epistemological (Hume) and structuralist/dialectic (Hegel) moves up an existential notch at this point, as can still be observed today.

The view that "identity or sameness" is a substance was commendably dismissed by David Hume early on as thoroughly confused, for it belonged to the deceptions of 'our common thinking':

"Thus we feign the continu'd existence [of objects] of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption [of these perceptions], and [in the same way] run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and [mental] *substance*, to disguise the variation [in ourselves]" (Hume 1739/40, 302).

The persistent idea of 'identity' as something substantial that can be gained, held onto or lost (and then regained?) is deeply anchored in this 'common thought'. It relies on a (precarious) security policy, namely the 'fiction' and 'our propensity' to establish stability in an undeviating progressive perception of the self and the world – an existential Archimedean location which will never set the world on fire (as it were), but which allows for reliable action. The same security policy includes the attempt to transfer substantial thought from the individual to the 'collective identity', something that Max Weber characterised as 'believed community' and Benedikt Anderson

subsequently as 'imagined community', declaring such a community to be a collective possession that conveys a feeling of security.

Significantly, the emphasis on the individual and collective identity as a kind of social substance is always greatest when there is a noticeable change in forms of sociation in relatively traditional societies: the quest for internal and external stability repeatedly (and almost reflexively) generates substantial fictions here. However, because they are held to be real, these thus take on an ominously real edge, when the political rhetoricians and actors and sections of 'public opinion' align themselves with them - with all the associated dysfunctional consequences.

On the other hand, in a 'classic' immigration society such as the USA, it is typical that a model of identity based on interaction theory should be proposed: when George Herbert Mead (see Mead 1973) used the well-known dynamically related three-way constellation of "I", "me" and "self" as an example of forming identity as a structurally open, interactive process, he was analytically recycling those pluralistically conceived urban forms of sociation in which an individual's 'significant Others' can be continually changing and the orientation towards a generalisable 'generalised Other' must always be re-adjusted (see Strauss 1968 in particular).

In a mobile social world generated by reciprocity (Simmel) and co-orientation, the human subject accordingly stands for a relation that acts to itself and to its world, precisely by acting to others, and in interacting with them this relation is reflected back upon itself (see Soeffner 2010, 173-74).

This means for me as an individual: my structurally dynamically conceived and normative orientation system, the 'generalised Other', becomes the variable sum of the 'significant Others' I reflect, which are characterised by me. The more Other I get to know and the more intensively I interact, the more 'significant' they become for me and the more my potential for social perception and action grows. Thus my 'personal' and my

'social' identities 'form' into the paradox of a – tendentially – permanently transforming complex unit:¹⁴ the mobile unit of my ego, which is continued in the interaction between this ego and the internal, internalised and external Others.

Structurally analogue to this desubstantialised concept of identity, an interactionist concept of 'collective identity' can be developed. The same is true here; the greater the differences between a society/community, the more co-orientation must be achieved and cooperation pursued. While this increases the potential for options concerning perception and action, it also means that the degree of uncertainty to act and potential for conflict grows for the actors.

So, on the one hand, this concerns the construction (which must be achieved and secured in practice) of a permanently transforming 'unit' with open boundaries. On the other hand, within this unit a transformational process is in progress, where the reciprocal degree of alterity of all actors to each other constitutes the combination of reciprocity, not on the basis of imagined or intended *commonality*, but rather on the knowledge of the essential *otherness* of the individual actors or groups; the increase in potential for growth and action of such forms of sociation comes at the price of considerable cohesive fragility. The tension between an increase in options and this growing fragility is the hallmark of modern pluralistic societies.

14 On the distinction between 'personal' and 'social' identity see Luckmann (1979).

The “Open Society” and Its Citizens¹⁵

A practicing bourgeois culture on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other are the two extremes that develop in response to the fragile structure of such open societies. The fundamentalism that can be observed on a global scale, along with its characteristic yearning for a ‘homeland’ and firm attachment to an ‘absolute’ belief and/or an all-encompassing society, do not represent a regression to pre-modern societal forms – a relapse of this kind would in any case be impossible on account of the relational framework linking the economy, media and politics these days – but rather stem from a desire for a modern phenomenon to ‘return’.

The lofty, heroic or fanatical belief in an all-encompassing society, however, articulates a reflexive resentment directed against the repeated pressure (accompanying the growing options for perception and action) to take risky decisions in relatively unclear situations. Possessing absolute belief and being firmly attached to a social norm both minimise this uncertainty. When faced with a threatened ‘generalisation of alterity’ (see above), they can communicate the feeling of belonging to an alliance of people who feel and think the same way, who believe they can find an antidote to the ‘anonymous nature of modern society’ in radically homogenising attempts to persuade the community, and who, by association, develop ideas shared by the community about what constitutes ‘the enemy’.

Repeated attempts in Germany by a section of the political elite and those intellectuals who sympathise with them to find a ‘German *Leitkultur*’ (defining culture) are based on a similar reflex. This reflex replaces the defence of legal equality, within the framework of a social contract as

15 See Popper (1975).

defined in a constitution, with the desire for a visibly shared ethos:¹⁶ instead of a culture defined by law there is one defined by attitude. Moreover, the reflex represents the (illusionary) response to a historical development that emerged after 1945, one that led to Germany becoming among the most 'mixed' countries in Europe.

Refugee migration, emigration and remigration, migration driven by poverty and work, political asylum, and the targeted recruitment of qualified personnel all mean that in the last four generations there are immigrants in nearly one in three families in Germany. Today, every eighth inhabitant of Germany was born abroad and immigrated to the country sometime in the last sixty years. In 2013, 10.7 million immigrants from a total of 194 countries were living in Germany (see Statistisches Bundesamt in Wiesbaden 2013). In short: Germany is characterized by ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism to a greater degree than ever before.

On the one hand, there is the quest for a *Leitkultur* for a populist and editorially embellished, slightly attenuated nationalist/fundamentalist 'homeland', and then on the other hand we can see how Germany, as a *constitutive* 'open society', reacts structurally to its pluralistic nature: in terms of foreign policy it increases its plurality via integration into the European community, and via the economy and media through improving international links. Domestically, plurality is strengthened through creating 'arenas', in the form of public spaces or media platforms where differences and opposing interests can be articulated and worked out.¹⁷

In 'open societies' with legal systems, the citizens who are successful are those who, firstly, are capable of recognising difference and articulating it. This refers both to differences between one individual and others, and

16 See Böckenförde (1978), particularly 24ff. and Soeffner (2011), 146.

17 On the concept of arenas see Strauss (1993), 225ff.; Soeffner (1991); Soeffner and Zifonun (2008), particularly 125-26.

to differences between groups, beliefs, lifestyles and attitudes. Secondly, they must be capable of perceiving and utilising comprehensive systems such as frameworks for cooperation. This involves, thirdly, an awareness of the full repertoire of language games and role games in their social world, as well as a proficiency in these and the ability to adapt them.

And thus we have come full circle with my line of argumentation, for the skills listed in the paragraph above aid the practical implementation of the 'maxims of communication' and 'existential hypotheses' named in Section III. They require precisely the practical and *learnable* social aptitude which can help in facing the essential fragility of human communication and cooperation. While the fictional unities are directed at generating indifference to difference, beyond the distinction between we/the Others and friend/enemy, in social aptitude based on difference it is possible to use the reciprocity of a variety of perspectives for language and role games in co-orientation and cooperation.

An analysis of the functionality and effects of practical 'maxims of communication' and 'existential hypotheses' in concrete co-orientation and cooperative contexts follows on from Simmel's insight that society exists "wherever several individuals are in reciprocal relationships", which is why sociology is "the only science" to undertake "the *investigation* of the *forces*, forms and development of *sociation*: of the cooperation, association, and co-existence" (Simmel 1909). In pluralistic forms of sociation these last characteristics listed by Simmel must be supplemented by 'opposition'.

Simmel hoped that this enforced, tension-ridden and complex "cooperation of many" could produce something that would be "beyond the individual and yet not transcendent".¹⁸ In line with my argumentation so far, 'otherworldly' means sociation as a pluralistically structured process. The

18 Georg Simmel. 2008. Here "Das Objekt der Soziologie", 116.

task for contemporary sociology as a 'science of reality' (to use Weber's expression) is to empirically retrace these processes of sociation and analytically rework them.

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