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## Strangers in the Hands of an Angry “I”: On the Immediacy of Other Persons\*

**Abstract:** In the first of two essays on the ontological ground of otherness, and its phenomenological availability, we argue that what we call the “occasion” within the encounter of others are sources as well as re-sources for disclosing the results of a construction and concealment of a secret identity, one we keep from ourselves even though we have created it. Yet, individuals are capable of returning their encounters to the well of *sensus communis*, and that *sensus communis* is as natural as it is cultural. Human beings are not compelled to interpret strangeness as threat, even if we are culturally compelled to interpret strangeness itself. Narrative lives in our *sensus communis*, and it is open, revisable, even danceable. Immediacy is person, the person that is community, and it is sublime, is both liked and disliked.

**Keywords:** otherness, phenomenology, self, subjectivity, Waldenfels, *sensus communis*, imagination, narrative

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\* This essay was written well before the barbaric Russian invasion on Ukraine in February 2022. The resulting warming of relations on the Polish-Ukrainian border, and between the two peoples, is certainly a cause for reflection on the matter of who is a stranger and why, the topics we confront in this essay.

## A “Crisis”?

This paper is an attempt to provide a kind of response to what is commonly referred to as the “immigrant crisis” in Europe and in the United States. We do not intend to approach the problem from the political or economic perspective. There is actually no evidence that the so-called crisis (actually repeated waves of groups aiming to immigrate to the United States or the European Union, garnering broad media attention) poses any real threat to the security or the way of life of either Europeans or Americans. The political football being kicked around obscures the situation further.

The first and the only form this “crisis” really took, so far, is very strong experiences of uneasiness, inquietude, or even deep existential anxiety. These experiences almost immediately found their expressions in the hysterical arguments and theories informing us that right now we, whose countries are called upon to host the would-be immigrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers, are facing the greatest danger since World War II, that we are invaded by the herds of aliens who intend to deprive us of our identity and completely destroy our cultural heritage. Many of these rants have reached extremely radical levels of aggressiveness, some of them taking the form of ridiculously self-contradictory or hyperbolic statements (for example, “lazy thieves” and “bad hombres”). But all of these epithets and jeremiads could be brought down to the simple sentence desperately cried out by hundreds of thousands of Europeans and Americans: “We are under siege!” Most human beings can understand what it means to confront a deadly danger, and if they believe the threat is real, real responses begin to follow (for example, the separation of children from their families by the US government, or the awful events on the Belarus/Polish border in the fall of 2021).

The whole situation becomes more complicated when we realize that the strongest and the most radical reactions have taken place in the Central European countries and in the rural Midwestern and Southern states, which are almost or completely untouched by these herds of “invaders.” By contrast, many who live close to borders and shores, and who *are* affected more directly, oppose the tendency to exaggerate the crisis. It becomes even more complicated if one makes the slightest effort to observe the real state of affairs. For example, the Syrians on the Belarus border are actually doctors and lawyers and engineers and teachers, who only want to cross to Germany, not invade Poland; the immigrants coming across the southern US border only want jobs that US natives do not want anyway, and actually help the US economy, and so on. But the situation is not *about* facts or states of affairs. It is not about actuality at all. That is why we must designate the “crisis” in scare quotes — and in this particular case, that is an unusually apt idiom.

We confess, at the outset, a very deep, frustrating disappointment, which at some moment turned into a more critical attitude, expressed in one single question: how is it possible that so many of our fellow citizens and colleagues from different parts of Europe and the United States were so strongly and so quickly taken captive by what Elaine Showalter calls “hystories”?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*, New York 1998.

## The Problem of Otherness

The problem of thinking through “the other,” or “otherness,” is as old as the history of Western thought, and indeed even older. It seems that it is, and always was, one of the greatest challenges with which not just philosophy but everyone must struggle. Even with all the changes of historical-cultural background, one can immediately recognize the very same patterns which constantly return and resonate — in this or that form — when collective fear enters onto the stage. It is not our intention to provide a complete list of these patterns, but we would like to point out few enduring issues.<sup>2</sup>

First, at least since Plato’s *Sophist*, we know that otherness can take two main forms: either it is related to the same and as such appears as relative to it, as its peculiar moment, or it is something which resists any relation and as such remains completely incomprehensible. In other words, either it is reduced to the totalizing dialectics of immanence or is cast out into an absolute transcendence.

Second, and as a consequence, throughout the whole history of Western culture the category of otherness was expressed (in religion, philosophy, myths, social imaginaries) in terms of almost Manichaean opposition with regard to both the ontological and axiological aspects. In other words, oneness, self-identity, sameness, were always recognized as the highest ideal, as the Platonic Good. Everything that would question this ideal, that would introduce the aspect of differentiation without any possibility of being appropriated, that is, the risk of alienation, is presented as Evil. The ethical implications of this perspective go without saying.

Third, the obsession with otherness (with all the ambivalence characteristic of obsessive thinking) is perfectly reflected in conceptual or linguistic problems as to the *ways of naming it*. It seems that in most languages there is no single word which would be able to render all possible nuances, shades, and forms of otherness. It is as if our languages work relentlessly in order to sort out this unbearable enigma, which appears and re-appears in so many different forms. It is as if “evil” has so many names. Any closer analysis of most of the European languages will show that we can distinguish at least three more or less distinct meanings.

## The Meanings of Otherness

First, what is other/strange/alien is somebody/something coming from the other *place*, something external, as opposed to interiority (*externum, étranger, stranger, foreigner, Fremde*). A second meaning implies the relation of *possession* — what is other does not belong to us, is excluded and exteriorized — in an economic (*oiko-nomos*) sense — from the realm of what is our own (*alienum, alien, ajeno*). Last but not least, otherness means something peculiar, odd, unfamiliar, and uncanny as opposed to what is well known, familiar, and homey. In other words, this otherness is something resistant to the concepts and categories

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough analysis of the ways and modes of approaching, interpreting and thematizing (philosophical, historical and cultural) of the problem of the others, as well as their ethical implications, see R. Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, London–New York 2005.

by means of which we make sense of reality, hence, we mean any phenomena that resist our efforts of *understanding* (*insolitum, étranger, estrange, Entfremden*). Obviously, these three meanings, although distinct, point at different aspects of the same problem — but they very often overlap or support each other. It seems to us that it is the first aspect which is of crucial importance and which implies or even embraces the other two.<sup>3</sup> In our inquiry, we will use the terms “other,” “others,” and “otherness” to cast a net over this entire field of meaning. We are aware that the discussion can go indefinitely as to how the terminology is best arranged.

## The Creation and Limits of the Self

It seems that what is at stake in our relation to strangers, aliens, foreigners, that is, others, is not so much how we should understand them (as if it were possible at all), but rather what this relatedness reveals about ourselves, how it reveals ourselves before and to ourselves. The others introduce into our everyday life a shadow of uncertainty, unfamiliarity — sometimes moderate, in many cases highly disruptive. But why? Why does the fact of being confronted with strangers appear to be so problematic that our provisional and immediate responses take on the form of imaginative representations of almost apocalyptic dangers (physical, cultural, religious, economic, hygienic, etc.)?

It seems that these colourful and often highly aggressive imaginative representations bring us face to face with two significant phenomena concerning our own identities, which are much more complex, conflicted, and fragile than we expect them to be. First, one can say — following Bernhard Waldenfels — that the process of creating the self lies, to a large extent, in “drawing the boundaries”<sup>4</sup> (between what is *heimlich* and *unheimlich*). The boundary drawing is logically and phenomenologically primal. There is no self and no identity which would precede this process or at any moment would stand apart from it. And what follows the self is always already mediated through its intimate relation to otherness. Indeed, we will go so far as to say that “immediacy” just *is* the presence of *others*, or of *the other* (these are not quite the same). This idea is certainly not unique to our view but is not given the attention it needs. The idea of immediate experience (unmediated by culture, symbols, even space and time) spreads out in every direction and affects everything else we think, say, or do.

Second, in accordance with the still dominant cultural ideal of the autonomous, independent modern subject, ascribing the very sense of *being* one-self to a particular and exclusive field of our self-experience is — as some of the more profound psychoanalytical insights have shown — nothing else but the imaginary effect of

<sup>3</sup> We rely here on the careful and detailed etymological and conceptual distinctions made by Bernhard Waldenfels. See B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien: Basic Concepts*, transl. A. Kozin, T. Stähler, Evanston 2011, pp. 71–72.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 11 ff. In Waldenfels’s view this process is considered as equal to the process of constitution of any (always and necessarily contingent) subjectivity, selfness or culture. In his view (and we follow him with this regard) human being has essentially liminal character.

originally constitutive identifications with what is other (and strange), of what does not belong to the realm of my “own-ness” — for reasons we will explain later in more detail. If that is so, subjectivity is, from the very beginning, marked by a peculiar and often violent dialectics of familiarity and strangeness, of the most vivid desire for self-possession and a painful, disruptive feeling of being possessed or dis-possessed.

Both points show that *the subject* and *the stranger* are two sides of the same imaginary effect, which is constantly at work in our perception of ourselves and of the others. This structure has been observed in literature (think of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Double*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde*, Thomas Tryon’s “the other”), in art, in film, even in popular culture (such as Billy Joel’s song “The Stranger”). This widely recognized aspect of subjectivity, this doubling, brings us the other *as* the self, and without that experience (to see one’s own embodiment and gaze in a primal mirroring), it is unclear whether any “self” can develop. The experience is so powerful that it cannot be ignored or pass unnoticed. And as such, it can have, and in fact often does have, significant implications of an ethical (and political) nature.

### The Other Group as Immediate Otherness

A further word is needed about the difference between the presence of others and “the other,” as *immediacy*. It seems likely that seeing otherness in the other group precedes the individualized experience, culturally and anthropologically speaking. In our primal *sensus communis*, those who are part of our group are unable to be present to individuals *within* the group *as* “other.” In all likelihood, otherness is first experienced in the presence of *the other group*, and hence, the feeling of uncanniness is first generated between and among groups of humans, and it is likely that the experience extends into animal and even insect experience as well. The group structure reaches deeply into nature, where many kinds of mammals, birds, reptiles, and even groups of ants distinguish the “other group,” sometimes co-existing peacefully, sometimes locked in mortal struggle, and even sometimes developing complex social interdependencies, as with the *Polyergus-Formica* ant slave-making relation. The broad evidence of otherness at the level of groups may explain why human beings are likely, when threatened, to fall back upon a primal nature immanent in the species and in many forms of life. While the presence of the other group is not always a threat, yet, we may safely say it is always “an occasion.” This will become a technical term for us. That is, when *the others* are present, that is when *we* are present, and there is immediacy in the sense that even non-action is a sort of decision, a sort of “cut in time,” a “before the others” and “after the others.”

### The Strangeness of the Time: Encounters and Occasions

Thus, the uncanniness is an experience of *the strangeness of the time*, an introduction of a before and an after that suspends the encounter in its immediacy as a kind

of “no-time,” or as an eternity immanent in an event. The presence of the others is an experience of being out of time, and hence, without a ground, without a place, *atopos*, *unheimlich*, homeless. All occasions are “encounters” but not all encounters are occasions. The occasion is the encounter that “takes hold,” that has portents.

There is no reason to deny that the encounter with others, this aspect of human *sensus communis*, is our natural aspect, shared widely with other forms of life. Even the weirdness of the “occasion” of immediacy may belong with the natural aspect, since it seems empirically evident that such experienced weirdness is surely shared at least by higher primates. But when we consider the range of, for example, dog encounters on a typical day in the park, we realize that weirdness is not *always* a part of the “occasion.” It might or might not be “weird” for the dogs. We have to wait to see what they do. The physical encounter of dogs in the present, and their temporally extended encounters through the scenting and discovery process, are (evidently) not usually “weird” to them, but a part of their *sensus communis*.

It seems to us that focusing overly on weirdness will not take us to the fullest account of otherness, and especially where, in human experience, the otherness can grow from a post-natural or enculturated combination of structures which, even if they are traceable to natural encounters, have taken on a dynamism of their own. It is a dynamism which permits the generalization of an individual’s portion of natural immediacy into a quite unnatural collection of responses — “unnatural” in the sense that they reverse the natural, putting what is prior as posterior and vice-versa. For example, although the others clearly have priority in the natural encounter, yet the individual post-natural response will place “us” in priority over “them.” Thus, we have the immediacy of others *to* our group, and a quite different immediacy of the other *to* our individualized experiences. This latter immediacy leads to occasions of another kind, or what we might call the “cultural immediacy of the encounter.” As fascinating as it would be to pursue the occasions of cultural immediacy, we must now move to a discussion of the individualized, post-natural portion of the experience of the other.

## A Modern Alien

Contemporary philosophers and psychoanalysts apparently agree on the point that the question of the other or stranger cannot simply be extracted from the problem of subjectivity or the self. Some of them even agree that the latter problem is to be somehow solved or illuminated by reversing the whole analysis and beginning with otherness and strangeness. The reason for such reversal is quite obvious — nowadays nobody has any doubts that the traditional conception of the subject (evoked by René Descartes, developed by Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and then finding its articulations in many thinkers of both the continental and analytical traditions) can still be defended. We think not. These are philosophies of mediation, and we are convinced that the problem lies in immediate experience, which is part of the reason it is so intractable.

The picture of the human individual as being somehow isolated from his/her life world, being self-transparent, self-reliant, fully autonomous, and self-grounding; furthermore, we picture the self as being a distant and indifferent master of all his or her representations. This picture seems to be extremely naive. In fact, it always was. It was based on an artificial construction of the modes of human self-experience, and, as such, was based on a quite tricky theoretical and methodological step. It is identifiably modern in form.

The Cartesian “discovery” of this self-grounding, self-transparent, and autonomous subject — the ground of all absolutely certain knowledge — was accompanied by the significant operation of suspension of everything that could cast any shadow on this ideal construction. Everything within the field of human experience, whatever was doubtful, uncertain, unspeakable, or irrational, was relegated to the dark zone of the unknowable. Left out was the immediacy of others and of *the Other*, eliminating the ground of both nature and culture. In this way Descartes not only constructed for the first time, and unwittingly perhaps, the theory of the transcendental subject, but he also created one of the first and certainly the most sophisticated philosophical figures of strangeness — the figure of the powerful, mean, demonic Alien.

## Enter the King

One wonders whether the felt necessity of the immediacy of the others, and then the Other (individualized from others), did not haunt Descartes’s mind, since it seems hyperbolic doubt as a methodological tool requires no demons. Yet, he spun from his own soul the mother of all demons, the evil deceiver. This move makes him the first great psychoanalyst. Those who believe that psychoanalysis was invented by Sigmund Freud are wrong. The only question was how to build the fence solid enough to defend the new, proud King, “His Majesty Ego,” against this dark zone, this otherness of the others (it is difficult not to think of Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping, or even Kim Jong-Un). Such a zone creates a permanent danger for the stability of His Majesty’s kingdom of Light and Truth. Having denied the immediacy of others, and thus of *the Other*, these primal figures have no choice but to become, for this new King, manifestations of the royal ego.

But the energies exerted upon us naturally and through the immediacy of our social *sensus communis* are not willingly marched into the catacombs of the Ego. They rebel, resist, and persist in being immediate and other. Thus, beneath the constructed strangeness of the Ego to its own projections, there remains the primal immediacy of others (their nature) and of the Other (the individualizing work of culture). The former of these is what Person means as the concrete basis of sublime experience — and it is not always threatening.<sup>5</sup> The latter, individuated response

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<sup>5</sup> We use the term “person” here as Kant does, for example in the Third Paralogism, A362. The use of the term “person” in Kant’s *Critiques* is reserved for a sublime experience of the other as an autonomous rational being and it can never be reduced to, for example, a judgment of taste. But it requires a reflective rather than determinate judgment, a generalization from what is not only particular

to Person is what "person" means, existentially, and this is the ground of dignity, unmediated in its presence, but dependent upon the natural aspect of *sensus communis* for its manifestation.

## Kant's Suspended Immediacy

It is good to remember that, as Kant rightly pointed out, we both like and don't like the experience of the sublime. We do not like its refusal of form, but we do like the way it brings us to recognition of our power to determine ourselves individually in the feeling of liking by making a judgment. In many ways, then, we could fairly characterize the occasion of the presence of others as a demand for judging, and the presence of the others as a path to the recognition and appropriation of our individual dignity. Without the immediacy of the others, our individual dignity, if it exists, is latent and unavailable to us at the individual level.

The immediacy of the occasion is, therefore, the basis of the encounter with the eternal, the strange cut in time that makes these events call forth and absolutely require not only the act of judging, but the demand for an action which ends the suspension of time. This experience truly is what we mean by "suspense," and it cannot be held for very long. Action *will* break it, dividing the before from the action with a sublime and immediate, but *intelligible* moment. In a sense, this includes "I think, I am," but not as an argument, or even as a self-evident utterance, only as a moment that is ineffable in fact, but that inspires such inadequate utterances, as exclamations, of existing. Thus, we affirm in Descartes's great effort, the achievement of an exclamation, "I act, I am." And we then defer it as sublime, the sublimity of the other person.

That is hardly a ground for asserting a substantial subject. What we can find in the Cartesian enterprise is not only the superficial character of his conception of the subject; above all, it shows perfectly that the mode of being which is characteristic for ourselves is being referred to our boundaries — regardless of whether it takes a positive or negative form. In the most general formulation, that would mean human be-ing is always in-between same/familiar and other/strange, known and unknown, real and imaginary, a "concern" in suspense, unsustainable, and hence finite. Our finitude is grounded, experientially, in our inability to sustain the occasion of the presence of others, and the encounter with the other. We must act.

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in experience, but unique, and which always fails to arrive at an adequate concept. This is the general structure of sublimity. See "The Analytic of the Sublime" in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. There is, of course, a whole tradition of philosophical personalism which treats these problems in great detail. Our version of this idea differs from the tradition in that we take "Person" as collective before it can be individuated, and in this our views are closer to those of Josiah Royce. See R.E. Auxier, *Time, Will, and Purpose: Living Ideas from the Philosophy of Josiah*, Chicago 2013, esp. chapters 7–9.



## *Im Anfang war die Tat*

Therefore, we must leave aside all that might have been done in favour of what is to be enacted. An eternity of possibility is destroyed in releasing the suspended immediacy of others (nature) and the other (culture). As being finite, this act always directs itself in a more or less reflective or intentional manner to its boundaries. When we act, we know, after a delay, that we act, and we experience, primarily, the egress or departure of the possibilities we have eliminated. What is left afterwards is hardly a regal Cartesian ego. But *subjectivity*, as distinct from *the* subject, continues, binds the wounds of our cut in time, and weaves the after with the before, forming a cradle for the occasion and the encounter within its gauze of reflection. The knowledge of the act is less than the act, but it is *of* the act.

In more precise philosophical formulation it means that our human “essence” lies — as we have already mentioned — in setting the boundaries, in creating certain orders, and this activity always coincides with the exclusion of what is not considered “our own.” Waldenfels is quite correct when stating that the self is not something pre-existing and substantial, some substantial being who only then can relate in this or that way to its own properties and fragmentary experiences. Quite the contrary, what is primal is the experience of differentiation through which and in which the “self” is given to itself for the first time (even the word can be misleading, conjuring as it does “das Ich” and other versions of the modern subject or the Freudian Ego). The self is not only relational through and through, it originates in and from the constant process of distinguishing itself from the others, distinguishing between what is its own and what is strange, what is homey (*heimlich*) from what is unhomey (*unheimlich*).

## Drawing and Bounding

The self is precisely the effect of such “drawing boundaries that distinguish an inside from an outside and thus adopt the shapes of *inclusion* and *exclusion*.”<sup>6</sup> In another passage Waldenfels radicalizes this point: “This self is neither the veiled subject of one’s own act of bounding, nor the objective result of an alien act of bounding, but within the act of bounding it springs out, as it were; it appears as a cavity, as an *inside which separates itself from an outside* and thus produces a *preference in the difference*.”<sup>7</sup> The metaphor of drawing is clearly inadequate; we prefer “act of bounding.” We said above that the occasion and encounter, as immediate, evade description, yet, the metaphor of drawing might be deepened by observing that one also draws water from a well, and that the well is fed from an unseen spring. Indeed, the well is a place where culture and nature cooperate. The well of our sociality, even when severely drawn down, is replenished from a spring of our natural *sensus communis*, which moves under the surface of our ontic constructions. Selves are like draughts from the work of drawing out some

<sup>6</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

individualizable portion of what existed before and with the common resource. We do not suggest that Waldenfels would endorse our modifications.

Even with the clarification, the self is essentially paradoxical — at one and the same time it is, as it were, one of the elements of the relation and the relation itself. Instead of the subject who is directly and intimately given to itself — the self relates to itself only by means of this *inclusive–exclusive relation*. It means its relation to itself and the relation to others, strangers, aliens overlap one another. Being nothing more than the temporary projection of particular orders, it appears to be at the same time at their limits, as bounded — the impossible non-existing place — within and without them. In other words, the rhythm of human existence is marked by a dialectic of projective self-identification and alienation. Although these two are not identical, the one does not exist without the other.

## Our Secret Identity

Yet, to “identify” one-self is compulsory, as it were. To “identify” one-self is to designate a zone which stands over against us, the distance between the drawn water and the well water, and indeed, ethnically speaking, it is also to distinguish the well water from the well-spring; it is to be referred to what is external, or even more, to be reflected, as in a disturbed pool, in this externality. Waldenfels adds:

The opposition between the own and the alien does not emerge from a mere separation, but from a process of *in-* and *ex-*clusion. I am where you cannot be, and vice versa. We call a place alien if it is where I am not and cannot be and where I am nevertheless, in the manner of this impossibility.<sup>8</sup>

We are faced here with a two-fold paradox. First, every act of self-identification, understood as delimitation, is essentially mediated by the reference to what remains excluded. That means that the self loses itself in being taken captive by its own counterpart, and in this way escapes, so to speak, only from itself. In other words, the identifying self projects itself into the place of its own present impossibility, a return to the eternal and sublime occasion and encounter.

Second, as far as the reference to the other/stranger relies on the act of exclusion, it takes purely negative form — the self refers himself/herself *to* the stranger by *escaping from* the stranger. The simplest ontological consequence of this process of delimitation is that the self intentionally comprises what is excluded.<sup>9</sup> We might say that it keeps a secret from itself. But the intentionality, which is operative here, takes on — as we will see — rather peculiar forms of radical break, disruption, resistance. The well metaphor has limits. This break of water from water is more than a calm lowering and dipping of a familiar bucket. That image might cover, for example, the occasion and encounter of families about to be joined in an approved marriage, with the breaking with the earlier order’s inclusions and exclusions encompassed in the act. It is an occasion and an encounter, and it does carry every structure we have described, but the occasions that concern us here are less

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. ibidem, pp. 15–16.

easily assimilated and woven into a seamless “before and after.” It is in this more violent sense that one can speak about the self in terms of exclusiveness — it is the effect of the process of exclusion, of which it itself becomes a part.

## Strangers to Ourselves

If what we have said above is true, the self is always already permeated by strangeness. Waldenfels argues: “The ‘I’ is an Other because alienness [otherness] begins in one’s own house. The alien [other] reference within the self-reference explains why no one is merely who they are, and causes the chain of self-doubling.”<sup>10</sup>

Even within the realm of its “ownness,” the self is marked by the traces of what is other and strange, what precedes its own initiative and as such undermines its sovereignty, as if from within. Here we have something like the experiences that must underlie the reactions to imagined invasions of the “homeland” by refugees and alien races. We are always — at least to some extent — split, fragmented, and unable to reconnect with what has led to our acts of self-identification. We are before and at the same time behind ourselves. Our thrownness into the world (in the most radical way articulated in the fact of our birth, forever beyond our grasp, the moment when we are drawn out of our mothers like water from a well), our being in language, the non-transparency of our embodiment, the secret, enigmatic and often ambivalent stream of our thoughts, unconscious phantasies or dreams — all these phenomena indicate that we can never fully grasp ourselves.

At one and the same time we have an advantage over ourselves and are miserably behind. That is why human existence can be quite adequately described, after Waldenfels, as ecstatic strangeness/alienness.<sup>11</sup> It seems that our existence, that is, any more or less unified course of our experiences, is based on some doubling or reduplication of that before, during, and after, which we have repaired in order to include a sublime eternity within the scope of our finitude. Existence spreads over the ever-present possibility not only of self-alteration, but also of self-estrangement or self-alienation. Occasions still produce encounters. It seems that our self-reference is always already accompanied by different forms of self-eluding, in the sense that we prefer to rest upon the work we have already accomplished and maintain only the modes of alienation we have already woven into the fabric of our temporality. We act as if our past work were not the same as our present and future work. But it is. We remain strangers to ourselves and face an ever-present task.

To sum up, our being at the limit is articulated in two simultaneous, inseparable moments/aspects — first, delimitation constitutes what can be called “interiority,” understood as what is our own and homey and this limiting is done by means of exclusion of what we find unrecognizable, strange, unknown, inaccessible, unacceptable, *unheimlich*. Yet, somehow we are always aware that what we exclude is also “us and me.” My interiority is a residuum of my undifferentiated history with my kind and with all humanity. This is my common sense, a gift of our nature,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pp. 16–17.

<sup>11</sup> See ibidem, p. 51.

binding us both to our group and to the others. The interiority of my group is its residuum from what it has excluded and included from before it came to have an identifiable "essence," and from after every occasion and encounter, the presence of the others. That interiority is constituted negatively before it can ever become an identity. Second, and as a consequence, this process of constituting by means of separating produces and at the same time conceals our own strangeness.

## It

But what precisely happens when I (and we) do encounter a radical strange-ness/stranger? And here we are already assuming that the natural encounter with others and the "occasion" have done their work, have individuated the self to some significant degree, and that this self now brings that setting to an encounter of radical otherness, which we now designate "strangeness" — that aspect of otherness that resists all efforts to assimilate or integrate it with the self. What is the genuine mode (or modes) of this strange experience of strangeness?

In order to answer this question Waldenfels quite adequately uses one of the ancient Greek terms for experience, namely that of *pathos*.<sup>12</sup> Its original meaning indicates "something that happens" in the sense of what one suffers or endures. Immediate experience is drawn from our existence and can befall us without being sought, intended, or desired. Furthermore, it usually takes on the form of an occasion/encounter that one cannot control by force. Thus, it is the immediate experience which undermines all concepts and schemata by means of which we could put it into some neat or tidy order, locate it in the organized sequence of events. Or, simply speaking, this immediate experience is given as irreducible to anything known and familiar. It appears beyond or against anticipation and expectation, before any initiative. It appears as a break and disruption of any unified course of experiences, and because of that, it also appears as an obstacle. The occasion is the encounter we never see coming. Such is its immediacy, and all immediacy.

Immediate experience touches, affects us, and agitates, puts us outside of ourselves, hits us with the prod that makes present. Thus, the strangers experienced in the mode of *pathos* are an "it" which takes on the form a *hyperphenomenon*,<sup>13</sup> which is to say, *it* appears, *it* gives itself in a paradoxical mode of not being present. *It* is — to express this phenomenological situation by using Jean-Luc Marion's idiom — as if we were experiencing the pure appearing without anything that appears, and that is because the strangers always escape any forms we could impose on them. Such is sublimity.

That means not so much that the strangers, or the *it* that is strange, can be absolutely different from us. The encounter rather suggests that the strangers cannot be brought down to or derived from the realm of "ownness." Furthermore, the radical experience of the occasion, and of encountering the strangers, finds its prolongation in the strangeness of experience. As Waldenfels says, "Alienness

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, esp. pp. 26–28, 34, 36.

<sup>13</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 35.

[strangeness] in its radical form means that the self in a certain way lies *outside of itself* and that every order is surrounded by the shadows of the *extra-ordinary*.<sup>14</sup>

## Before We Were Us

There is no sense in the sharp and strict separation between immanent and transcendent strangeness. Since they are forms in the same (tragic?) moment, the disruption of suspense, these two forms always come together. In the occasion, there is no difference between the immanent sublimity and the transcendent sublimity. Immediacy is immediacy. Person is person. It is it. So, if I am/we are moved, agitated, shocked by strangeness which comes from without, that is only because I am/we are already haunted by the ghosts and phantoms that we have owned, humanly, ethnically or psychologically, by what is repressed, forgotten, neglected within my/our own existential project, by this “shadow of what does not fit into it.”

What is not “us” or “me” once was, or at least was held in suspense with the potency to become “us” and “me,” if not wholly, then in ways other than *it* actually did. What is set aside, deferred, eliminated, excluded, was “ours” before we were “us.” At that place it is hard to avoid questions such as: does this mean it is enough to recognize our own strangeness in order to recognize and to give justice to the strangeness which comes from without? But what does it mean to “recognize” strangeness? Is it possible at all? And above all, does such a recognition have to have positive effects? We think the best way to answer these questions is to combine the phenomenological path with some psychoanalytical insights.

## Uncanny Others

The link between these two perspectives is provided by Helmuth Plessner, who describes strangeness as what is “one’s own, familiar, and homely in the other and as the other and therefore [...] is uncanny.” When one looks at the stranger one encounters “the uncanniness of the other in the inconceivable interlocking of what is one’s own with the other.”<sup>15</sup>

Why do we experience uncanniness when confronted with the others/strangers reflecting ourselves with some regard? What is so agitating in this mixture of ownness and otherness? We have suggested that immediacy is the key, both as occasion and, more broadly, as encounter. The continuing surprise to us is its primacy over self-identification, and there is a great struggle within the modern, Cartesian subject to interpret that primacy as non-threatening. In a way, the bane of the titans, their *hubris*, must have been similar, but with less reflective mediation and no interior struggle. Still, we could easily see in titanic *hubris* a pattern and image for the modern subject. Clearly the struggle becomes more intense with the

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> H. Plessner, “The Exposure of the Human,” [in:] H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology*, transl. N.F. Schott, H. Delitz, R. Seyfert (eds.), Evanston 2018, p. 54.

Kantian turn, which grants to the modern subject an even wider range of powers, being both the knower and the imposer of limits and conditions upon all possible knowledge, casting its own form of rationality over the whole domain of intelligibility. Such a creature is quite solitary, having only empirical companions, until the moment of sublime encounter.

In his famous essay, Freud explores the enigma of the uncanny in great detail, and he provides some clue to our problem. He repeats, following Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, that: "'Unheimlich' is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light."<sup>16</sup> It seems then that the word carries a doubly contradictory sense — denoting what is unfamiliar and unknown, it refers at the same time to what is "known of old and long familiar."<sup>17</sup> And it demands the appearance of what ought not appear. It is a fair description of what we have meant by "encounter," but with no recognition from Freud that what is visible is, at a deeper level, the unseen other or others, still concealed behind whatever has appeared.

It is not what we see in the encounter, but what we feel below it that makes the experience *unheimlich*. In accordance with Freud's etymological investigations, *unheimlich* is based on the connection between words: *Geheim* (secret), *heimisch* (native) and *heimlich* ("homely"<sup>18</sup>). The meaning of the term *unheimlich* and of the phenomenon/appearance is based on the tension between two apparently opposite meanings: the homey and the unhomey, if these odd words can be tolerated. Freud's intention is to show how certain things become so private and intimate that they turn from being familiar into "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others." Of course, at the depths, what is withheld from the others, mundanely, is the others as *sensus communis*. In some very real sense they already know what the subject, the Ego, is hiding, and that is the collective presence of the other and the others. From being homey and familiar they become strange, "secret and untrustworthy." We have conveniently forgotten them until there is an occasion, and they are encountered.

In short, they underwent the process of repression. The uncanny, Freud argues, "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and of old established in the mind, and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."<sup>19</sup> The experience of the uncanny is the return of those contents but they do not return as our own, familiar, known and friendly. They already take on the form of imaginative, or rather phantasmatic doubles which no longer come from within but unexpectedly loom up as if from behind, as externalities beyond our

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<sup>16</sup> S. Freud, "The Uncanny," [in:] S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, London 1955, p. 224.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> This is a problematic translation into English, but there is no good word for this meaning, combining coziness, familiarity, and a nestled secure feeling; we use "homey" above.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 241.

power, as the shadow, which — as in the story told by Hans Christian Andersen — emancipated from its subject now exercises its power over him.<sup>20</sup>

[T]he quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the “double” being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted — a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The double has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, these others are the effect of externalization, or, to be more precise, they are imaginatively projected onto some other object or person, which from the moment of encounter onward is perceived as a dreadful, even demonic alien, an intrusive stranger entering into the everyday experience of the individual (it is important to remember that this encounter is cultural, individuated).

## Making Friends with the Monster

In fact, the self tries, in this way, to defend itself against estrangement and internal division. Now, we are close to giving a provisional answer to our question. These strangers haunting us in the experience of the uncanny are so horrifying not because of their extreme otherness, but rather because they are of us and like us, or even more — “they are *more like us than our own selves*.”<sup>22</sup> They simply appear as a mirror-image of “the repressed otherness within the self,” as Freud says. The modern subject has no resources for assimilating the terror, but fortunately the self, the residuum of our collective and individuating experience, is slightly better off. The self can *say* “I am the monster,” and can come to think it if not quite believe it. The saying is a kind of performance, but it requires the removal of the persona and the revealing of the person. It is a vulnerability to others that dissipates the vulnerability to the subject, by the subject, and for the subject which is our Kantian inheritance. A self steps from the shadow and hails the other, that is hails us, hails me. It is possible that this is a friend, although it is never certain.

Still something needs to be added in order to solve our enigma. Our hypothesis is that the experience of the uncanny is so mysterious and agitating because it reveals the deep, painful, unsurpassable dependence in the very heart of the self. The experience of the uncanny reveals *subjectivity* (which is the contrary of *the* subject) as a fragile, dynamic, and conflictual structure created by a series of imaginative projections and introjections, by means of which the sphere of oneness is to be distinguished from the sphere of dark and dangerous strangeness. The effect of these imaginative operations, this sublime oscillation and play of understanding, is far from a precise fulfillment of any anticipation, and of course it is far from the naive Cartesian promise of self-transparency and autonomy.

<sup>20</sup> H.C. Andersen, “The Shadow,” transl. J. Hersholt, H.C. Andersen Centret, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheShadow\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheShadow_e.html) (accessed 3.03.2019).

<sup>21</sup> S. Freud, “The Uncanny,” p. 236.

<sup>22</sup> R. Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 75.

## Recognizing Ourselves

Let us return to questions posed earlier about whether it would be sufficient to recognize our own strangeness in order to recognize and to give justice to the strangeness which comes from without, from occasions and encounters. And what would it mean to “recognize” strangeness? It seems that we are rather far from any positive answer. There is at least one psychoanalytical theory which seems to give us some hope: Julia Kristeva’s book *Strangers to Ourselves*. However, given a closer look, the optimism radiating from her work seems to be a bit fantastic. “On the basis of an erotic, death-bearing unconscious, the uncanny strangeness — a projection as well as a first working out of death drive — [...] sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being *with* others.”<sup>23</sup>

Earlier one can read that the task of psychoanalysis is to avoid the petrification and reification of strangers, by analyzing them through our self-analysis, to recognize them by our self-recognition.

To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that “demon,” that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid “us.” By recognizing our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners.<sup>24</sup>

Later on she presents the idea of what we might ironically call the “Holy Mountain,” as if from the prophecy of Isaiah, the world which from now on will be inhabited by “a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious — desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible.”<sup>25</sup> According to Kristeva, all problems with strangers and foreigners are caused by our insistent lack of the acceptance of the very fact that we are split and divided within ourselves, that there is persistent strangeness within us. As soon as we decide or learn to accept our dark side, the hostility towards the strangers would turn into solidarity.

To speak in an almost ridiculously metaphorical way, Kristeva’s statements sound like saying: “As soon as I accept the fact that my body casts a shadow, the latter will disappear.” That isn’t quite right. Speaking more seriously, the fact of our *acceptance* of “uncanny strangeness” solves neither the painful fragmentation of the self nor the replacement of hostility by solidarity. Second, why should this strangeness be pleased or pacified with the fact of being *recognized*? Or once *recognized* why should it *accept* the strangeness of the other? Does Kristeva mean that the “erotic death-bearing unconscious,” which is also “destructive, fearful, empty, impossible” only because of this act of recognition, will become “erotic life-bearing,” and “constructive, peaceful, fulfilled, and for which all things are possible”? Clearly, things are much more complicated.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, transl. L.S. Roudiez, New York 1991, p. 192.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> For similar but much more detailed criticism of Kristeva’s theory, see R. Visker, “The Strange(r) Within Me,” *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network* 12 [4] (2005), pp. 425–441.



## Mirror, Mirror

We do not think this self-recognition solution is realistic in its optimism, but there is still something worth thinking about here. We have presented this problem of the immediacy of the others as a task of weaving what is *out of time*, that occasion which divides it into a before and an after, together *with* its past and future. A perfect continuity cannot be restored, but a workable weave can be made. If the mundane world *disappears* along with the occasion of others, it always *reappears*, even if there is an unhappy eternity within the event.

A quite different and much less optimistic story (than that of Kristeva) can be found in Jacques Lacan's work. We are thinking here about his theory of the mirror stage of development, where the hetero-genesis of subjectivity is fully based on the imaginative identification.<sup>27</sup> Summarizing Lacan, Antoine Mooij says, "Initially [Lacan's] imaginary is oriented on the mirror stage and narcissism in the sense of Freud — turning the image into a central figure — while at a later stage [of his thought] it takes on the broader meaning of anything that constitutes a whole or Gestalt which can be qualified as consistency (*consistance*)."<sup>28</sup> Earlier Mooij has pointed out:

When the cosmos, along the road of magic, shows itself with a human face, it reflects man himself, mirroring his face. The features of the physiognomy will bring this to bear on the entire world of perception: Leaves are dancing, a car looks aggressive. At this level, the observer sees himself. This brings us to the final point of the Gestalt representation. The world of the Gestalt and the image show themselves as a whole, in a closed form. Thus, myths and religions [and, we add, groups that feel threatened] tend to close themselves off and become totalitarian — it is all part of their design.<sup>29</sup>

The xenophobia with which we are concerned is part of the design of recognition and acceptance. But how does this come to be? The mirror image of the child — being a reflex in the mirror or another child — serves as the basis for creating the first form of unity and kinesthetic control — *Ur-Ich*. It is not the case that the child recognizes him/herself in the other, and so there is nothing to accept. This simple imaginary identification does not imply the simple form of influence of the external, specular image on a preexisting ego. The latter is for the first time given to him/herself in this form of an alienating identification, of the sort we have discussed earlier. Note that the situation here described is cultural, presupposing the natural encounter and the occasion. This mirror stage is rather an unconscious assumption of the external image in which *the subject* recognizes itself in the *form* of the unified ego "that is I, and it is also me." It is a magical Gestalt that closes the circle of perception into a narcissistic world. This image, by which the subject is fascinated

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<sup>27</sup> See J. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," [in:] J. Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. B. Fink, New York–London 2006, pp. 75–81; for a clear and thorough exposition of the process of the subject's constitution as a series of ideal, that is, imagistic, identifications, see J. Lacan, "Presentation on Psychological Causality," [in:] J. Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. B. Fink, New York–London 2006, esp. 145–157.

<sup>28</sup> A. Mooij, *Lacan and Cassirer: An Essay on Symbolisation*, transl. P. van Nieuwkoop, Leiden–Boston 2018, pp. 101–102; cf. p. 150.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

and captured, and with which it identifies itself, is an imaginary response to the original experience of helplessness and fragmentation, the portents of the impending alienating *self*-identification. The creation of the *illusion* of unity, this Gestalt in the mirror, is the form of ego. Therefore, Lacan writes: “the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation.”<sup>30</sup> In short, it means that biological insufficiency is supplemented, or rather transcended, by an ideal imaginary identity — a closed and impermeable Gestalt.

## Misrecognition

In this sense the ego is based on a double *misrecognition*: “the ego not only, as it were, ‘finds itself’ at the place of the other (the first misrecognition: the ego is alienated)”; and “provides the subject with a deceptive [we would add — magical] impression of unity (the second and most fundamental misrecognition: the ego does not recognize itself as alienated).”<sup>31</sup> In short, it is the other who gives the subject, eventually the ego, its own identity, and this original identification is, as it were, without the subject. The latter is its effect, which finds itself from the beginning in a state of a painful dependence or, to use Lacan’s favorite term, *subjection*. On the one hand, it needs the other who shapes its own self. On the other hand, “the other is an obstacle that prevents it from reaching the unity that it aspires to.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, the subject, and later the ego-identity always carries the trace of the other, of exteriority which will never be fully internalized. The famous phrase “I am another” really means “I cannot be without this other through whom I get the I.”<sup>33</sup> Such an “I” can neither completely exclude, nor internalize this foundational exteriority.

In this sense, original identification is, from the very beginning, intertwined with the original self-estrangement, but that need not become a closed problem, a problem without a solution, until magic is evoked in place of the temporal work of weaving the occasion into the development of the self. “I” cannot be fully at one with “myself.” “I” am, so to speak, imprinted with otherness and exteriority. That is why Lacan so often uses the provocative term *extimacy*, which is to express the paradoxical relation of the subject to itself, always already mediated by the relation to the ungraspable other — “to whom I am more attached than to myself [...] since, at the most assented to heart of my identity to myself, he pulls the strings.”<sup>34</sup> “My” true self, as we already suggested with regard to Waldenfels, is always already beyond or outside of itself. It is ex-centric — as Lacan holds. But this is also connected with one of the characteristics of the self that we mentioned above: it is exclusive in a double sense. First, it is covered by, or hidden

<sup>30</sup> J. Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> L. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, Cambridge 2007, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> R. Visker, “The Strange(r) Within Me,” p. 433.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> J. Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud,” [in:] J. Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. B. Fink, New York–London 2006, p. 436.

behind the non-transparent veil of Ego, which pretends, in its ideal form, to take the place of the subject *tout court*. Second, it is exclusive because the centre of the subject's gravity, its external figure, is something already excluded. There never was an occasion, and so there are no encounters, from the closed Gestalt that fills perception under the magical influence of the Ego. Our xenophobic neighbours and friends and colleagues simply do not perceive the strangers, especially those neighbours who are not confronted with the strangers in person, in the flesh. The refugees on television are images, unrecognized in their mirroring, and subjected to a totalitarian magic. They are not really perceived, they are conjured. Hence, they are misrecognized twice.

### The Gift of the Others

The *original* identification, which is a kind of gift, a prestation, leading to self-estrangement, provokes aggressiveness which then can be awakened in me by those who are almost like me, who are the trace of my extimate interiority, who remind me that I am never fully at home. For example, it is mainly Christians in the United States who are horrified by the *equally Christian* Central American refugees and asylum seekers dying on their borders. How deeply similar they are, in the non-recognition and their compensatory conjuring of the US Christians, is a gift given by the dying others, so that the concealment of their secret identities may remain intact. This sort of "exchange" has been well described by Marcel Mauss, especially in his essay on the person.<sup>35</sup> So, this reinterpretation that uncanniness and strangeness faces us not only with the indeterminate and indefinable character of others, but above all of my own self which in its deepest, most "intimate" structures is "neither *of* me nor genuinely *mine*; but rather it is something *about* me."<sup>36</sup> This "something about me" is never clearly represented in the others; there are some gaps and the blind spots on the surface of the mirror, a foveation and periphery. In fact, this "something about me" cannot be represented because "I" originated from it; the gift cannot be assimilated or integrated. At the same time this something cannot be clearly presentified, because it is nothing objectifiable, no thing, but also not "nothing," and as such it constantly haunts "me"<sup>37</sup> — it is the gift that keeps on giving and will not leave off until "I" am damned. That is why "I" experience the others as a threat, as suffocating, as almost a deadly danger.

### The Us that We Tell Ourselves We Are

Are there remedies of psychological, ethical, and political importance, which can help in creating a positive response to strangeness within ourselves, and as an

<sup>35</sup> See M. Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self," transl. W.D. Halls, [in:] *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, M. Carrithers et al. (eds.), Cambridge 1985, pp. 1–25.

<sup>36</sup> R. Visker, "The Strange(r) Within Me," p. 438.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibidem*.

obvious implication, to these strangers which come to us from without? It seems that first we should be more modest and less idealistic. If the strangers/strangeness remain what he/she/it/they really is/are, it always will be something dreadful, shocking, agitating and undermining our identities, our political and moral orders. These are our friends and neighbours, our fellow citizens, and ourselves in the depths of an enveloping darkness, a shadow within a shadow, doubled, cast not by the others, but by the Other that we are. The magic is hard to resist.

In every other case, we will bring it down to the level of something known, rational, transparent, whether we really know it or don't. In short, we will bring it to the conditions of our understanding, to the level of the same. Waldenfels, being fully aware of this danger, postulates a creative or productive form of response which always operates *ex post factum*, but its main point is to be open to a grey zone or some blind spots within our political and ethical orders which is introduced by the strangers. He reminds us that our response always decides about who "we" are and who "we" will be. If "we" build the walls, psychologically or physically, then we become those enclosed within them. There may be subjects and egos within the walls, but the selves no longer appear. Eventually even "my" spouse and children are other, because "I" am other and cannot learn it. And if they cannot, how can I? Hence we see that in the extreme cases, family members even identify one another to the Gestapo or KGB or secret police as threats to the closed order. They would do better to point the finger at themselves, but they simply cannot see it.

Richard Kearney<sup>38</sup> and Rudi Visker propose as a solution that we create new narratives which will not so much help us to understand this experience but by means of them we would be able to give the other/otherness a place in the course of the story, and in this way we would prevent "it" "from being everywhere and nowhere."<sup>39</sup> These narratives can provide not only the possibility of distance, but also new forms of practical understanding, and that means becoming aware of the differences between real danger, that is, the bad form of the alien or evil stranger (think of Mark Twain or Albert Camus), and the others which do not pose any threat. But above all these narrative forms give voice to *our own* strangeness, to different forms of the articulation of our self, which always is something more than rigid ego, of which Freud wrote that it is a poor creature who simply wants love and be loved.

Jonathan Lear, in one of his essays, wrote that the human mind is a differentiated unity, and that means, on the one hand, it is capable of growth. On the other hand, there is a constant risk of sudden disruption of the course of our experience, sudden irruptions of irrationality, coming precisely from the very heart of rationality.<sup>40</sup> Awareness of this fact cannot, as Kristeva suggests, solve the problem of

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<sup>38</sup> R. Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*; especially "Introduction," where the author proposes his vision of narrative understanding and narrative imagination, which are to help us to distinguish between good and evil others, and to understand more deeply the difference between the otherness coming from within from that which comes from without.

<sup>39</sup> R. Visker, "Strange(r) Within Me," p. 438.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Lear, "Restlessness, Phantasy, and the Concept of Mind," [in:] J. Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 80–122.

our own strangeness or the problem of the strangers, but at least it can help us understand that different and strange voices speak through us. Lear argues that as far we become aware of that, we can make a different use of them.

We have argued that the occasion and the encounter are sources as well as resources; that individuals are capable of returning their encounters to the well of *sensus communis*; and that *sensus communis* is as natural as it is cultural. Human beings are not compelled to interpret strangeness as threat, even if we are culturally compelled to interpret strangeness. Narrative lives in our *sensus communis*, and it is open, revisable, even danceable. Immediacy is person, the person that is community, and it is sublime, is both liked and disliked.

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