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Wolfgang Welsch
Friedrich Schiller University Jena (Germany)

ON ACQUISITION AND POSSESSION OF COMMONALITIES

Introduction

It's a great honor and privilege to have been invited to this international conference, and to have been asked to deliver a keynote speech. The honor is greater still since, as a philosopher, I am not an expert in the field of transcultural English studies. What I might nonetheless be able to contribute to your reflections is conceptual clarification with respect to basic terms and convictions. To this end, I intend to address the conference's key term of "transculturality".

In philosophy, this term was not at all common - in fact, it was not even in use - when, several years ago, I introduced it to philosophical reflection on culture.¹ In the meantime it has become more familiar in my discipline, though it still meets with reluctance. I am all the more glad that it is so widespread in your work.

When I introduced the term 'transculturality', I thought it was a new one. Subsequently I learned that at least the adjective 'transcultural' wasn't quite so rare after all in cultural studies since the 1960s. But I was giving it a new twist at least. In the older anthropological and ethnological discussion, 'transcultural' referred to transcultural invariances. My objective, on the contrary, was to use it to describe a strikingly new, contemporary feature of cultures originating through their increased blending. The main idea was that deep differences between cultures are today diminishing more and more, that contemporary cultures are characterized by cross-cutting elements - and in this sense are to be comprehended as transcultural rather than as monocultural. It seemed to me (and still does) that the inherited concept of cultures as homogeneous and closed entities has become highly inappropriate in comprehending the constitution of today's cultures. So my basic intuition was that a conceptual update was necessary. In suggesting

¹ I presented a first version of the concept in 1991 with the title "Transkulturalität - Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen" (appeared in *Information Philosophie*, 2, 1992, 5-20). Several extended versions have appeared in Italian, English, Spanish and German. The following are representative: "Transculturalità. Forme di vita dopo la dissoluzione delle culture", in *Paradigmi. Rivista di critica filosofica*, Sondernummer "Dialogo interculturale ed eurocentrismo" X/30, 1992, 665-689; "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today", in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 194-213; "Transculturalidad: la forma cambiante de las culturas en la actualidad", in *Democracia y ciudadanía en la sociedad global*, eds. Cristina Camachos Ramos, Miriam Calvillo Verlasco and Juan Mora Heredia (Aragón: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001), 191-218; "Auf dem Weg zu transkulturellen Gesellschaften", in *Die Zukunft des Menschen - Philosophische Ausblicke*, ed. Günter Seubold (Bonn: Bouvier, 1999), 119-144.

'transculturality' I was trying to do what Hegel urged us philosophers to do, namely to grasp our age in thought.²

I still think that I was then on the right track. Yet, in the meantime, I've come to suspect that my original conception is in need of a supplement. An essential point is missing. At present, most of us think of transcultural commonalities exclusively as a - highly welcome - effect of today's blending of cultures. Cultures, we think, were quite different formerly, now they are merging and thus commonalities are coming about. Cultural difference is the point of departure, commonalities are second-level acquisitions. Furthermore, when our view of cultural blending comes under attack, when opponents object that this development will end in uniformization, our response again shows our adherence to difference: We point out that these supposedly uniform cultures nevertheless exhibit new forms of inner diversity, that the transcultural networks which arise sometimes differ even from one individual to the next. - We are, both conceptually and emotionally, bound to the concept of difference.

This view, I think, is in need of revision. For there *is* another type of commonalities, one *preceding* cultural difference. We tend to overlook the amount of commonalities humans already share before cultural differences get off the ground. What I have in mind here, is roughly what was formerly referred to as universals: determinants common to all cultures. It is to this point that I want to direct your attention today. In doing so, however, I will give the old issue of universals a new twist - so to speak an update in the light of recent research in both the sciences and the humanities.

My current picture is that transculturality - the existence of cross-cultural commonalities - is fostered by two quite different factors operating at very different levels (though there is, as I will show, also some connection). One is the current process of the permeation of cultures - a process creating commonalities by *overcoming* differences. The other is much older and related to the human condition as such. It *underlies* all formation of difference. - If we take *both* aspects into account, then we might, I suspect, arrive at a more complete picture of transculturality altogether.

In the following, I will first summarize the main points of my previous account of transculturality, and then - and above all - try to point out the importance and impact that universal-style commonalities have on our condition.

I. From the concept of single cultures to transculturality

1. The traditional concept of single cultures

a. The Herderian framework

² Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [1821] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

The conception of transculturality was, in the first place, meant to replace the older conception of single cultures - a concept that had been dominant since the end of the eighteenth century and was paradigmatically formulated by Herder in his *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind* from 1774 and his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* between 1784 and 1791.³

This older conception was characterized by three determinants: ethnic foundation, social homogenization, and intercultural delimitation. Firstly, culture was to be the specific culture of a certain people - with, say, French culture being intrinsically different from German culture, or Slavic, or Japanese culture. Secondly, every culture was supposed to mould the whole life of the people concerned, making every act and every object an unmistakable instance of precisely *this* culture. Thirdly, *delimitation* towards the outside ensued: every culture was, as the culture of one folk, to be distinguished and to remain separated from other folks' cultures.⁴

b. Problematic consequences - arising from the very core of the conception

The three main traits of the conception - the emphasis on ethnicity, homogeneity and separation - have certainly become untenable today, in both descriptive and normative respects.

Let me highlight just one point. Having noted that "every nation has its *centre* of happiness *within itself* just as each sphere its centre of gravity",⁵ Herder continues: "Everything which is still the *same* as my nature, which can be *assimilated* therein, I envy, strive towards, make my own; *beyond this*, kind nature has armed me with *insensibility*, *coldness* and *blindness*; it can even become *contempt* and *disgust*."⁶ So Herder advocates the double feature of emphasis on the own and exclusion of the foreign. "Prejudice", he says, "is good [...] for it makes for *happiness*."⁷ Conversely, any reference to another culture that goes beyond use for its own ends is damaging, is "already *illness*".⁸

³ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966). The work first appeared in four separate parts, each of five books, in the years 1784, 1785, 1787 and 1791, published by the Hartknoch press in Riga and Leipzig.

⁴ To be sure, Herder's conception also contains elements which we may still value: the emphasis on "everyday culture", or the equitable recognition of all cultures, so different from the Enlightenment's unificatory and Eurocentric assessment. For views on Herder's possible contemporary relevance, see *Herder Today*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* [1774], *Werke*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 9-107, here 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

The conception's basic failing is to envisage cultures as closed spheres. Exclusion and conflict logically follow from this. For different spheres, each closed on itself, cannot communicate or mingle with each other but, as Herder states, can only "*clash with one another*".⁹ (This, by the way, is the original version of the "clash of civilizations".)

2. The concept of transculturality

Today's cultures can obviously no longer be described as closed spheres or in terms of inner homogeneity and outer separation. Rather they are characterized by manifold mixing and permeations.¹⁰ It is this new form of cultures that I call transcultural, since it goes *beyond* the traditional concept of culture and *passes through* traditional boundaries as a matter of course. - Let me briefly summarize the main points of my concept.

a. Macro-level: permeations

At the macro-level contemporary cultures are multiply characterized by *hybridization* - on the levels of population, merchandise and information. The entanglements are a consequence of migratory processes, as well as of communications systems and economic interdependencies - and, of course, also dependencies. Worldwide, in most countries, live members of most other countries of this planet; in the case of merchandise (as exotic as it may once have been) the new condition is evident anyway; and finally the global networking of communications technology makes all sorts of information available everywhere.

Cultural mixing occurs not only (as is often too one-sidedly stated) at the low level of Coke, McDonalds, MTV or CNN, but in highbrow culture as well. This has been the case for a long time - think, for example, of Puccini and Chinese music; of Gauguin and Tahiti; of expressionism and African art; or of Messiaen and India. Or take the example of medicine: whereas Western medicine is on the advance in Asian countries, in the West people are increasingly turning to acupuncture, Qigong und Ayurveda.

The effects of permeation even affect basic cultural questions. Today the same basic problems and similar states of consciousness appear in cultures once considered to be fundamentally different - think, for example, of human rights debates, feminist movements or ecological awareness. They are powerful unifying factors across the board culturally.

Put tersely: As a result of the increasing interpenetration of cultures there is no longer anything *absolutely foreign*. Accordingly, there is no longer anything *exclusively own* either. Authenticity has become folklore, it is ownness simulated for others - to whom the indigene himself

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ We are mistaken when we continue to speak of German, French, Japanese, Indian, etc. cultures as if these were clearly defined and closed entities; what we really have in mind when speaking this way are *political* or *linguistic* communities, not truly *cultural* formations.

belongs.¹¹ In a culture's internal design there is today almost as much foreignness as in its external relations with other cultures.¹² The delimitation of own-culture and foreign culture has become invalid.¹³

b. Micro-level: transcultural formation of individuals

Transculturality is gaining ground not only at the macrocultural level, but also at the individual's micro-level. For most of us, multiple cultural connexions are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, are shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries. Their cultural formation is transcultural. As Amy Gutmann put it: "Most people's identities, not just Western intellectuals or elites, are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but people are multicultural."¹⁴ And this is likely to become even more so in the future.¹⁵

¹¹ Conversely the foreign is considered the own completely as a matter of course. In Kyoto, accompanied by Japanese friends, I entered a restaurant in which everything appeared genuinely Japanese and asked my companions whether everything here really was completely Japanese, including the chairs which we had just sat down on. They seemed astonished by the question, almost annoyed, and hastily assured me that everything there - even the chairs - was completely Japanese. But I knew the chairs: they were a model "Cab", designed by Mario Bellini and produced by Cassina in Milan. Some minutes later I no longer dared even to ask about the crockery we were eating from (Suomi series plates produced by Rosenthal in Germany). - What is astonishing is not that European furniture and crockery should be found here, but that the Japanese held them to be products of their own culture. That the foreign and own has become indistinguishable for them serves witness to the factual transculturality.

¹² Sociologically viewed, this is a familiar fact today: "[...] people belong to many different cultures and the cultural differences are as likely to be *within* states (i.e. between regions, classes, ethnic groups, the urban and rural) as *between* states" (Anthony King, "Architecture, Capital and the Globalization of Culture", in *Global Culture: Nationalism, globalization and modernity*, A Theory, Culture & Society special issue, ed. Mike Featherstone, London: Sage, 1990, 397-411, here 409). "[...] cultural diversity tends now to be as great within nations as it is between them" (Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 231).

¹³ Incidentally, this is reflected in a famous thesis in analytic philosophy. According to Quine and Davidson the problem of translation between *different* societies and languages is structurally not at all unlike, and in no way greater or more dramatic than within *one and the same* society and language.

¹⁴ Amy Gutmann, "The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 22, no. 3 [1993], 171-206, here 183.

¹⁵ Sociologists have been telling us since the seventies that modern lives are to be understood "as a migration through different social worlds and as the successive realization of a number of possible identities" (Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness*, New York: Random House, 1973, 77) and that we all

c. Cultural diversity of a new type

What is the result of this? Some intellectuals fear that the entanglements at the macro and microlevels will result in straightforward uniformization - the loss of cultural difference. That is wrong. For even if people draw on the same set of cultural elements, they will probably give those elements different weight and a different overall arrangement. And differences will of course be even greater when people draw on several and diverse cultural elements. Identity networks woven from partly the same and from partly different threads are not all of the same color and pattern.

What changes is the *type* of cultural variety. Differences no longer emerge between different kinds of monolithic identities, but between identity configurations that have some elements in common while differing in other elements, in their arrangement as a whole, and often in their complexity.

d. Transculturality - already in history

possess "multiple attachments and identities" - "cross-cutting identities", as Bell put it (Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage. Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960-1980*, Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1980, 243). What once may have applied only to exquisite subjects like Montaigne, Novalis, Whitman, Rimbaud or Nietzsche - major advocates and prophets of a pluralistic identity - seems to be becoming the structure of almost everybody today. Montaigne had stated: "I have nothing to say about myself absolutely, simply, and solidly, without confusion and without mixture, or in one word. [...] we are all patchwork, and so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, each moment, plays its own game" (Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald M. Frame, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, 242 and 244 resp. [II 1]). Novalis wrote that one person is "several people at once", since "pluralism" is "our innermost essence" (Novalis, *Schriften*, eds. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, vol. 3: *Das philosophische Werk II*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983, 250 [63] and 571 resp. [107]). Walt Whitman declared: "I am large ... I contain multitudes" (Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* ["Song of Myself"], 1855, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, 84 [1314-1316]). Rimbaud stated "JE est un autre" (Arthur Rimbaud, Letter to Paul Demeny [May 15, 1871], in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, 249-254, here 250). And Nietzsche said of himself that he was "glad to harbour [...] not 'one immortal soul', but *many mortal souls* within" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Zweiter Band, Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, vol. 2, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, 386 [II 17]); he also coined the formula of the "subject as a multitude" (Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Juli 1882 bis Herbst 1885, Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, vol. 11, 650 [August-September 1885]). - On the issue of the plural subject see both my "Subjektsein heute - Überlegungen zur Transformation des Subjekts" (Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, 39 (1991), no. 4, 347-365) and my *Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), Second Part, Chapter XIV: "Transversalität und Subjektivität", 829-852.

There is a further point I do not want to fail to mention. Transculturality is in no way completely new historically, in fact it has been widespread in history.

Carl Zuckmayer once wonderfully described this in *The Devil's General*: "[...] just imagine your line of ancestry, from the birth of Christ on" "[...] just imagine the procession of your ancestors - since the birth of Christ", General Harras says to lieutenant Hartmann. And then he provides the full picture of Hartmann's ancestry: "There was a Roman Captain, a dark fellow, brown as a ripe olive; he managed to teach Latin to his blonde girl on the banks of the Rhine; then a Jewish spice dealer came into the family, a serious man who converted to Christianity before the wedding and founded the Catholic tradition in the house. Then a Greek doctor, a Celtic Legionnaire, a Grisonian landsknecht, a Swedish Knight, one of Napoleon's soldiers, a deserting Cossack, a Black Forest raftsman, a wandering miller's apprentice from Alsace, a fat boatsman from Holland, a Magyar, a Pandour, an officer from Vienna, a French actor, a Bohemian musician; and all the whole mixed-up crowd that lived, brawled, drank, and sang and begot children along the River Rhine! That Goethe character, he came out of the same pot. Also a guy named Beethoven, and Gutenberg, and - ah, whatever, look it up in the encyclopedia! They were the best, my friend! The best in the world! And why? Because the nations mixed there like the waters from the springs and brooks and rivers that flow together in one great living stream."¹⁶

This, I think, is a realistic description of a 'folk's' historical genesis and of the mixed constitution of its members. When today, in the age of globalization, we witness interpenetration of cultures, this is not a completely new phenomenon, rather such permeation was already typical of cultures in the past, though perhaps to a lesser degree. Edward Said may well have been right in saying: "All cultures are hybrid; none of them is pure; none of them is identical to a 'pure' folk; none of them consists of a homogenous fabric."¹⁷

¹⁶ Carl Zuckmayer, *The Devil's General* [1946], in *Masters of Modern Drama* (New York: Random House, 1963), 911-958, here 930 [translation modified].

¹⁷ Edward W. Said: "Kultur und Identität - Europas Selbstfindung aus der Einverleibung der Welt", *Lettre Internationale*, 34 (1996), 21-25, here 24. Similarly, from a philosophical point of view, J. N. Mohanty stated, "that talk of a culture which evokes the idea of a homogeneous form is completely misleading. Indian culture, or Hindu culture consists of completely different cultures. [...] A completely homogeneous subculture is not to be found" (Jitendra N. Mohanty, "Den anderen verstehen", in *Philosophische Grundlagen der Interkulturalität*, ed. R.A. Mall, Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1993, 115-122, here 118). "The idea of cultural purity is a myth" (*ibid.*, 117). Jacques Derrida says: "*It is peculiar to a culture, that it is never identical with itself.* There is no culture and no cultural identity without this difference *towards itself*" (Jacques Derrida, "Das andere Kap", in *Das andere Kap. Die vertagte Demokratie - Zwei Essays zu Europa*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, 9-80, here 12 f.) Rémi Brague has pointed out how European identity is characterized by the sense of its distance from a double origin: "What's specific to European identity lies in its 'cultural secondariness': in the knowledge of its not being original, but having before it something else, something prior - culturally Greek antiquity, religiously Judaism" (Rémi Brague, *Europa - Eine exzentrische Identität*, Frankfurt: Campus, 1993). - As soon as one observes the cultural fictions of purity more closely and realistically, they rapidly break up into a series of transcultural entanglements.

e. Transcultural possession and further acquisition of commonalities

I have already made clear why transculturality does not simply lead to uniformization but is intrinsically linked with the emergence of diversity of a new type.^{18,19} Transcultural identity networks aren't all the same in their repertoire and structure. Even when people draw on similar cultural elements, I said, they will probably give them different weight and a different overall arrangement.

So difference is not vanishing, but its *mode* is changing. Difference, as traditionally provided by single cultures, certainly is diminishing. Instead differences between transcultural networks arise. These networks, however, also have some elements in common while differing in others. So there is always some overlap between them - "family resemblances", as Wittgenstein put it.

The result of this is a greater chance for communication, linking up and understanding than ever before. The common stock of overlapping elements - of commonalities that have arisen through the development of transcultural networks in the first place - provides a basis for further exchange and agreement. On an initial ground of commonalities a second range of commonalities can be developed which may even comprise elements that hadn't previously seemed capable of being agreed upon. Many of these second-level commonalities will be pragmatic in tone.

In short: The transcultural orientations provide a first set of commonalities and, on their basis, allow for the development of subsequent commonalities. In other words: transcultural

¹⁸ Similar views to mine are put forward by Mike Featherstone, who argues "against those who would wish to present the tendency on the global level to be one of cultural integration and homogenization" (Mike Featherstone, *Consumer culture & postmodernism*, London: Sage, 1991, 146) and by Ulf Hannerz who says "that the flow of culture between countries and continents may result in another diversity of culture, based more on interconnections than on autonomy" (Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 266).

¹⁹ Incidentally, it is by no means evident that globalization processes are correctly defined when they are only described as unilinear expansion of Western culture. One would, at the same time, have to be attentive to considerable alterations which the elements of the initial culture experience in their acquisition. Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out such ambiguities in the "assimilation of the other". He describes this, for instance, in the way the inhabitants of Bali deal with video technology in a ritual context: "if the television and the VCR [...] suggested the astonishing pervasiveness of capitalist markets and technology, [...] the Balinese adaptation of the latest Western and Japanese modes of representation seemed so culturally idiosyncratic and resilient that it was unclear who was assimilating whom" (Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991, 4). Ulf Hannerz discusses similar phenomena under the heading "creolization": the uniform trends of a 'world culture', he demonstrates, are quickly bound into national or regional cultural profiles and thereby experience considerable diversification and transformation (cf. Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, esp. 264 ff.).

intersections lead to an *initial acquisition* of commonalities, and the *possession* of these consequently enables *further acquisitions*. - Needless to say, this increased possibility for exchange and coming to terms with each other represents a great advantage of the transcultural constitution.

II. Deeper-level commonalities

Having so far summarized my previous account of transculturality, I now turn to the complementary aspect announced in the introduction. There are not only commonalities that *arise* through the permeation of cultures, I said, but there also exist commonalities that already *precede* and *underlie* the formation of cultures. I'd like to consider these deeper commonalities in the following.

So am I now addressing the notorious issue of cultural universals? At least not directly. First I'd like to show that transcultural experience and exchange can, as a matter of principle, not be understood without assuming something 'universal' underlying cultural difference. If there were no common basis to cultures at all, then the fact that we can transfer semantic items (beliefs, thoughts, perceptions, yearnings, etc.) from one culture to another and integrate them into a context which originally was not theirs would be completely unintelligible. We usually consider it a matter of course that such transfers are possible - but one is far less willing to accept their condition of possibility.

Reference to cultural universals must reckon with resistance. In the realm of cultural studies an extreme form of difference thinking is today dominant. Under its auspice cultural studies flourish. To refer to universals there seems almost to be a sacrilege. But all I want is, first, to urge us to use *both* eyes - to take a look *also* at elementary commonalities. And, second, our clarificatory work cannot simply take established preferences as its measure. It is important to look whether there are in fact deeper commonalities and what significance accrues to them for the understanding of cultural differences and for the acquisition of commonalities sought.

1. Fascination by works of art and literature from foreign cultures

Let us consider the fascination that outstanding works of art or literature from foreign cultures can exert on us. Why do we fall under their spell?²⁰

a. Mea res agitur

²⁰ I first presented the following considerations in "Rethinking identity in the age of globalization - a transcultural perspective" (in *Symposion of Beauty and Art. Festschrift für Tsunemichi Kambayashi*, Hiroshi Okabayashi et al. (eds), Tokyo: Keiso, 2002, 333-346). An updated version appeared in *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Volume 8: "Aesthetics and/as Globalization" (2004), 167-176.

When confronted with such works we sense a *mea res agitur*. As distant as the origin of these works may be in time and space, we nevertheless feel, strangely enough, that it is *we* who are at stake. Though not made for us, the works seem to address us, we feel attracted and fascinated by them. They appear to bear a promise or a challenge to which we respond. Some at least seem to develop an impulse and potential to improve and enlarge our sensitivity, our comprehension and perhaps even our way of being.

So we take those works, however distant their origin distanced in time or space may be, to be relevant to *our* orientation. We do not lock them within their original cultural context, rather we experience them as transculturally effective. As a phenomenon, I think, this is evident.

b. Objection to the modern dogma of cultural boundness

Yet this transcultural force tends to be overlooked in current conceptualization. For in modernity we have become accustomed to thinking that everything is strictly bound to its cultural context. We take all production, experience and cognition to be fully determined by its cultural framework and hence restricted to it. This is the typically modern axiom par excellence.²¹ It is behind the various forms of relativism, contextualism and culturalism today dominant in the humanities and cultural studies. Now, to be sure, culture-dependent aspects do exist. But *not only* these exist. With the named axiom - with this common prejudice of contemporary cultural studies ("Kulturwissenschaften") - we are blinding ourselves to the obviously not culture-bound but transcultural potential of outstanding semantic items like, for example, artworks.

Instead of spiriting this potential away through belief in the modern decree, we should be trying to give it an appropriate rendering. We need, I think, a theory which faces up to and is able to explain this transcending of context, this transcultural force of semantic items - such a theory, it seems to me, doesn't yet exist.

c. This fascination is not culture-bound but transcends cultures

The fascination works independently of familiarity with the respective culture. If you go to Japan for the first time and visit the Ginkakuji temple in Kyoto, you will feel the strong magnetism of the place. You may have no idea of 15th century Japanese culture, never mind of the conditions in which the Shogun Yoshimasa created this environment. Yet you are irresistibly attracted and, after some time, may feel how the place alters your way of walking, behaving, thinking.

It is as if a previously unknown chord in our existence were being struck. A side we knew nothing about and which now suddenly resonates. In our culture it was never brought to bear, now it blossoms. As if until now we had only realized part of our human potential. As if this were in fact richer than it had previously - whether monoculturally or transculturally - been developed.

²¹ In recent years I have been developing an account and critique of this axiom, which I hope to be able to present in 2006 with the title *Beyond Modern Anthropocentrism*.

2. How are such phenomena to be explained?

a. Insufficiency of the hermeneutic approach

How are phenomena of this kind to be explained? The standard explanation, that given by hermeneutics, fails. It claims that all understanding is ultimately determined by the cultural context one belongs to. But this is highly implausible.

If someone grew up in Paris and studied at Paris VIII St.Denis, this obviously doesn't in itself give him a deep understanding of the St. Denis Cathedral, Gothic style's foundational piece of architecture. For this he must - like everybody else - acquire a lot of additional knowledge. But for this acquisition he is, again, not *per se* better prepared by a Parisian childhood than, say, a childhood in Vancouver or Nagoya. None of these childhoods facilitates or rules out thorough understanding. (Today American scholars write the most informed and fascinating books on European art.)

In the same way, the primary fascination works in a way that is culture independent in the clearest of senses. People from *every* cultural context experience the magnetism of the Ginkakuji temple. None of them, neither people from "old Europe" (an expression coined by *Napoleon*) nor any of the Japanese visitors lived in the period when this temple was erected. Neither contemporariness nor belonging to the "effective history" really plays any role here.²² - It must instead be something in the human make up as such that makes us receptive to the attraction of the place: something beyond the realm of specific cultural formation, something precultural, something related to the human potential and constitution as such.

b. The deep subcultural dimension

Even if it were the case that we inevitably approach what is unknown to us through the set of views and possibilities provided by our cultural condition (as hermeneutics thinks), it would still be true that we can experience the culture-transcending force of works like the Ginkakuji temple only because there is a framework-transcending dimension inherent to our cultural condition. Amidst our cultural formation paths to any work, no matter how 'exotic', open up. Our cultural formation must in itself contain something which enables such paths to other cultures - and by no means just dead ends of remaining-with-oneself in a self-modelled other, but paths that really lead to the other.²³

²² A second objection to the hermeneutic approach applies to the circle of self-shackling to which it hands over all understanding. Hermeneutics thinks one can only understand the other in terms of the own, even if in terms of a successively extended own. However, this has the consequence that one nowhere gets beyond the figure of remaining-with-oneself in the face of a self-modelled other. No matter how much pirouetting, genuine understanding therefore counts as impossible. Conversely, with this consequence one can recognize that the hermeneutic view must be wrong - genuine understanding of the other *does exist*.

²³ In this context it is worth pointing out a statement of Tugendhat's: "I consider the idea that

In other words: Culture seems to contain two layers: one cultural, and another precultural. The culture we are acquainted with is itself one specific moulding of a more general structure. And due to the latter's inherence and permanence we are capable of experiencing semantic items lacking any direct connection with our cultural mould. This is just as in Chomsky's conception, where any language represents a specific moulding of universal grammar, with this universal structure still remaining, so that learning other languages is possible through processes that still draw on universal grammar.

I do not mind whether one takes this general structure to remain *below* the level of cultural moulding, or to be *inherent* to the latter (which I would prefer) - I am urging only that we should be aware of this deeper layer and take it into account.

3. "Universals"

Can we say more about this general structure - which so far I have only demonstrated we must recognize? What precisely does it consist of? In what way is it inherent in us? And is it truly universal?

Frankly, I don't like the current usage of the term `universal'. `Universal', I think, would have to refer to the universe or to something valid all over the universe, as it did - as a matter of course - in traditional use of the term. But in its modern usage the term has become restricted to things on earth, and furthermore to just one species on earth, to *homo sapiens*. In contemporary language `universal' just means `valid for all humans'. - Isn't that an impertinent reduction? Yet I will (so as not to complicate things unnecessarily) succumb to using the expression in the modern standard sense.

So I now turn to the discussion of "universals" in the older anthropological and more recent scientific literature. Maybe this can help us to understand better the deep culture-transcending layers of our constitution, capacities and experience.

a. Universals in older anthropological and recent scientific discussion

aa. Unsatisfactory beginnings

`Universals' were a problematic feature from the start. When in 1873 Adolf Bastian (1826-1905), the "father of German anthropology", stated that there are universal "elementary ideas" ("Elementargedanken") which culturally develop into "folk ideas" ("Völkergedanken"),²⁴ he had

our possibilities of understanding are primarily bound to the Western tradition to be a prejudice" (Ernst Tugendhat, *Egozentrismus und Mystik. Eine anthropologische Studie*, Munich: Beck, 2003, 135).

²⁴ Adolf Bastian, *Controversen in der Ethnologie*, Vol. I: *Die Geographischen Provinzen in ihren culturgeschichtlichen Berührungspuncten* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1893), translated in excerpts in Klaus-Peter Koepping, *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of*

a hard time making this plausible because, even according to his own conception, these "elementary ideas" are never directly observable, but only indirectly deducible from the manifest plethora of folk ideas. - So are they more than fictions?

Bastian passed his idea on to his disciple Franz Boas who became the leading figure of North American anthropology. But given the constitutively concealed character of the universals assumed it was no wonder that in the more pragmatic climate of thought of the US the Boas school turned completely to the apparent diversity of cultures (think, for example, of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Edward Sapir, Alfred L. Kroeber) and developed the doctrine of cultural relativism and incommensurability so dominant in the first half of the twentieth century. - In this view there was simply no space for universals.

Against this doctrine, Bronislaw Malinowski claimed in 1941 that cultural universals obviously do exist. But the lists he presented were quite disappointing. All he could bring forward were seven basic needs: metabolism, reproduction, bodily comforts, safety, movement, growth, and health.²⁵ Things were hardly any better with George P. Murdock's famous list of 72 human universals, published in 1945.²⁶ Murdoch proposed, for example, "tool making, gift giving, funeral rites, greetings, hair styles, hospitality, marriage, housing, taboos, inheritance rules, status differentiation".²⁷

Objections were obvious. Did these universals have any explanatory force for the real design of cultures? Didn't they rather look like "empty frames" or "blanket categories"?²⁸ Kroeber even

Mankind. The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 171-173.

²⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, "A scientific theory of culture" [1941], in *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 1-144, here 91.

²⁶ George P. Murdock, "The common denominator of cultures" [1945], *Culture and society. Twenty-four essays* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965), 87-110, here 89.

²⁷ Here's the full list in alphabetic order: "Age-grading, athletic sports, bodily adornment, calendar, cleanliness training, community organization, cooking, cooperative labor, cosmology, courtship, dancing, decorative art, divination, division of labor, dream interpretation, education, eschatology, ethics, ethnobotany, etiquette, faith healing, family, feasting, fire making, folklore, food taboos, funeral rites, games, gestures, gift giving, government, greetings, hair styles, hospitality, housing, hygiene, incest taboos, inheritance rules, joking, kin-groups, kinship nomenclature, language, law, luck superstitions, magic, marriage, mealtimes, medicine, modesty concerning natural functions, mourning, music, mythology, numerals, obstetrics, penal sanctions, personal names, population policy, postnatal care, pregnancy usages, property rights, propitiation of supernatural beings, puberty customs, religious ritual, residence rules, sexual restrictions, soul concepts, status differentiation, surgery, tool making, trade, visiting, weaning, and weather control" (ibid.).

²⁸ Cf. Elmar Holenstein, *Menschliches Selbstverständnis* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985),

spoke of "fake universals". Clifford Geertz resumed the criticism in 1966 by pointing out that in order to bring cultural phenomena under such universal headings one must strip them of all their specific content.²⁹ What good is it to classify Confucianism, Calvinism and Buddhism together as "religion" when one form teaches that merit is due to following rules whereas the other excludes precisely this, and when in one case it is a religion with God and in the other without God? - "And as with religion, so with `marriage', `trade' and all the rest [...]."³⁰ Geertz asked: "Is the fact that `marriage' is universal (if it is) as penetrating a comment on what we are as the facts concerning Himalayan polyandry, or those fantastic Australian marriage rules, or the elaborate bride-price systems of Bantu Africa?"³¹ Geertz's conclusion reads: "rather than moving toward the essentials of the human situation", looking for human universals "moves away from them".³² - Certainly a plausible critique.

bb. Refutation of radical cultural relativism and the discovery of hard universals

The situation changed however in the eighties when once paradigmatic `proofs' of radical cultural diversity were falsified: in 1983 Derek Freeman demolished Margaret Mead's Samoa-myth³³ and Ekkehart Malotki did the same to Benjamin Lee Whorf's once so influential declarations about Hopi language.³⁴ The dogma of radical cultural relativism broke down in anthropology³⁵ (it has survived only in cultural studies in America and Europe). As a consequence, scholars become disposed to reconsider the issue of universals and also finally to pay attention to research which had already, some decades earlier, demonstrated the existence of universals of a much more solid type than those listed by Malinowski and Murdock.

Roman Jakobson had found out in 1953 that the sounds of natural human languages are not a random mix, but form a system underlain by a distinct number of binary oppositions.³⁶

125.

²⁹ Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man" [1966], *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 33-54, here 39 f.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³² *Ibid.*, 39.

³³ Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

³⁴ Ekkehart Malotki, *Hopi Time* (Berlin: Mouton, 1983).

³⁵ The doctrine of radical cultural relativism was revealed to be "a myth created by linguists and anthropologists" (Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991, 13).

³⁶ Cf. Holenstein, *Menschliches Selbstverständnis*, 125.

However, Brent Berlin's and Paul Kay's 1969 study *Basic Color Terms* represented the real breakthrough.³⁷ They showed, firstly, that whatever the number of basic color terms in a specific culture is (ranging from two to eleven), the members of these cultures, despite dividing up the color spectrum quite differently (depending on the available number of color words), nonetheless agree almost completely when asked which specific color chip (of which they were shown more than 300) represents the ideal or prototypical instance of a color they have a word for. This consensus with respect to the focal points of color terms proves that the basic experience of color is not culturally determined but universal. Secondly, Berlin and Kay found that the order in which basic color categories enter languages is not arbitrary. If a language has only two color words they are always white and black; the third color is always red; if a fourth is added, it will be either green or yellow; the fifth will be yellow or green; then come blue and brown; and finally purple, pink, orange, and gray. So there *are* strong universal regularities - sequences of constitution that apply in all cultures. - In the meantime, research on the classification of botanical and zoological life forms has revealed similar developmental sequences.³⁸

cc. Surface universals

In addition to this the existence of surface universals was established. Facial expression of emotions is one case. Studies of children born deaf and blind show that the elementary expressions of, say, happiness or sadness are not learned or imitated (children born deaf and blind are not capable of such learning), but form part of an innate behavioral repertoire which is the same across cultures.³⁹ Another well-known example - this time of universal gestures - is raising one's eyebrows as a way of initiating communication: "as an expression of friendly attentiveness, say when greeting at a distance, people in all cultures raise their eyebrows for a sixth of a second; at the same time they lift their head, following this they nod and a smile spreads."⁴⁰

One might ask: are there not also cultural differences in these matters? Certainly. But they are only a *secondary* phenomenon. They concern not the expressions as such but the willingness to display them publicly. This was brilliantly demonstrated by Paul Ekman and his associates (1969, 1972, 1973). They did a comparative study of Japanese (who allegedly have a tendency to mask facial expressions of emotions) and Americans (who are considered not to do so). The result was that when with others, the Japanese do mask expressions or substitute one for another, while Americans do not. But when, so to speak, off-stage (alone) the Japanese and

³⁷ Brent Berlin & Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

³⁸ Cf. Brown, *Human Universals*, 14.

³⁹ Cf. Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, "Universalien im menschlichen Sozialverhalten", in *Der ganze Mensch. Aspekte einer pragmatischen Anthropologie*, ed. Hans Rössner (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1986), 82 f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

Americans respond in completely the same way. So the basic feature of emotions and their facial expression is the same; differences concern only "display rules", i.e. culture-specific standards about the display of emotions.⁴¹

dd. Aesthetic universals

Another case in point are aesthetic preferences. Studies of infants (3-4 months) showed that they already prefer the same adult faces as we adults prefer. They respond with greater interest to faces that also seem more interesting to us. This applies cross-culturally.⁴² So these early preference patterns are innate, not culturally learned.

Furthermore, in the adult world patterns of preference concerning the opposite sex are very similar worldwide. This has been demonstrated for facial and bodily proportions. In a famous 1993 study Devendra Singh found out that, from a male point of view, the ideal female waist-hip-ratio (WHR) is 0.7. (For Europeans: this is very close to the famous 60:90 centimeter measure; and for Americans 24:36 inches might ring a bell).⁴³

So these body-related patterns of aesthetic preference are also universal. They do not, of course, determine our aesthetic preferences completely, they are culturally formed over. Nonetheless they represent a solid core that determines our *primary* choice.

*

I have first, with reference to phonetic and linguistic universals, pointed out deep universals; then, with emotive and mimetic universals, surface universals; and finally, with aesthetic universals, a third group. All of these are factors which all people across all cultures share.

Recently I reread Rousseau's complaint that "philosophy does not travel".⁴⁴ Were it to do so,

⁴¹ Cf. Paul Ekman, "Cross-Cultural Studies of Facial Expressions", in *Darwin and Facial Expression: A Century of Research in Review*, ed. Paul Ekman (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 169-222, here 215-218; as well as his "Afterword" in Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* [1872] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 363-393, here 383-385. - The facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger and disgust are unambiguously universal; in addition (though apparently only in literate cultures) come those of fear and surprise (cf. Ekman, "Afterword", 390; cf. also Vicki Bruce, *In the Eye of the Beholder: The Science of Face Perception*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 190).

⁴² Cf. Judith H. Langlois et al., "Infant preferences for attractive faces: Rudiments of a stereotype?", in *Developmental Psychology*, 23 (1987), 363-369.

⁴³ Further universal marks of beauty are: flawless skin, thick shiny hair, and symmetrical body (cf. Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, New York: Doubleday, 1999, 91, 161-163, 185-187).

⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Über den Ursprung und die Grundlagen der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen* (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*)

then the "philosophical rabble" would be unable to propagate the "hackneyed" doctrine that "people are the same everywhere".⁴⁵ - Well, now, when one starts to travel, one is certainly fascinated by the variation. But when one travels a lot and travels far (and if one also gets around enough otherwise, say in science), then one might increasingly notice how much we humans have in common.⁴⁶

b. Universals as the legacy of humanity's protocultural developments

In the following, I will give the theme of universals a certain twist. Why in fact do we all have these things in common? Where do we have them *from*?

aa. The shaping of "human nature" through protocultural-biological feedback processes

Today one knows this fairly precisely. They have taken shape in the course of human development and became frozen at a certain point in time as the reserves of 'human nature' - at a point in time *before* the spread of *homo sapiens* across the globe, and hence *before the emergence of cultural diversity*. I want to go into this in greater detail.

One must bear in mind that the early humans (the *Australopithecines* just as the early species of *homo*) enhanced - and in this way, as evolutionary theorists say, "selected" - certain biological features through protocultural activities in the process of becoming human. Human nature is not simply a product of nature, but in large part a human product - humans have themselves had a role in producing their "nature".⁴⁷

An obvious example of this is the fact that our bodies are largely hairless (along with

[1755], *Schriften zur Kulturkritik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1971), 61-269, here 131 [Note j].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 133 [Note j].

⁴⁶ Darwin had already noticed the "similarity, or rather identity" of humans regarding elementary abilities and modes of behavior. One can "hardly fail to be deeply impressed with the close similarity between the men of all races in tastes, dispositions and habits. This is shown by the pleasure which they all take in dancing, rude music, acting, painting, tattooing, and otherwise decorating themselves, - in their mutual comprehension of gesture-language - and, as I shall be able to show in a future essay, by the same expression in their features, and by the same inarticulate cries, when they are excited by various emotions. This similarity, or rather identity, is striking, when contrasted with the different expressions which may be observed in distinct species of monkeys" (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* [1871], Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, I 232).

⁴⁷ This has been pointed out by Clifford Geertz: "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man", 49); "culture [...] was ingredient, and centrally ingredient, in the production of that animal itself" (*ibid.*, 47).

simultaneous enhancement of our scalp hair) - which so clearly distinguishes us from our nearest biological relatives, the apes. This hairlessness is not to be explained, as was thought earlier, as an adaptation to climatic change (then we would have to have lost the hair on our head first instead of enhancing it), but as a result of sexual selection.⁴⁸ Reducing hair growth - a means of distancing ourselves from our nearest ape relations - had become attractive,⁴⁹ and so in the choice of partner those candidates were preferred who already corresponded to this new human fashion to some extent. This preference had then led to increased propagation of hairlessness in the genome of the species - until humans one day, having left behind their paradisaic proximity to animals, simultaneously (as the Bible recounts) discovered that they were human and "perceived themselves to be naked".⁵⁰ - Through its effects on the gene pool

⁴⁸ "Sexual selection" is the second major selection mechanism which Darwin, in addition to the natural selection set out in the *Origin of Species* of 1859, presented in 1871 in *The Descent of Man* (the book's subtitle is "Selection in Relation to Sex" and the voluminous Part II is dedicated entirely to sexual selection). Only both procedures together provide the full picture of evolution. The theory of sexual selection at the same time builds a bridge to aesthetics: for sexual choice the gradual development of aesthetic attractors, of so-called "ornaments" (which in the order of natural selection are costly and of no use, and indeed often a hindrance) represent the decisive success factor, and the higher reproductive success then secures increased propagation of these aesthetic formations and of the correlatively growing aesthetic sense in the species's genome. Sexual selection is a process that makes the bodies and attitude of future generations more aesthetic. - For Darwin it was eminently important to pay attention to the dynamics particular to sexual, as distinct from natural selection. Only a few hours before his death in a lecture to the Zoological Society he expressed his conviction, against objections, that the theory of sexual selection is sound: "I may perhaps be here permitted to say that, after having carefully weighed, to the best of my ability, the various arguments which have been advanced against the principle of sexual selection, I remain firmly convinced of its truth" (Charles Darwin, "A preliminary notice: On the modification of a race of Syrian street dogs by means of sexual selection" [1882], *The collected papers of Charles Darwin*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977, 278-280, here 278). Neo-Darwinism and the today dominant sociobiology attempt, however, to deny the independence of sexual selection and to reduce all effects of sexual selection (including specifically aesthetic ones) by means of a general perspective of "fitness" to being effects of natural selection ("the currency in which the success of every biological trait is measured" is "reproductive fitness": Eckart Voland, "Aesthetic Preferences in the World of Artifacts - Adaptations for the Evaluation of 'Honest Signals'?" [2003], 256). For a critique of this tendency see my "Animal Aesthetics" (paper at the XVIth International Congress of Aesthetics, "Changes in Aesthetics", Rio de Janeiro, 18-23 July 2004, accessible in *Contemporary Aesthetics's* Forum: Science in Aesthetics, www.contempaesthetics.org/pages/article.php?articleID=243, 2004).

⁴⁹ "As a matter of fact the majority of parameters in human beauty are defined by enhancing differences with apes" (Winfried Menninghaus, *Das Versprechen der Schönheit*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003, 91).

⁵⁰ *Genesis*, 3.7.

the ongoing aesthetic preference had produced a new, distinctive bodily feature of the human.⁵¹

Much of what one calls "human nature" is a result of protocultural-biological feedback processes: biological provisions made protocultural activities possible and through feedback these in turn enhanced the corresponding biological factors. Not only have our bodies (starting with our upright gait) formed in such processes, but also our basic emotional and mimetic patterns, and even the human brain's particular functional type.⁵²

What makes our brain so special is not, as one can often read, due simply to expansion of the cerebral cortex or increased differentiation in areas of the brain, but to a dramatic redistribution between external (sensorimotor) and internal (reflexive) functions. In lower mammals (say in rats, with which we nonetheless share 90% of our genome) the relationship between internal and external communication is 10:90 percent; conversely in humans it is at least 90:10 percent.⁵³ We humans are experts in inner communication, world champions in reflexion. It is *in this* that our peculiarity lies. We have generated this in a million-year long feedback process in which protocultural activities like tool use, the formation of social structures and language played the decisive role.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Incidentally, this is a specific aesthetic preference also in the sense that hairlessness is just an *optical impression*: in absolute numbers the human body has as many hairs as - or even more than - many kinds of ape; it is simply that our hairs have become so minute and inapparent that the *optical appearance* of hair loss or nakedness originated (cf. Menninghaus, *Das Versprechen der Schönheit*, 88). - In addition, sex-specific variations (generally stronger hair and especially beard growth in men) within the general tendency towards hairlessness are to be explained as strategies of differentiation between the sexes (dimorphism).

⁵² "His [man's] large and efficient brain is a consequence of culture as much as its cause. He does not have a culture because he has a large brain; he has a large brain because several million years ago his little-brained ancestors tried the cultural way to survival. Of course, the correct way to view this is a feedback process. [...] the cultural things themselves propelled him into getting a larger brain. It is not only the capacity for culture, then, that lies in the brain; it is the forms of culture, the universal grammar of language and behavior" (Robin Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1975, ²1991, 283 f.).

⁵³ Cf. Volker Storch, Ulrich Welsch and Michael Wink, *Evolutionsbiologie* (Berlin: Springer, 2001), 375. According to other sources, "the inputs from the sensory system and the outputs to the effectors" comprise only "a vanishingly small percentage of the connections" (Wolf Singer, "Selbsterfahrung und neurobiologische Fremdbeschreibung - zwei konfliktträchtige Erkenntnisquellen", in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 52, 2004, 2, 235-255, here 242); perhaps even only "one in 10 million threads is connected with the world, the others connect the brain with itself" (Manfred Spitzer, *Lernen. Gehirnforschung und die Schule des Lebens*, Heidelberg: Spektrum Akademischer Verlag, 2002, 52).

⁵⁴ This picture results as the distillation of today's state of palaeoanthropological knowledge, which is itself nourished by many research disciplines. It is beyond the scope here to set out the argument in detail. It will form part of my book *Beyond Modern Anthropocentrism*.

bb. `Freezing' of the developmental state around 40 000 years ago

And now to the next point. It is easy to see that a further increase in the dominance of reflexiveness would no longer have been advantageous. If humans had made the transition to a relation of 100% inwardly related functions as opposed to 0% outwardly related ones, then they would actually have become the way radical constructivists describe us: they would have been able only to think up the world, but no longer able to calibrate their constructions externally; they would then have moved only in fantasies. Steps in this direction were presumably in fact tried out, but for understandable reasons didn't prove advantageous, and so the state already reached has remained - that in which the optimal relationship between heightened reflexive ability and indispensable sensorimotoric linking to the world was attained.

In fact it is today known that development of the brain froze in this state an estimated 40 000 years ago and has since been conserved.⁵⁵ At that time - as surprising as it might initially sound - our whole bodily design and our emotional and mimic repertoire, indeed the whole human genome became frozen in the state that had been reached through the until then driving protocultural processes.⁵⁶ Since then there has been no further development of humans in these respects.

cc. Universals: frozen standards

This has two consequences. First an explanation of universals results, as the stocks of human nature then attained, which have been preserved due to the absence of further genetic change. Hence their universality - as their archaic character. These universal factors, to repeat, concern our bodily form and the aesthetic preferences relating to them; further, elementary emotions and their facial expression; and finally basic neuronal structures (including phonetic and linguistic patterns). All these factors underlie unchanged the cultural evolution that followed.⁵⁷

dd. Emergence of culture

⁵⁵ The point in time may be located a maximum of 10 000 years earlier or later. The fact that the `freezing' took place is uncontroversial.

⁵⁶ Wolf Singer has set out clearly what that means: If a stone-age baby were to grow up in our civilization it would be just as capable of learning successes as our children. And due to genetic commonalities concerning anatomy it would also look like one of our children. Conversely, if a 21st century baby were to grow up in a stone age culture it would simply turn out like a stone-age person (Wolf Singer, *Der Beobachter im Gehirn. Essays zur Hirnforschung*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, 44). - All this also means that humanity has produced its later and so impressive cultural achievements still with stone-age brains. From this one can see that although our genetic provision does an awful lot, it is a long way from doing everything. Cultural progress must obviously rest on a mechanism of its own which can no longer be explained according to genetic logic.

⁵⁷ They are genetically fixed and neurally anchored.

The second consequence is likewise obvious. From now on a further development of humans could take place *only* by way of culture. The genetic route had been exhausted, and cultural evolution, as everyone knows, no longer has any genetic repercussions. Now it is a fact that precisely then - around 40 000 years ago, as our genetic development came to a standstill - the cultural route was dramatically embarked upon. This simultaneity of the end of genetic evolution and the beginning of cultural evolution is no coincidence, rather a strong congruence exists between both sides: the human biological make-up had become good enough through protocultural evolution to be able henceforth to carry cultural evolution (in particular, as described, the optimum brain configuration necessary for this had been achieved), and cultural evolution is such that it uses this make-up but does not change it.

Thus 40 000 years ago, with the transition to the New Stone Age, cultural development accelerated: initially in the form of a dramatic explosion in the invention of tools; soon after followed the initial forms of art (first small statues, then cave paintings). The further path of the cultural take-off is familiar to everyone: a good 10 000 years ago the Neolithic revolution took place with the first towns being built; around 6000 years ago the first advanced civilizations formed; and for about 200 years we have been witnessing the attempted development of a global culture.

As I said, with the freezing of genetic development only the cultural route still remained open. This is why an acceleration and a take-off of a now genuinely cultural evolution came about, one decoupled from the genetic mechanisms of natural evolution and instead developing its own mechanisms of tradition - which in turn made possible further heightening of cultural development.⁵⁸

ee. The global spread of *homo sapiens* and the beginning of cultural diversification

And now for the final two points of this survey of development. The rapid evolution of culture coincided precisely with the global spread of the species *homo sapiens*. In the course of this all other kinds of human died out. Precisely because it took the path to a decisively cultural evolution, *homo sapiens* seems to have been conspicuously superior.

Finally: *Only after this*, only in the further history of the successful model *homo sapiens*, did the formation of cultural difference follow, the further development of which has led to the different cultures that we know. Cultural diversity is a late product on the basis of our common nature.

⁵⁸ In this perspective it becomes explicable for the first time, without the traditional introduction of mythical kinds of external dimensions ("divine spark", nonnatural "reason" that suddenly turns up in the midst of nature, etc.), how the emergence of genuinely cultural processes, together with their autonomization tendency, could come about from the starting point of a protoculturally, biologically achieved state of development. After millions of years of preparation the arrow of culture broke free from the string of protoculture.

III. The overall picture: primary and subsequent commonalities

The scenario described permits, as I said, an explanation of human universals. They correspond to the protocultural-biological make-up of humans that froze about 40 000 years ago. It is still at work in us. All later cultural development rests on this.

1. The relevance of universals - for our self-understanding and for transcultural tasks

One might, however, harbour doubt as to whether the ongoing efficacy of this universal make-up is in fact of any importance worth mentioning. Maybe you found some of what I said about the list and the anthropogenetic explanation of universals interesting - but ultimately not very important for your work, or for our self-understanding. The universals named seem to concern only very elementary, not high levels of human existence. How could they ever be relevant to a writer or literary theorist? - I want to make three points in response to this impression and such reservations.

a. Self-understanding

aa. The significance of prelinguistic and precultural aspects

First: I don't think the ultimate grounds of the human are linguistic. To be sure, the human is a *zoon logon echon*, a speaking and thinking being. But these activities, in their best moments, draw upon presentiments and certainties that are prelinguistic and precultural. As Thomas Nagel, an eminent philosopher, put it: "[...] philosophy is not like a particular language. Its sources are preverbal and often precultural". And the big difficulty for philosophy, Nagel continues, is "to express [...] intuitively felt problems in language without losing them".⁵⁹

Artists often express a similar belief. They feel driven by forces from the bedrock underlying the 'cultural'. Remember, for instance, of Paul Klee's endeavour to dwell "somewhat closer to the heart of creation".⁶⁰ Several writers have seen their vocation in putting wordless things into words.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11.

⁶⁰ "I cannot be grasped at all on this side. For I dwell as with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat closer to the heart of creation than is usual. And not yet close enough by far" (Paul Klee, *Gedichte*, ed. Felix Klee, Zurich: Arche, ²1980), 7 [1920]). Cf. (with a different accentuation) also Jean Dubuffet, "Positions anticulturelles" [1951], *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 67-77.

⁶¹ Cf. Hofmannsthal: "[...] the language in which it might perhaps have been given to me not only to write, but also to think, is neither Latin nor English nor Italian nor Spanish, but a language of which I do not know even one word, a language in which dumb things speak to me" (Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter* [1902], translated and with a preface by Michael Hofmann, Syrens: London 1995, 18).

I take this prelinguistic and precultural dimension very seriously. It's the locus of our fundamental connectedness with the world. Through language *alone* we would never meet with the world. And the fact that the universals I named are precultural does not entail that they are noncultural. They are so neither in their (protocultural) genesis, nor in their efficacy - they are still powerful within culture.

I once did a test concerning mimic expressions. Are we able to change them arbitrarily, for example by substituting the expression of sadness for that of joy and vice versa? And what happens if we do? Yes, with a lot of effort, we are able to switch them. But after a while one feels deeply uncomfortable and in serious danger - and is better advised to give up the experiment. We are better off going by the innate program - rather than to an asylum. If we wanted to meddle with these old patterns, our cultural activity would also break down.

bb. The elementariness of the logical

My second response might be surprising. It is that, though our foundations are not linguistic, they are nonetheless *logical* in nature.

According to recent findings the basic logical elements are anchored in the brain's modes of neural processing. Logical particles such as 'and' and 'or', logical relations such as 'same', 'identical' and 'other', connectives such as 'either/or', 'as well as' and 'if ... then', also the quantitative categories 'one', 'many', 'all' as well as the qualitative categories of affirmation and negation correspond to deep-seated operational modes of the neuronal system. These lie at the level of the general algorithm underlying all the brain's specific functions (and hence also the infamous 'modules') and also including mathematical operations such as addition and subtraction or multiplication and division.⁶²

Logic and mathematics are the elaborate *cultural articulations* of this *elementary neuronal logic*. No doubt they also lead the latter to unsuspected heights, linked with many degrees of freedom, but their basic stock is neurally anchored and their further development remains bound to this. Incidentally, this root is also capable of explaining the universal applicability of logic and mathematics, and likewise of throwing light on both the old theorem that the structure of the world is intrinsically logical and mathematical, and the modern view that precisely the mathematically based sciences get closest to the core of things.

So in our logical operations too we draw on a very old possession. It works pervasively in all our activities. Whether feelings and their forms of expression, aesthetic decisions, or linguistic achievements, they are all shaped by the elementary arsenal of affirmation and negation, sameness and difference, exclusive or inferential relationships, and so on.⁶³ One can hardly have

⁶² For a representative example from the mass of literature on the subject see: Christof Koch and Idan Segev, "The role of single neurons in information processing", in *Nature, Neuroscience Supplement*, Volume 3, November 2000, 1171-1177.

⁶³ However the neural anchoring of these logical parameters is to be distinguished from the conscious use we make of logical forms. The neural provision in no way guarantees the

an exaggerated idea of the extent to which logical elements shape the form of our simplest performances. Just try to imagine once how any sensation, perception, action or communication might be possible or might look like without these patterns. You cannot - all determinacy would be dissolved.

The fact that we usually do not notice this logical impregnation of everything is simply the reverse side of its elementariness. "The real foundations of his enquiry", Wittgenstein once said, "do not strike a man at all."⁶⁴ We humans move in these elementary logical structures in the most matter-of-course manner - like fishes in water.

Now, if it is the case that the logical structures are inherent in us as a neural possession, and if all our advanced cultural communication and rational methods rest on these, then one can recognize from this that rejection of evolutionary biological and neurobiological research results - as we currently often witness from the side of cultural studies and philosophy - is blind and foolish. The *formulation of logic* is, to be sure, a *cultural product*; but the *structure and validity* of the logical is an *evolutionary product*. It is precisely when one recognizes the elementary importance of logical operations for all our sensations and understanding - and who could escape from this? - that the extent to which an adequate understanding of the human must also include precultural dimensions becomes clear.⁶⁵

correctness of our reasoning. Not only can we make mistakes in our use of logical structures, but we can also consciously stage deceptions. It is just that correct and incorrect use alike are possible and evaluable only within the framework of basic possession of the logical forms.

⁶⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 50^e [129].

⁶⁵ Such considerations have nothing to do with adopting an "interpretive monopoly" of the biological sciences. It is just a matter of considering empirical findings about the human as an empirical being - instead of making a show of ignoring them and continuing to tell obsolete stories based on a lack of information and false empirical assumptions. Conversely, however, it is also important to examine the findings provided by science with philosophical tools and to integrate them into a framework of philosophical conceptions. I am therefore precisely not pleading in favor of straightforward adoption of the, in fact often simplistic, interpretations ('philosophies') of the sciences. Conversely I see the habit of simple rejection as having two disadvantages: for philosophy which it keeps at a regressive level; for cultural understanding in which, precisely due to philosophical reservedness, amateur overall interpretations can flourish. - One should recall just once, in contrast to the attitude today widespread, how energetically philosophers like Kant and Hegel endeavoured to take on the most recent scientific knowledge. Kant became famous for his theory, based on Newtonian foundations, of the development of galaxies and solar systems (Kant-Laplace theory) that he put forward his 1755 *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*; and with minimal scientific findings, but maximal application of reflection the late Kant (long before Darwin) developed the thought that humans might have originated "when the Orang-Utang or the Chimpanzee would develop the organs for walking, manipulating objects and speaking, until it had a human form, containing within it an organ for the use of understanding, and gradually developing itself by social culture" (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* [1798], trans. Mary J. Gregor, Haag:

b. Universals and transcultural communication

aa. Universals as elementary conditions of communication

With this I come to the third aspect: The precultural potentials of our existence are still important, indeed indispensable, for present attempts to attain more commonalities between cultures.

First, the *contents* of transcultural understanding may be no matter how diverse, but without the support of elementary *logical* forms we would not be able to have or communicate a single one of them, and would be equally incapable of entering into mutual comparison for the purpose of more closely determining what is common and what separates.⁶⁶

Secondly, emotions and their expressions participate essentially in successful communication. A conversation is determined not only through views and arguments, but is also guided by emotional proximity or distancing. Often it is only growing emotional trust that makes participants able to really involve themselves with contents and henceforth to actually move towards one another with *understanding*.

To be sure, the elementary commonalities mentioned do not lead to success *on their own*. But *without them* the whole undertaking would be in vain - it wouldn't even be able to get going.

Nijhoff, 1974, 188 n). Furthermore, Kant considered a common derivation of all creatures from a single "original mother" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, 304 [B 386 f., § 80]); he called "a hypothesis like this" "a daring adventure of reason" - an assumption that is by no means "absurd" and "not inconsistent a priori, in the judgement of mere reason" (ibid., 305 [B 370n]). And Hegel's account of animals in the *Encyclopaedia* is an eloquent document of how eager he too was to adopt and to reflect on the state of scientific knowledge of his time. - It seems as though philosophers have paradoxically retreated to the ivory tower of pure speculation only since an immense wealth of scientific knowledge has become available. Already Adorno complained about this attitude of ignorance about science: "Among the tasks awaiting the attention of philosophy, by no means the last is the adaptation, without amateurish analogies and syntheses, of the results of experience gained in the natural sciences, to the province of the mind. [...] If the sole purpose of philosophy consisted in bringing the human intellect to the stage where it could identify itself with what it has learned about natural phenomena, instead of leaving mankind to live out its life like a troglodyte sheltering behind its own knowledge of the cosmos in which the imprudent species, 'homo', goes his graceless way, at least something would have been achieved" (Theodor W. Adorno, "Why Philosophy" [1962], *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, 40-53, here 50 f.)

⁶⁶ Pointing out the preference for ambiguity in some cultures over the clear either/or does not impact on this. The 'as well as' is also part of the basic logical repertoire, and ambiguity too, though in each case excluding a lot, does not exclude everything.

bb. Extending the table: need universals and culture universals

At this point it is time to extend the table of universals. Until now I have only been pointing out universals in the strictest sense - such as are strictly common to *all* humans and human communities.

Based on these, however, there is also a second type of universals which relates to elementary human needs, to demands of life and to the strategies of solution responding to them. Malinowski and Murdock were not wrong to list such universals. If not all humans were familiar with hunger or the need for protection and accommodation, human cultures would look quite different than is the case. However, the solution to these problems (posed by the *protocultural nature* of humans) already results on the *route of culture* - hence, for instance, strategies for storing provisions or accommodation differ greatly (also depending on the natural living environment). Geertz was right that with regard to such universal needs the analysis of culturally different strategies of solution cannot be dispensed with. But, conversely, it would be just as wrong not to recognize the latter as being different solutions to the same kind of problems. As universal needs underlie these commonalities, I call them *need universals*.

It is important that the dual structure of the same need and different problem solution makes possible an understanding of other cultural feats. One attains understanding of an exotic type of accommodation because one is familiar with the problem of accommodation and because one can clarify for oneself, in view of the differing climatic and other circumstances, why the form chosen there is an appropriate solution to the problem as it exists under those conditions - a form not suitable to the problem at home, but exactly to the way one would have it oneself living in the other place. *Need universals* thus represent, in contrast to strict universals (which are of protocultural origin), a next highest (protocultural-cultural) level which also contributes to transcultural understanding.

Furthermore there are also universals that are completely *cultural* in kind. They arise from structural necessities that crop up in the cultural process, in particular with regard to the cultural task of tradition, which is indispensable to any culture whatever. In this respect analogous solutions often come about in view of the same pressure of problems. An example of this is the development of systems of writing. Correspondingly, I call these specifically *cultural* commonalities *culture universals*. These are, admittedly, features that are not common to *all* humans and human communities - there are also cultures without writing. These are thus commonalities between *many*, but not all cultures - one might therefore also call them *semi-universals*. Though their form turns out to differ culturally, these culture universals also represent transcultural points of contact: the writing of other cultures can be decoded and documents can be translated.

So the table of universals is at least threefold: strict universals of a protocultural kind, need universals of a protocultural-cultural kind, and genuine culture universals. Presumably this table could be extended further. What matters here is that on the basis of the 'hard' universals the formation of higher-level (universal or semi-universal) commonalities comes about which also contribute to the possibility of transcultural communication, and which are suitable to fill the gap between fundamental commonalities and current difference - or that between necessary and

sufficient conditions for transcultural communication.

2. Original possession and further acquisition of commonalities

Overall the following picture thus results concerning the possession and acquisition of commonalities: Long before the culture-specific commonalities and differences that one usually focuses on, we humans already possess universal commonalities due to the origin common to all of us. Through these commonalities people were already connected before they began to differentiate culturally. If one wants to go back to an "effective history", then first of all to this one - it is common to *all* of us. And these old commonalities continue to operate. It is due to them, first, that what would not be possible or understandable in terms of cultural difference alone is possible: namely, that we are able to connect inwardly with the contents of other cultures - from the initial fascination, as I attempted to describe using the Ginkakuji temple as an example, through to highly elaborated forms of understanding.

The acquisition of transcultural commonalities currently sought still lives from these old commonalities and would not be able to get going at all without them. To be sure, higher level commonalities come in addition. But their formation and acquisition is possible only on the basis of those more elementary commonalities, and their use still lives from the basal commonalities. - This is why I would wish, with this exposition, to have inclined the reader somewhat more to think once about the elementary commonalities too. In this way, I believe, we could add a new perspective and give a new boost to the aim of promoting transcultural commonalities.