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# THE OTHER IN DIALOGUE. BETWEEN HERMENEUTIC EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSIVE RATIONALITY<sup>1</sup>

Dialogicality is – and, indeed, is (being) as such also discussed by numerous, almost innumerable authors – one of the fundamental phenomena of human co-existence in the world: throughout, from birth to death, before and after, beyond them both, insofar as each and every person as a single, as a singular individual, traversing (through) presence, transfers onwards the potentiality of (still – not yet or not anymore –) absent fragments – the ancient remnants and the novel seeds, the memory and the expectation – of conversations past and future, the movement – the event(uation) – of dialogue – because of its endless finiteness, brittle in-(de)terminability continuously threatened by the precarious prospect of radical discontinuation in the rupture of deafening noise or of dumbfounding muteness – not only occasionally accompanies our lives, but – first and foremost –, as a kind of atmosphere that surrounds us, occasions,

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co-constitutes the manner, in which we encounter all there is: lifeless as well as living beings, material things as well as spiritual concerns, plants, animals, fellow human beings as well as ourselves, and – perhaps (who knows?) likewise – the (wholly, absolutely, divinely) transcendent: – in a word: – the other. As beings of sociality, reaching towards the other, reached by the other, handling the matters, debating them and doing them, dealing with them, we are already always a part of a dialogue: dialogue dis-closes – at once reveals and conceals – the horizon(s) of the world, the time(s) and the space(s), within which what is appears: be-speaking we dwell in the world. Through the inter-play of questions and answers, through the inter-mediality of language, (a/the) dialogue opens (us) up (for) the different dimensions of the “inter-esse” – the “in-between(ness)” – of our being-in-the-world: it is a medium of the encounter with the other.

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With regard to the problem of the other as it gives itself to be encountered in the dialogical movement the present paper would like to take into account – and recount – the principal points of contention between two conflicting, but nonetheless complementing philosophical stances: the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and the phenomenology of Bernhard Waldenfels (1934). The intention of subsequent consideration of the confrontation between Gadamer’s compelling advocacy of the primacy of question in his conceptualization of hermeneutic experience and Waldenfels’ critical reassessment of the phenomenon of answer in his theory of responsive rationality, between opposing positions that, thus juxtaposed, by themselves circumscribe the basic elements of dialogue, is not – and cannot be – to overplay or to underplay the significance of either of them by comparing its pertinence to the counterpart, nor to establish an unsurmountable, a moated frontline by declaring complete self-sufficiency of one – or contestable (e)quality of the illegitimacy of both – of the rivals in a wager of war “for truth” between them, but by re-tracing the converging and diverging traits at the crossroads of their paths attempt to re-approach exactly and expressly the openness of the “in-between(ness)” of (our) being and thus – maybe – show anew – nuanced from (within) the viewpoints of both authors – the way the other comes into play (to be encountered) with-in (the medium of) dialogue.

From the beginnings of the “art” – practice and skill – of understanding in Ancient Greece, through its modern blossoming into a general theory and

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doctrine, to the attempts of a methodological founding of human(ist[ic]) sciences upon its basis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the historical development of hermeneutics has been – and still is – intrinsically incited – at first implicitly and unthematized, later on explicitly and emphatically – by the problem of understanding – and interpretation – of sense, of the meaning – for example – of (an utterance in) a conversation or of (a passage in) a text, the problem of an understanding mediation in the relation between the interpreted and the interpreter: the ever profounder, in effect never-ending (self-)reflection upon/of the procedures of understanding, of/upon the circumstances of interpretation, denotes (also) the gradual passage from classical hermeneutics, through hermeneutic philosophy, to philosophical hermeneutics as instigated and instituted by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his seminal, epochal book *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*; 1960), as well as – before publication – recurrently re-announced and – afterward – exhaustively re-elaborated in his other writings regarding a diverse range of topics.

The origin of Gadamer's outline of philosophical hermeneutics is the situation of crisis within the humanities – *Geisteswissenschaften* – of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries stemming from predominantly accepted persuasion that solely “exact” and “objective” – that is to say: natural – science with its ideal of inductive method can warrant the attainment of truth. Although Gadamer from the onset on recognizes the fundamentally non-methodical nature of humanist knowledge, his hermeneutics is not aimed at an attempt neither to forge a new – better – method nor to renew old – inadequate – ones, and it does not represent yet another, a(n) re-iterated effort to reconcile the humanities with natural sciences. On the contrary: as such it seeks – by re-examining and re-evaluating the re-sources of hermeneutical tradition – to offer an answer to the critical question(s) of the “sciences” of human in their unique placement between scientific technique and openness of sense, between method and truth, whilst it asks how is understanding – if at all – possible, whilst it investigates what conditions and defines it.

Gadamer therefore rethinks the concept of the circle of understanding, which classical hermeneutics had adopted from ancient rhetoric, and distinguished it as the key principle for interpretation, which signifies a special relationship of mutual co-determination between the parts and the whole of a text to

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be understood, in accordance with the impulses received from his philosophical teacher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), whose groundbreaking work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*; 1927) – the “project” of hermeneutic phenomenology it entails – gave (back) – in Gadamer’s opinion – to (the structure of) understanding its ontologically positive sense, insofar as it comprehended understanding as the original, the originary form of the realization of (human) existence in the world, the *Dasein*. As (a/the) being – not by its own choice – thrown into the world to be – one day – re-called (off) – of it – existence always (already) possesses a(n) un-certain understanding of the surrounding world: the self-understanding of existence incorporates the co-understanding of the world. And vice versa: the understanding of the world, of things and of people with-in it, already (always) includes the self-understanding of existence. The circularity of understanding – the hermeneutic circle – is grounded in existence itself.

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From this circumstance, from this presupposition far-reaching consequences for the problem of understanding and interpretation of a text or of a person, of the sense of what is being said and conveyed to us through language, ensue: on the one hand no interpretation starts from zero, it is an explication, an unfolding of understanding pre-determined by the latent and anticipatory movement of fore-understanding; on the other hand the elaboration of fore-understanding concerning the content into explicit, evident understanding cannot remain arbitrary, but needs to seek (initial) guidance and (ultimate) confirmation in “the things themselves” (Heidegger 1996: 153).<sup>2</sup>

In the entire progression of understanding of a (written or oral) “statement”, which can be – according to Gadamer – construed as a process of constant re-projection(s) – re-(en)visioning(s) –, of verification and/or of transformation of the expectation(s) (of the unity) of sense, in the movement of interpretation, the attention to the subject matter is of vital, inevitable importance: the goal of understanding is to come to an agreement concerning the content of what addresses us, what is at stake and as such, by itself, “desires” to be – by us – understood: “For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity. Understanding begins /.../ when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics.” (Gadamer 2004: 298)

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2 Cf. also Gadamer 2004: 269.

Interpreter's fore-understanding – his/her fore-meaning, her/his fore-judgements – of the content at hand consists of prejudices that – at the same time – command the endeavor of understanding – and can thus lead it astray – as well as – paradoxically – enable it: they demarcate, mark its limits and condition its very possibility. Prejudices defining all attempts at understanding everything and anything are, re-present the actuality of the historicity of being, the sign and the signature of human finiteness. The hallmark of our – of beings' and of being's – "belonging" to (the/a) tradition.<sup>3</sup>

One of the cardinal – and distinctive – characteristics – in-valuable merits – of Gadamer's hermeneutics is precisely the re-acknowledgment of the historicity of understanding through the concept, the principle of history of effect – *Wirkungsgeschichte* – that indicates, specifies the movement of tradition enveloping interpretation, and therefore complements the thought about the hermeneutic circle. The emphasis upon the mutual inter-connectedness, intertwining and interweaving of history and understanding in their historically effected relationship does not only intend to describe the influence a text has had and continues to have on tradition, that its meaning has been and can be understood otherwise in different times, but – above all – that all our understanding is always already influenced – inter-mediated – by the history of its effects, by the effectuation of history itself. The awareness of the co-conditioning of understanding through tradition, the historically effected consciousness – as Gadamer calls it –, is the awareness of the effect history exerts on, with-in understanding: the conscious re-cognition of hermeneutic situation, which essentially determines, in-activates the horizon, the capacity of our understanding of the world we inhabit, and which of itself, by delineating its borders brings about the acceptance of the finiteness of human existence. Hermeneutic, historically effected consciousness is the awareness of finitude – the latter is the former's fundamental constituent –: as such it possesses the openness of the structure of experience.

Hermeneutic experience is concerned and deals with tradition. Insofar as tradition, what it brings and carries, the meaning it transfers onto us, is not something we can simply learn and easily master, but effectuates our under-

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3 Cf. Gadamer 1998: 64.

standing while it relates to us, hermeneutic experience – Gadamer claims – can be – and it is at this crucial, accentuated point that for him the problem of (the otherness) of the other arises – viewed as being analogous to the (I's) experience of the Thou. Gadamer distinguishes three possibilities of an approach towards the other and – in a transposition onto the problematic of hermeneutics – towards tradition: – on the one hand – the behavior of the other can be typified, methodologically studied and debated as an object of scientific prediction robbed of personality – in the humanities with such a position the naïve, blind and outdated “scientism” can be compared that perceives itself detached from the (subjective) effect(s) of tradition –, and – on the other hand – the other can remain, despite being acknowledged as a person, under siege of the self-relatedness of the I, which does not alter the reflective nature of the relation, but unleashes the struggle for mutual recognition – historical consciousness offers an appurtenant parallel within hermeneutical sphere to such a stance, since it denies its own historical conditionedness –; yet, neither of these possibilities breaks with the preponderance, the predominance of the I, on the contrary: the Thou in its otherness thus never really reaches the fortifications of the I. Only the third, the highest option of the I-Thou relationship is correspondingly a true analogue of hermeneutic experience that is of prominence for the historically effected consciousness: it allows a person to make their claim to validity – even if it is being made against us – and lets the Thou say something to the I: it listens to the other – to the meaning, the sense it is trying to communicate – in the openness of understanding. In the essay entitled “Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference” (“Hermeneutik und ontologische Differenz”; 1989) Gadamer succinctly wrote: “For precisely when we seek to understand the other person, we have the hermeneutical experience that we must break down resistance in ourselves if we wish to hear the other as other. This is really a basic determinant of all human existence, and also still governs the success of our ‘self-understanding.’” (Gadamer 2007: 371)

The effectuation of hermeneutic experience comes about, according to Gadamer, as *Horizontverschmelzung*, as the fusion of the horizons of understanding: the understanding of anything and everything transferred and conferred onto us through tradition occurs as the flowing together of the horizon divulged by what is (being) said, what addresses us as a meaningful message

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to be understood, and the horizon of the interpreter: hence it must always include the application – *Anwendung* – onto one's own hermeneutic situation. Application is not only an integral, but also the integrative part of understanding, the source of the productivity of interpretation.

The openness of historically effected consciousness for the address of tradition – the truth claim (encountered) with-in it – possesses the logical structure of question. The essence of the question is “to open up possibilities and keep them open,” (Gadamer 2004: 298) to open (up) the *pro et contra*, the in-between of “thus and otherwise” in their counter-balance. Within this space of possibilities, however, all cannot be possible: a question is meaningful only if its pre-suppositions are fixed and its horizon clearly outlined. It needs a sense of direction, of directedness towards the openness of the (still) questionable from wherein an answer may eventually emerge. The decision regarding a question, the passage through the field, the uncertainty of questionability, the weighing(-out-and-in) of options is the way towards knowledge and comprehension: to experience something we must learn the subtle art of questioning. Questioning is the mindful with-holding with-in the realm of the possible, it is an attentive attitude practiced with self-restraint and carefully contemplated judgment. Whilst questioning opens the possibilities of sense, of understanding it (also) holds our prejudices *in suspenso*: as the openness for truth it is a kind of hermeneutical *epoché*, which Dean Komel had in his book *Outlines. On philosophical and cultural hermeneutics* (*Osnutja. K filozofski in kulturni hermenevtiki*; 2001) described with the following words: “/.../ to withhold oneself from any judgment regarding tradition, before by itself it addresses us and becomes for us [note]worthy. There is no understanding of tradition without hearkening to its voice; what distinguishes hermeneutic experience is therefore not the ability to form a unifying uncomplicatedness of interpretation, but the possibility of truly listening to the other that can be fulfilled in the sincerity of a simple conversation.” (Komel 2001: 12)

Defending the priority of the question before the answer Gadamer defines the task of hermeneutics as “entering into a dialogue” with tradition accomplished as a dialectic of question and answer. To understand a traditionary text means to understand it as an answer to a question, that is to say, to attain the hermeneutic horizon of the question defining the sense of the text. “Thus a

person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question – a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it.” (Gadamer 2004: 363) However, insofar as the text asks us a question, questions us, while it puts our fore-understanding into question, and requires a reply, we ourselves must start questioning. For a sense of a question can really be understood only if we pose and raise it also (for) ourselves: the (self)questioning is the realization, the actualization of a question as such. The understanding thus, in effect, in truth, entails a doubly dialectic inter-play of questions and answers: a text questions us, asks us a question and demands a reply from us; we are asking, questioning the text, and demanding its reply. Whenever we attempt to endeavor behind and beyond what is said, whenever we are trying to gain the horizon of the question, to reconstruct the question being asked and replied to, our questioning itself determined by the (limited) horizon of our own historical, our own contemporary understanding, is, and needs to be involved, if we are to understand at all. The reconstruction of a question passes through and surpasses the historical horizon of tradition in a fusion of past and present horizons. And vice versa: the fusion of horizons as the understanding of the questionability of something surpasses and passes through the reconstruction.

The dialectic of question and answer that determines the structure of hermeneutic experience describes understanding as a mutual relation(ship) between the interpreted and the interpreter: as a process of a dialogue. The understanding of tradition opens up the seemingly closed hermeneutic circle into – and for – a liberated, a liberating – free(d) – dialogue as the inter-play of questions and answers, addresses and replies, assertions and objections: the – communicatively, communally articulated – play with/of words, of/with language itself.

For Gadamer language re-presents, is the universal medium, the speculative, the mediating middle of all (mutual) understanding, it determines both, the hermeneutic object as well as the hermeneutic act. It is, at once, in one,

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the interpreter and the interpreted.<sup>4</sup> As the “universal aspect of hermeneutics” language enables the effectuation of the synthesis between the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present, between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader: the fusion of the horizons is “*the achievement of language*.” (Gadamer 2004: 370) Guided by language Gadamer therefore – in (the third, the concluding part of) *Truth and Method* – considers and attempts to accomplish an “ontological shift of hermeneutics”. A shift from the general theory of understanding towards hermeneutic ontology: a shift that is no subversive action and no revolution, but the awareness of linguistic mediation of all experience: the linguality of all understanding, according to which our relationship with all there is, with beings and with being (as such), can be defined as interpretation. A re-summarizing sentence – at first glance only an unassuming “statement” – concisely recapitulates Gadamer’s “stance”: “*Being that can be understood is language*.” (Gadamer 2004: 470)

Understanding of tradition, of all there is and thus lends itself to understanding, is fulfilled in the linguistically mediated process of interpretation, as experience it is an event and partakes in the immediacy of the eventuation of truth: it is an encounter with what claims its validity as a binding truth, what forces us to pose questions and to seek answers. An encounter with-in – the openness of – language.

An understanding encounter can never be grasped as a mere methodological procedure, obtainable through learning. As the dialectic of question and answer it is – rather – a dialogue that entices both parties, all the counter-parts in their inter-play. Historically effected, it never begins “from scratch”, and it never ends in ultimate, final totality, with “the full sum” of a whole elucidation of sense. The acknowledgment of the intrinsic, innermost in-complete, un-concluding endlessness of the finite, forever im-perfective, ever im-perfectible possibility of dialogical movement is the truth of historically effected consciousness, the truth of its openness for the experience of tradition. The openness for its future.

Insofar as, however, hermeneutic(al) consciousness is compelled to examine and to verify, to question its presumptions, its prejudices, to critically re-

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4 Cf. Komel 2002: 16 ff.

asses and re-appropriate them in the event of encounter itself, if it wants to experience the unalienable truth of tradition, to view the own as well as the other in proper proportions of their relation(ship), insofar as the understanding of tradition does not denote the naïve and passive submission, self-surrender and self-submersion regarding the overwhelming superiority of tradition, insofar as the interpreted is not irrevocably bound by the self-evident life of tradition, insofar as the appropriation of tradition stemming from what addresses us as a task of understanding pre-supposes the re-cognition of the distance between the interpreted and the interpreter and therefore an openness for its otherness, the true position of hermeneutics lies in the in-between of – the opposition(s) of – familiarity and strangeness, with-in the un-known: “Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness; but this polarity is not to be regarded psychologically /.../, but truly hermeneutically – i.e., in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us. Here too there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditional text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*” (Gadamer 2004: 295)

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The juxta-pos(ition)ing polarity between the proximity and the distance of what is to be understood, between the past and the present, between the text and the reader, motivates the dialogical movement of understanding. The true, the f-actual beginning of – the process of – understanding, the impulse that brings it about, is a misunderstanding, the initial discord that incites us towards searching and finding accord, the dissension, which provokes the hermeneutical attitude as the (im)mediation of sense: “Challenged by something not understood or not understandable, hermeneutics is brought onto the path of questioning and is required to understand. In this process one never has some advance lordship over all meaningfulness. Instead, one is answering an always self-renewing challenge to take something not understood, something surprisingly other, strange, dark – and perhaps deep – that we need to understand.” (Gadamer 2007: 363)

But: are sense and understanding, is questioning, is the truth of historically effected, hermeneutic(al) consciousness all (there is)? Does understandability – the availability of everything for understanding and the readiness for it

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– have the final word? Does there (not) exist another, different (and differentiated) kind of otherness, a foreignness (as such)? The alien by itself, the radically alien? A more radical form of incomprehensibility? An unintelligibility, which is not only contrary to understanding, which does not represent neither its lower degree nor its earlier phase, which is not a mere misunderstanding? An unintelligibility that does not mean neither what is not yet comprehensible nor what is not comprehensible anymore? The unintelligibility that cannot be sur-passed (through) by understanding, that eludes the sphere – and the economy – of sense, that trespasses (against) them, lies beyond sense and understanding, cannot be integrated or assimilated, opposes all appropriation, and thwarts all attempts at/of hermeneutical mediation, that comes from elsewhere and undermines the safety of established orders? An untamable, irrepressible, unsurmountable alienness? Alienness as the unintelligibility with-in the understandable, as the unannullable border-line, the limit of understandability? As the a(nti)-hermeneutic counter-force with-in hermeneutics itself, which questions all of its efforts and all of its endeavors, puts the hermeneutics itself, its possibility in-to the question? Alienness as a radical surplus?

Bernhard Waldenfels – following especially the stimulations he had received from the phenomenological theories of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), as well as from the works of Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) – thoroughly scrutinizes, from the viewpoint of the problem(s) of the experience of the alienness (of the other), from within the horizon of responsivity, on the way towards responsive rationality, which stands at the center of his studies from the treatise *Order in the Twilight* (*Ordnung im Zwielicht*; 1987) onwards, rationality that does not allow any kind of fixation or hypostatizing,<sup>5</sup> that in an expressly formulated antagonism with Gadamer's advocacy for the methodological primacy of question, emphasizes – as its name suggests – the dimension of answer, of response and, therefore, also of responsibility towards the situative, singular

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5 Waldenfels wrote in his diary published in book form under the title *A Philosophical Diary. From the Workshop of Thinking 1980–2005* (*Philosophisches Tagebuch. Aus der Werkstatt des Denkens 1980–2005*; 2008) already in 1980: “Direction of thought: *floating rationality*, confronted by such differences as subject and object, world and man, no fixation and no hypostatization into a higher reality”. (Waldenfels 2008: 25)

address – the demands and the claims –<sup>6</sup> of the other as the alien, that with the underlying ethical impulse combines and binds together the ontological as well as the epistemological problematic, (also) Gadamer’s hermeneutics and accentuates its limits, its internal, intrinsic limitation, stemming from its exclusive focus on understanding and interpretation, the mediation of sense, the a-biding by the search for a consensus in a mutually reciprocal understanding, by the wholeness of the common, communally shared sense, the truth. Whilst Waldenfels in (the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first part of) the central, seminal work *The Registers of Answer* (*Antwortregister*; 1994) discusses Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy in the context of the relation between question and answer, in the essay “Beyond Sense and Understanding” (“Jenseits von Sinn und Verstehen”), published in the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of his *Studies on the Phenomenology of the Alien* (*Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*) entitled *The Polyphony of Speech* (*Vielstimmigkeit der Rede*; 1999), he turns his attention to hermeneutics precisely from the stance of the questions posed and accordingly summarized above, from the stance he first elaborated and exhaustively expounded upon – under the guidance of the problems of order, its foundation and its arbitrariness, its genealogy and the subject within it – in the work *Order in the Twilight*.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of order in the twilight means that the movement, the occurrence of (any kind of) order is fundamentally determined by an essential ambiguity, double-sidedness, which clearly comes to the fore against the background of the dissolution, the disintegration of “the grand narratives”, the dis-closure of the deficiency of all-encompassing cultural-social and experience orders in the post-modern age, orders such as the total, purposeful and teleological order of cosmos of Ancient Greece, based on the coordination of parts into a whole, or as the grounding formal order of modernity, constructed upon normativity,

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6 I predominantly translate the German word “Anspruch”, which represents one of the key concepts of Waldenfels’ thought, with “address”, because of its original reference to language and dialogue; it could, however, also be rendered as “claim”, “appeal”, “demand”, “aspiration” or “tendency”, meanings that simultaneously re-sound, and need to be heard in the word itself.

7 Reflecting upon hermeneutics and the conference organized in 2000 in honor of Gadamer’s 100th anniversary Waldenfels in his diary describes himself – half seriously, half jokingly – as a half-hermeneutical heathen. Cf. Waldenfels 2008: 235.

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the universality of legislative directive or interdiction, upon the subordination under a rule. An order enables and disables at once, it dis-(en)ables, at once it forms and transforms, it trans-forms, whilst it embraces certain possibilities of experience, of thought and of practice, it also rejects other and dismisses them, an order renders im-possible: in the friction amongst diverse orders the movement of a specific order is comprised of a process of inclusion, selection and exclusion, of mutual effectuation, of re-productivity. An order marks, demarcates its own limits, it de-limits: it has a limited reach and remains contingent. The order, wherein we find and move ourselves, is an order in the form of potentiality, only one of the possible orders, an order amongst other orders.<sup>8</sup>

The order as “*according to rules (i.e., non-arbitrary) ordered complex of this and that*” (Waldenfels 1987: 17), as the equa(liza)tion of the unequal, the disparate, originates on the threshold of disorder by the organization of the disorganized, what needs to be ordered and comes into order, to it, it emerges as a response to its address, its appeal, through the open confrontation from the intermediary event of address and response, from the sphere of the in-between of their inter-play: “As *an intermediary event [Zwischenereignis]* I understand something that, whilst it occurs, refers to something else by responding to its incentive and address. Insofar as this corresponds with every utterance and every action, they can be viewed as being interlocutory or interactive events. I denote the order that arises from this complex and in an organizing way intervenes in it as *responsive rationality [responsive Rationalität]*. It incorporates an open organization, because what is being organized does not itself stem from the order. It organizes the means and the manner someone confronts and accepts the alien.” (Waldenfels 1987: 47)

On the threshold, on the border(s) of dis-order, on the edge(s) of order, in the tears and the gaps between orders, in their selectivity, inclusive exclusivity and exclusive inclusivity, what is not ordered, the disordered, re-appears at once as preceding and as surpassing order, as a transgression, as the surplus of the address: as the excess originating from the exorbitant over-determination of all phenomena, from their hyper-/super-abundancy, transcending the limit(ation)s of order without abolishing (or replacing) them: as the extraor-

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8 Cf. Waldenfels 1998: 15 ff.

dinary which remains – at once – inside and outside of order, challenging it and provoking it, enticing it and threatening it, but never disappears, never dissipates, which can never be completely and fully integrated with-in (the/an) order itself. All that emerges within order is simultaneously present and absent in it, it is itself and also something else, other, here and there, more and less, determined by a series of breaks and leaps, passages and pauses, the abysses of our experience.

The shadows of the alien as the extraordinary with-in order itself accompany and disquiet the relative peacefulness, the serenity of order, as the element of uncertainty in the certain, of the unusual in the usual, they motivate its movement, they impart upon it the seal of the ambiguous “*es gibt [there is]*”.<sup>9</sup>

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The radical alienness that defies appropriation, evades it and cannot be entirely caught even by the nets of the hermeneutical mind, that finds no fixed, no fixated settlement, is the “outer”, the “dark” side of order, the extraordinary with-in it itself. The alien resists all order(ing), all coordination and all subordination into (an/the) order, although it does not – as excluded – exist without it: there is no order without disorder and there is no disorder without order, nothing alien without the own and nothing own without the alien. The sting of the alien lurks in the heart – of hearts – of order, it puts it into question.

Responsive rationality is decisively denoted by the constitutive asymmetry, the hiatus between the addressing appeal of the alien and the subsequent, the for-ever belated response to it, the discrepancy, which is of consequence for the movement of dialogue, which withdraws support from the orders of speech and action, of sense and understanding.<sup>10</sup>

The possibility of responsive rationality, originating from the recognition of the contingent, limited nature of order(s), from the acknowledgment that “the response to an address is what primary demands questioning” (Kamel 2001: 22) – and not vice versa –, designates a change, a regrouping and a redistribution of weight(s), a shift: the passage from the posing, the bringing about of question(s) towards the ‘being-brought-into-question’ [In-Frage-gestellt-

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9 Cf. Waldenfels 1998: 79, as well as Waldenfels 2013: 5 ff.

10 Cf. Kamel 1998: 246.

sein],<sup>11</sup> from the question towards answer, to its different dimensions, its registers, towards the acceptance of the address and the response to it, towards the inevitability, the necessity of responding, towards the 'not-being-able-not-to-respond', towards 'the-im-possibility-of-non-response', towards *Nichtnichtantwortenkönnen*.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas Waldenfels in the first part of *The Registers of Answer* deliberates – comprehensively considering, besides Gadamer's hermeneutics, also Husserl's theory of intentionality, the concepts of speech acts as presented by John L. Austin (1911–1960) and John R. Searle (1932), as well as Jürgen Habermas' (1929) communicative agency and Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) discursivity – upon the movement of dialogue, upon the problem of the relation between question and answer, the second and the third part of his book are dedicated to the detailed and consequent explication of responsive rationality, to the exposition of responsivity as the fundamental characteristic of all our experience, of speech and of action, and as the principal incentive for a phenomenology of the alien.

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Every and each question, whether we understand it traditionally, as an objective question that arises from the lack of knowledge and that seeks to fulfill its goal within the total order, or as a questioning of someone which originates in the need for help and which finds completion in the following of rules within the grounding order of directives and interdictions, or, finally, as a question under the sign of possibility, as the opening of possibilities and as keeping them open that stems from their surplus and that as an event of disclosure turns to answering as the solving of problems – question as it is also understood by Gadamer –, moves and remains within the boundaries of the existing, pre-established order, order “incapable of motivating, regulating and enabling itself” (Komel 1998: 249), laying thus bare its blind spot inaccessible to any kind of ordering attempts. The same – namely, that it, although one can recognize also different motives, remains within an accepted, preconceived order (the tradition) – is true, insofar as it abides by the continuum of sense and by the reciprocal relation between the own and the alien, insofar

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11 Cf. Waldenfels 2007: 153.

12 Cf. Waldenfels 2008: 165.

as it is denoted by a certain yearning for knowledge, by the *Wissenwollen*, of Gadamer's exposition of the priority, the primacy of question as the methodological "parenthesis", of questioning as a hermeneutical *epoché*, and is true of the mutual play, the inter- and the counter-play of question and answer, for the constant oscillation between them, their inter-weaving within the circle of understanding, in the dialogue of interpreter with tradition and with its texts, in which the questioning of someone and the objective question fall into one and almost unnoticeably, without leap transverse into a questioning answering and a listening questioning, into a questioning thinking.

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Yet, thinking originating in the priority of questioning, which must in the end, if it wants to be really radical, put itself into question, according to Waldenfels, finally finds itself caught in the circle of circles, confronted by the alternative: if nothing else suffocates questioning, then questioning must suffocate itself: "Either questioning is incorporated into an unquestionable order, therefore resigning its genuine character of question, or it retains its genuinely questioning character, thus retiring backwards into the nirvana of its own unquestionability." (Waldenfels 2007: 186) The change of approach, a turning of perspective can perhaps offer a way out of the dilemma of question: perhaps a question can be what it is only when we attempt to rethink it from something other than itself, from the answer, if we think it as an address which brings us into question, and to which we have to respond.

The new, the renewed beginning with the answer that does not mean a mere shift of priority, that – on the contrary – evades all primacy with-in the en-closed en-circling of question and answer as such, because it itself eludes us, Waldenfels re-traces following the guiding line of a simple, at first glance almost a naïve question: "What do we respond to when we experience, say or do something?" (Waldenfels: 2007: 188) To respond – to offer an answer – to something means to reply and react to a challenge, to the appeal, the address posed from something or someone other, to take advantage of given possibilities. To answer – to offer a response – means to begin from elsewhere, from the exposition to the other. Responsivity kept in motion by intermediary events, by the surplus of the address, is the confrontation with, the acceptance of the alien.

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In this context it is necessary to emphasize an important and meaningful – also a linguistic – duplication: the difference between answer and answering, between the answer to a question and the answering to a questioning, between the given answer and the giving of the answer, between answer and response – the latter being the event(uation) of responding and responsiveness – which (can) never coincide in fullness. Traditional interpretations of the answer as (a kind of) a filler filling the void, the lack of knowledge, as a fulfillment of striving, according to a goal or a rule, are insufficient if we attempt to approach them from the appeal, the address we receive and perceive in speech, because the giving of the answer, responding, is more than merely transmittance of preconceived knowledge. We can, after all, respond not only with a counter-question or a(n) re-action, but also with a denial of answer, by looking away or through silence.

The duality, non-coincidence of answer and response indicates the (self-)differentiation and the (self-)duplication with-in the event of utterance itself: the ch(i)asm between the saying (or: the – act of – uttering) [das Sagen] and the said (or: the uttered) [das Gesagte], which comes into language, which is expressed in words, whilst it suppresses, presses all other “things” into silence. Waldenfels names – in *The Registers of Answer* implicitly, but explicitly in the book *The Estrangement of Modernity* (*Verfremdung der Moderne*; 2001) that represents a kind of a succinct summary of his own philosophical path – the turning of attention away from the said, the return back to the saying, to its address, the reduction of the said to the event of saying allowing the saying itself to re-sound, to be heard as an excess, a responsive *epoché*.<sup>13</sup> The reduction of the responsive *epoché* is an expropriation, a dispossession of events; it is an *Entordnung*, a dis-ordering, a nomadization, de-subjectification and de-personalization, de-finalization and de-causalization, de-totalization and de-structuralization, a dis-organization of speech and action; it is the re-acknowledgment, the recognition of the event character of activity and speaking, the noncoincidence with-in the coincidence of saying and the said. Whereas a question and a given answer remain within an order, the event of saying and, therefore, the event

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13 Cf. Waldenfels 2007: 195, as well as: Waldenfels 2001: 96.

of response, the giving of the answer, can never be subjugated to a(n) pre-established order: “The event of saying avoids being said, because it is not the said, *whilst it is more than the said*; it is a sur-plus, an ex-cès, something extraordinary that disquiets different orders of the said.” (Waldenfels 2007: 199). The event of saying differentiates, differs by/from itself, reflects and inflects, folds and unfolds itself. “If there exists a certain point of indifference, a kind of a primary differential, it is the dead point of differentiation itself, the locus of a *diastasis*, which always lies in a grey area, the place, of which we cannot speak without speaking from [with-in] it.” (Waldenfels 2007: 200)

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The intermediary event of the alien address and the response to it – the event of their dual rhythmization – is marked by the diastasis, by the *Auseinandertreten*, the simultaneous reaching towards each other and rending again asunder, between them lies a gap, a hiatus of an abyss: there is no comparison between what I respond to and what I offer as an answer, they do not move on an equal level, with-in the same order.<sup>14</sup> The difference between the “what-to [Worauf]?” and the “what [Was]?” of responding, whereat the “what-to?” cannot be subsumed and incorporated fully in the “what?” of the given answer, whereat the “what” cannot completely grasp the elusive “what-to?” of a response, Waldenfels calls – in contrast to both the intentional or the significative difference (*something being thought/given as something*: as sense) and the regulative difference (*something according to something*: according to a rule) – *the responsive difference*: we always respond *something to something*.<sup>15</sup> The address as the singular event of a break into the order, of a breach with-in it, can neither be coordinated into a whole nor subordinated under a rule, it is neither an example of a law nor has it sense by itself:<sup>16</sup> it precedes the response and the answer: no presence can ever catch up with the precedence of the address. Absent in its presence, present in its absence: the address interrupts and dis-

14 Similarly, in the work *The Phenomenology of Attention (Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit*; 2004) Waldenfels also recognizes an intermediary event in the phenomenon of attention and explains it as a double movement of *Auffallen* [“attracting attention”] and *Aufmerken* [“becoming attentive”]: the latter is a form of responding. Cf. Waldenfels 2004: 271, as well as: Waldenfels 2006: 92 ff.

15 Cf. Waldenfels 2007: 242, as well as: Waldenfels 2001: 78.

16 Cf. Waldenfels 1999: 46.

rupts all mediations, its immediacy is the im-mediate(d)ness of a breakthrough through the net of inter-mediation. The response follows subsequently, it always comes (too) late, is always belated. The precedence of the address and the subsequence of the response form a manifold movement, the rhythm of which cannot be unified or harmonized. On the contrary: an ineffaceable arrhythmia traverses it. The event(uation) of the addressing question and the giving of the answer is in itself punctured and ruptured, it passes through a pause, the calm of a break, it is a leap over an abyss, de-fined by the temporal-spatial delay, the postponement, the diachrony and the diatopy, the nonreciprocity: between the address and the response there is no pre-supposed, pre-approved concordance, no community, no inter-link(age), no synthesis.

We invent, find (out) answers in response to the inevitable addresses of the alien, to the inevitability of the – at once enticing and threatening – alien address, engaging (with) it, confronting (with) it, which to a certain extent entails not only arbitrariness, but also – at the other extreme – violence. The alien touches us in separating from us, in separation, in withdrawal: it gives itself onto us, it provokes our response, whilst it withdraws itself from (within) the distance of *withdrawing* and from (within) the proximity of *withdrawing*, in their intertwining: as the distance in proximity and as the proximity in the distance. “Responding moves beyond sense and rule; whilst it supersedes them, it of course also presupposes them. Responsive rationality which grows from responding itself, can neither replace nor leap over the intentional, the hermeneutic and the communicative mind, but it does surpass these forms of rationality.” (Waldenfels 2001: 78)

Responsive rationality as the logic of answer and response grows from responding to the alien claim, the address of alienness, from the dimension of responsiveness that Waldenfels regards as the fundamental trait of all our bodily behavior, of all our corporeal conduct, rooted in our living, lived body [der Leib], and that he comprehends as contrasting not only intentionality and communicativity, but also the hermeneutic(al) mind. Responsive rationality surpasses the borders of established orders without replacing them with other, with different orders: its locus is the in-between of the ordinary and the extraordinary: as such – in the sign of responsive(ness) – it touches (upon) – the limits of – the impossible with-in the possible: the im-possible.

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The experience of the alien causes the alienation, the estrangement of experience itself, the pathways of which Waldenfels discusses in the figures of deviation, surplus and transformation.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as in all our action and in all our speech, in everything we experience we always respond, have already responded to the address of the alien, the alienness – besides influencing the processes of orders and amongst them, besides influencing the interpersonal relationships between human beings – reaches into and co-constitutes – “infects” – the sphere of the own.<sup>18</sup> All relating to one’s self, all self-relation, is denoted by alienness, it is a relation towards one’s own self as the alien. The alien and the own, the own and the alien are crosswise chiasmatically inter-connected over the chasm between them. The alienness can be – and is – encountered in our own home(s), it undermines the possibility of total and complete self-control, the disposal over one’s (own) self. The radically alien is what – with its address that demands a response, with its call –, in truth, in effect, “calls us into our own” (Waldenfels 1999: 53).

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The ch(i)asm of the own and the alien imparts upon every utterance, upon all speech the seal of polyphony,<sup>19</sup> which prevents the “logos” in dialogue to pre-dominate over the “dia-”, over the sphere of the in-between, and which transforms the dialogical movement into a polylogue without the first and the last word, into the re-sounding of the own and the alien voices of all words, with-in them themselves. After all: in the listening to the sound of my own voice the own returns as (being) different, and allows me to hear the alien with-in it. “The polyphony begins by the duplication and the multiplication of the voice itself, by the circumstance that speech deviates from itself, supersedes and overtakes itself, that it is never completely by itself, but always already outside.” (Waldenfels 1999: 12)

Responsive hearkening to the address of the alien in its interweaving with the own thus means the acknowledgment of the polyphony of word, of the constant self-differentiation of saying. In the essay entitled “Hybrid

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17 Cf. Waldenfels 2001: 70 ff.

18 In *The Estrangement of Modernity* Waldenfels distinguishes between the ecstatic alienness within ourselves, the diastatic alienness as the alienness of other human beings and the extraordinary alienness of the other order. Cf. Waldenfels 2001: 55 ff.

19 Cf. Waldenfels 2007: 435 ff.

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Forms of Speech” (“Hybride Formen der Rede”) Waldenfels – in reference to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) – writes: “In each speech something is being brought into language, whilst something other is left out. This concurrent bringing-into-language [Zur-Sprache-bringen] and putting-to-silence [Zum-Schweigen-bringen] accentuates selective orders of speech, specific thematic fields and discourses, yet does not succumb to the binary orders of the true and the false, the regular and the irregular.” (Waldenfels 1999: 160) What is brought into language is not situated within language, as the alien, which the speech responds to, it is the extra-ordinary. As responding speech remains, un-resting, dis-quieting, on the border-line of the extra-ordinary, between the possible and the impossible: on the threshold between the own and the alien. It originates from the other, comes from elsewhere, and in saying refers to the unsaid, perhaps the unspeakably unsayable.

Waldenfels attempts to comprehend the responding attitude towards the address of the alien, the inventive confrontation with it, the incessant intervention, the ceaseless returning from the said to the event(uation) of saying, the effect(uation) of the responsive *epoché*, with the possibility of an indirect way of thinking and speaking.<sup>20</sup> In *The Estrangement of Modernity* he determines the necessity of an indirect mode and manner of approach towards the alien with following words: “If the alien is something that shows itself, *whilst* it withdraws itself, if the alien affects us, *before* we even see and understand it as something, if we respond to the claims, *before* we even speak about them, then this means that we do not take reference to the alien directly, but in a sidelong, crosswise or lateral way of seeing and speaking, which sees something, *whilst* it sees something other, which speaks and does something, *whilst* it does something other.” (Waldenfels 2001: 92) Moreover: speech, language itself functions indirectly, since from onset onwards it already always says and speaks more – and differently – than it speaks and says. To speak about and of something indirectly does not mean to adopt a position of a “meta-language”, but to speak from elsewhere, from the alien, to begin with the other. Indirect speech brings the alien to language without including it in the pre-established order of lan-

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20 Cf. Waldenfels 1987: 200 ff.

guage and of understanding. To speak indirectly means to respond to the surplus of the alien address.

Responsive rationality springs forth from the alien as the extraordinary that eludes all order, that defies its reach and its nets, that precedes and supersedes it, sur-passes (through) it, that always occurs as the singularly plural and as the plurally singular, the alien, to which we have to, we are obliged to respond, because it demands us as being responsive, as responsible beings, demands us as (a) response (to it), rationality stemming from responsivity is attentive rationality mindfully over-looking (over) the alien.

With regard to the road taken along the crossways of the confrontation of Gadamer's hermeneutics and Waldenfels' phenomenology in conclusion re-turning to the departure point of deliberation, to the question of the other (as encountered) in dialogue, it can – or: could – be – in summary somewhat schematically and therefore with a tendency for oversimplifying – ascertained that Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic experience, although admitting the otherness of the other, nonetheless finds its fulfillment in the movement of the appropriation, whereas Waldenfels' theory of responsive rationality re-presents the counter-movement of the estrangement of experience in-directly engaging with the alien (of the other-ness) as the extraordinary.

Waldenfels' critique – as he himself emphasizes – does not – nor does it want to – render (Gadamer's) hermeneutics obsolete or redundant, but allows – whilst it accentuates the (inward) limitations and the (outward) boundaries – its very possibility – and therefore also its necessity and its richness – by itself stand out and come clearly to the fore upon the background of what it does (not) address. However: if sense and understanding are not everything and cannot be everything, if they (had) come from elsewhere, if the connection with and belonging to tradition is hindered by the gap of an interruption, the breach of a break between the interpreter and the interpreted, if continuity is perforated, trans-pierced by discontinuity, by the abyss, which at once enables and disables, dis-(en)ables all hermeneutic endeavor(s), the other – (also) in dialogue – denoted by radical alienness that exceeds and transcends the orders of (mutual) understanding, sense and tradition, that exhorts us to respond to its address, demands – from us –

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a change of and with-in the hermeneutic(al) itself – yet not against it –, a change dis-closing – “guarding” – the secret of the (dialogical) encounter with the other.

The acknowledgment of the ambiguous im-possibility of dialogical understanding, the recognition of the a(nti)-dialogical trait with-in the movement of dialogue itself, of the impenetrable, all-penetrating alterity with-in it, prevents the omnipresent, the endlessly ad nauseam repeated, the fashionable talk of “dialogical openness” to become either an “idealist” moralization or a “realistic” amorality. To re-think, to re-consider – to respond to – the other in dialogue means to make sure the fragility of the human(e) in-between(ness) does not fall prey neither to the exuberance of unfounded “optimism” nor to the desperation of fathomless “pessimism”, to ensure that (a/the) dialogue – (with-in) which we are – can take place, that it can – perchance without quotation marks – *be*.

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