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On the affective ambivalence of living with cultural diversity

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ABSTRACT   Living with cultural diversity is characterized by a fundamental affective ambivalence. On the one hand, there is existential unease in the face of cultural strangeness, which is linked to our human dependence on 'common sense' – the shared background of understanding from which we derive ontological security about the world and our place in it. Through cultural contact, common sense loses something of its self-evident character, and certainties about what is normal are put to the test. On the other hand, contact with unfamiliar practices and forms of expression can equally give rise to positive feelings of wonder and fascination, as in the urban context. This affective ambivalence stems from an existential paradox: the experience of *both* meaning and lack of meaning are dependent on contact with transcendent realities – in other words, realities that cannot be fully encompassed within our cognitive and manipulative horizons. This leads us to the question as to what the conditions are in which cultural diversity is experienced as a positive social given. The hypothesis is that cultural strangeness cannot in any event fascinate those who perceive the presence of this strangeness, rightly or wrongly, as an acute threat to their own psychological integrity, their vital integrity and/or to the national integrity.

KEYWORDS   affect/emotion ● city life ● cultural strangeness ● meaning ● social philosophy ● transcendence

> What is completely unfamiliar to us can fascinate us but can also fill us with fear, and both of these experiences border closely to each other.[1]
>
> > Rolf-Peter Janz, *Faszination und Schrecken des Fremden* (2001)

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research has been conducted into the normative dilemmas of multicultural societies. Roughly speaking, the central question

has been on what moral grounds cultural minorities can demand recognition and support for their specific language and culture, and how the limits of this recognition should be determined. Opponents of this 'politics of recognition' have also joined this normative debate.

One issue that is conspicuous by its virtual absence from the discussion is what could be called 'everyday multiculturalism'; that is, the affective-dynamic aspects of *living* with cultural diversity. In other words, what is missing is an understanding of the visceral register that is characteristic of everyday experiences of strangeness in a culturally diverse society. I am referring here to those affects that are generated in banal encounters, in 'the prosaic moments and daily rhythms of social life that have a decisive impact on racial and ethnic practices' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 292). The significance of this everyday encounter with ethnocultural difference, and the affective texture thereof, has remained largely secondary to normative and institutional questions of multicultural citizenship. Yet in a democracy, multicultural policy must ultimately have the support of its citizens and that support is not necessarily only based on moral or political concerns. If we want to understand what both inspires and threatens multiculturalism, we have to gain a better understanding of the existential aspects of living with diversity.

Hence, parallel to the normative and institutional debate, we also need to develop a sociophilosophical understanding of some of the structural elements of the experience of cultural difference, because that experience is just as much part of the multicultural reality as legitimizing and granting rights and facilities. I deliberately speak of 'some structural elements', because my approach will be mainly – though in an empirically informed way – phenomenological: the theoretical focus is on those aspects of the experience of living with diversity that can be generalized for the reason that they are structured by the human condition itself.

At first glance, it would seem plausible to claim that cultural pluralization simply goes hand in hand with a disintegration of fundamental certainties and hence with a feeling of threat. For this reason, I will first discuss the self-evident background assumptions from which people derive ontological certainty about themselves and about the social, natural and sometimes even the supernatural world. This background of understanding I call 'common sense' (see the next section). It follows from this analysis that cultural contact can have a negative affective charge. Cultural contact strips common sense of part of its obvious character. It puts our certainties to the test about what is normal and healthy. This means that there is a potentially threatening side to cultural contact that cannot be reduced to ethnic identity formation or essentialization.

But cultural strangeness is not necessarily perceived as a threat. Although anguish and discomfort can be part of contact with unfamiliar ways of living and thinking, such a contact can equally engender positive

feelings of meaning and fascination. There is also something attractive about encountering unfamiliar worlds that we cannot fully comprehend and manipulate. It is precisely this type of contact that can evoke an awareness of our own finitude, and this awareness is not necessarily negatively structured. The following sections will explore this positive moment of cultural contact.

The given under investigation here – the experience of cultural strangeness – is a general one that can be described from the point of view of both immigrants and original inhabitants. My focus will in particular be this theoretical communality. But there are also important differences between the two perspectives. This becomes clear the moment we situate the encounter with (perceived) cultural strangeness in a social setting. Here I will examine some of the factors that might play a part in turning the negative experience of cultural diversity into a more affirming or positive one. The emphasis in this section will be on the native-born perspective.

COMMON SENSE

Most cultural assumptions are so familiar to us that they form the background against which we perceive, interpret and structure reality. As an outsider who is unfamiliar with local pre-reflective knowledge and meanings, interpreting a practice can in many instances lead to misunderstanding. Understanding always occurs against a background of what is taken for granted (Taylor, 1995: 167). Following Clifford Geertz, I call this background of embodied, commonplace knowledge of language and the world 'common sense' (Geertz, 1975; cf. Hannerz, 1992). This knowledge is so fundamental that, in the strict sense of 'fallible knowledge', it is not knowledge at all (cf. Habermas, 1988: 92). Common sense refers to the unproblematic patterns of interpretation that incorporate a deep familiarity with a certain social and natural world. 'Unproblematic' means that this embodied knowledge does not function as a 'hypothesis' or 'representation', but rather as a direct understanding. Although we can single out elements of this background of understanding and identify them in isolation, this does not mean that they function as articulated mental images of reality. A feature of the background of understanding is precisely that it is what makes a representation, a formulation, an explicit rule comprehensible (Searle, 1983: 158).

To be clear, I do not pretend to develop a radically new concept here. The notion of a 'background of understanding' has been articulated and conceptualized – with different words and shifts in emphasis – by many thinkers from different disciplines, such as philosophy of language

(Wittgenstein, Searle), phenomenology (Husserl, Gadamer), cultural anthropology (Geertz, Hannerz, Bourdieu) and critical theory (Habermas), to name just a few examples. The point is to reconstruct some of the salient features of this concept that allow me to explore the affective dimension of living with cultural diversity.

In everyday usage, common sense has acquired the primary meaning of prudence, of a sensible – albeit not very sophisticated – judgement on everyday matters. But the common sense that I am referring to here penetrates deep into our emotions, as far as our experience of the humiliating, the witty and the comical. 'Sense' has that broad meaning of a certain quality of feeling, of sensing, appreciating and perceiving (cf. 'senses'). The adjective 'common' indicates that we cannot discover in isolation what is real and normal, as with the monological, autonomous subject. Common sense is established through shared practices of acting and speaking. In that respect, it is a shared sensing and knowing, a horizon of communal unproblematic convictions that provide a certain background consensus.

It is important to put the extent of this consensus into perspective though. Common sense is, as Ulf Hannerz puts it, 'cultural business as usual; standard operating procedure, one's perspective at rest' (Hannerz, 1992: 127). However, culture, and certainly modern culture, is not shared by a social group in the strict sense of the word. In addition to 'cultural sharing', modern complex cultures are characterized to a large degree by the 'non-sharing' of culture (Hannerz, 1992: 44; Werbner and Modood, 1997). This cultural asymmetry is related to ethnic diversity, but also to subcultural variation in a much broader sense. For example, the modern division of labour creates significant differences in knowledge and perspective. The subculture of lorry drivers differs from that of jazz musicians. Moreover, the notion of 'subculture' should not be understood in an essentialist way. It is unclear where 'subcultures' begin because each form of human interaction can constitute culture, even at the relational micro level. Subcultures are not separate social worlds but a mix of what distinguishes itself culturally and what does not, with vague and porous boundaries, often internally diverse. They do not exist alongside one another but often through one another, sometimes even inside one another (nesting), which means we are able to speak of sub-subcultures (Hannerz, 1992: 75).

Common sense is only an *aspect* of sociocultural reality, which after all – however minimally – always contains a second-order level of thinking and speaking; the universe of argument and reflection. However, my focus here is not on practices and institutions that embody reflexive activity, but on the 'undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field'.[2] Common sense is an essential dimension of the human condition, particularly in the case of small-scale, relatively isolated societies. And although complex culture is not based on a perfect cultural symmetry, even here common sense is nonetheless a necessary

condition for human understanding. It is these expectations of normality that make the routines routine and self-evident. This is why common sense as such also exists in complex societies.

The dimension of common sense is guaranteed by a (local) consensus about the meaning of practices and institutions. This harmonization occurs through a continuous reciprocal adaptation and confirmation, which is expressed, for example, in sayings and jokes, in ways of speaking and moving, and in subtle facial expressions that betray surprise or recognition. Common sense is maintained through affirmation in everyday contacts and through rejection of what falls outside its scope. Practices that deviate too much from it run the risk of negative classification, such as 'unreasonable', 'backward' or even 'mad' (Bourdieu, 1977: 78). The self-evident nature of the universe of common sense is thus preserved and its most essential building blocks remain undiscussed. In this way, the question of 'legitimation' does not even arise. For instance, in the 19th-century England of John Stuart Mill, the legitimacy of the subjection of women was barely an issue. The inferiority of women was so obvious, so much part of the social order, that it had become a natural order. Questioning that order was akin to questioning the law of gravity, something that normal people in full possession of their faculties would not do. The ordinary is normal, the normal is natural and what is natural does not need a reason (Mill, 1989[1869]: 129 ff.).

Common sense can vary enormously from one culture to another, while – paradoxically – deriving its authority from the non-recognition of that local mediation. After all, one of its most fundamental characteristics is the naturalizing of the 'cultural', namely by passing off local frameworks of evaluation as universally valid (Geertz, 1975). In complex cultures, however, that authority is threatened because there are different variants of common sense that meet and overlap. 'Complex cultures include a multitude of more or less contrasting versions of common sense, which in themselves lean toward stability but which may be upset as conditions of life change or as these versions come upon one another' (Hannerz, 1992: 150). This variety gives rise to conflicting perspectives between self-evident world views that say what is true and real, what is good and acceptable, what is meaningful and what is not, what the difference is between a joke and a put-down, between a greeting and an insult, and between politeness and pushiness. This friction creates not only painful misunderstandings that can cause irritation, but also the common sense of our own way of life is to a certain extent made problematical. Holes appear in what we can call, to use Habermas's phrase, the 'wall against surprises',[3] holes through which a sense of contingency rushes in.

THE NEGATIVE MOMENT IN CULTURAL CONTACT

Cultural strangeness puts common sense to the test. The cultural other can be perceived as an existential threat because he or she does not reflect the field of tacit expectations of normality that form an orienting framework. This is related to the fact that human understanding depends on external confirmation. Because such confirmation is weak or absent in encounters with cultural strangeness, prevailing expectations of what is normal, healthy, sensible and valuable are challenged.

People cannot arrive at an understanding of themselves or the world in sociocultural isolation. Human understanding is fundamentally intertwined with certain forms of externality, such as language, cultural practices, institutions and the responses of others. I use Charles Taylor's broad term, 'dialogical identity', to refer to this anthropological dependence (Taylor, 1991).[4] Dialogical dependency applies at the fundamental level of common sense too. Common sense depends on confirmation, on a relative externality in which it is affirmed (common). However, an unfamiliar culture cannot be experienced just like that as a constitutive part of our own background of understanding. Rather, it offers resistance to accepted patterns of interpretation, although we have to constantly guard against dichotomizing the difference between 'familiar' and 'strange'. These dimensions resist any kind of purity but instead are always interwoven, even to the extent that if a subjective distinction can be made, its boundaries are unclear and ought to be understood rather in terms of emphasis than in terms of a neat separation (Waldenfels, 1997: 67). What is more, the transition from the familiar sphere to the socioculturally strange is gradual, which means that there are different gradations of strangeness (Stagl, 1997).[5]

The dialogical concept of the human mind points to a tendency in human desire for a recognizable presence, an externality in which we find familiar meanings. The cultural other does not immediately meet this longing, but instead resists a dialectic appropriation into our own horizon of thinking and evaluation. We cannot simply experience the cultural other – with his or her strange customs and clothing, eccentric views and behaviour – as an external manifestation of our own common sense. That which is strange resists being incorporated; it breaks through the illusion of a perfect symmetry. Here our understanding encounters a boundary with that which we have no relationship with, which is not a reality 'for us' but rather a reality that 'opposes us'. We are confronted with an externality that can engender both shock and fascination. Only in this sense is it acceptable to speak about 'absolute' otherness, namely, as an externality that is *not relative* to our own understanding, but that has an independence that in fact eludes it. However, this never involves 'the other' or another culture in its *totality*, but only certain aspects, such as strange rites that make no sense at all.

The confusion that arises through contact with cultural strangeness is more likely if it is embodied not just by a handful of people, but by practically everyone in our immediate vicinity. An illustration here is the experience of the migrant seeking to find his or her way in another culture. Common sense can after all hold its ground if challenged by a single individual. That individual is then the migrant, the minority, the other (or the 'backward one'). But if the deviation from the norm is too massive, if all recognizable forms seem to disappear, then disorientation can be far-reaching and can assume the form of a shock.

The term 'culture shock' was coined in 1960 by the cultural anthropologist Kalervo Oberg to describe a totality of symptoms that *may* result from exposure to another culture (Oberg, 1960). I should point out that this is by no means an inevitable part of contact with another culture, and that there are many gradations in which this negative moment can manifest itself. Its appearance and intensity depend on a number of variables, including the degree of cultural difference, a person's language skills, the level of control over initiating the other-culture experience,[6] and the nature and extent of one's support group both at home and abroad (Lonner, 1986: xix–xx). But culture shock remains a possibility. As already mentioned, migrants run the greatest risk, but it can also occur among original inhabitants who observe radical changes in the cultural composition of their neighbourhood within a short time.[7] Although the term has been widely bandied about since it was introduced by Oberg,[8] most authors agree that the core features of culture shock are confusion, uncertainty, depression, anguish and interpersonal discomfort. Culture shock arises when an individual in a culturally unfamiliar environment is not immediately able to understand or predict the behaviour of others. What is more, the strange cultural environment as a whole is not experienced as an expression of familiar norms and values. There are no familiar signs and symbols that offer an implicit understanding of the situation and, as a result, the individual is thrown back upon him- or herself. The person in question feels cut off from the sociocultural context, which normally provides constant sustenance for the constitution of common sense.

'Culture shock' involves a *subjectively* experienced lack of connection to the cultural environment that by no means needs to have an objective foundation. For instance, in the process of ethnogenesis, cultural differences can be 'perceived' simply on the basis of ethnic markers, such as skin colour, while real differences in practices or ways of thinking between social groups are in fact completely absent (Eriksen, 1993; Roosens, 1989). Moreover, while there are astonishing variations in common sense, it cannot differ absolutely among different human cultures. We all share a natural world and a specific human physical constitution that ensures similar orientations with regard to what is normal and what is not. (For example, nowhere do people sit on eggs or walk through walls.) But an individual who has no

immediate connection with recognizable patterns of interpretation can dramatize the difference and therefore experience or perceive it as unbridgeable.

What the responses that come under the term of 'culture shock' have in common is that they arise from an experience of personal isolation. We can term this isolation ontological because it relates not so much to the need for friendship and love, but to a need for cultural familiarity, which is related to the fact that it is not humanly possible to rely on non-shared criteria of 'normality' and 'acceptability'. In this way, the sociocultural environment can be perceived as an unrecognizable 'opposite' that defies comprehension and hence one's identity. In such a situation, not only is the environment unfamiliar, but it is experienced as though it does not recognize the person in question. The environment excludes and rejects the individual – the opposite of the reassuring experience of a shared reason. In such a case, the stranger faces a brutal world, with no familiar logic or meaning.[9]

Two conceptual clarifications are in order here. First, no specific cognitions with propositional content play a role in this anguish in the face of cultural strangeness. The same applies to the positive feelings of wonder in relation to cultural diversity, which I will describe later. These feelings of meaning and lack of meaning are, to use Peter Goldie's term, 'cognitively impenetrable' (Goldie, 2000: 76–7). Somebody's feelings are cognitive impenetrable if these feelings cannot be affected by his or her relevant convictions.[10] For this reason, I call such feelings 'existential' in nature. These affects are not open to 'cognitive therapy', which does not mean to say, however, that there are no variables that may influence them. We will return to this in greater depth later.

Second, experiencing feelings of discomfort or anguish when encountering other ethnocultural groups does not necessarily imply racism. Racism means that respect gives way to thinking that social 'others' do not have the same moral status, that fundamental rights do not apply to them. Feelings of discomfort, on the other hand, are compatible with a fundamental respect and entitlement to equal rights that constitute full membership of a society. What is defining for normal human personhood is the fact that a person is not a slave to its immediate impulses and affects, but has the capacity to evaluate these from culturally mediated moral standards. This is what Charles Taylor means by 'strong evaluation', which can be seen as constitutive of human freedom.[11] Although the negative affects discussed here can act as a *trigger* for racism, they should not be confused with a racist attitude.

Another way of making this point is through the conceptual distinction between 'social strangeness' and 'cultural strangeness' (Waldenfels, 1999). *Cultural* strangeness occurs when people come into contact with unfamiliar norms and values that are embodied in the practices and institutions of a particular social group. Here, 'strangeness' means that we are confronted with the unfamiliarity and incomprehensibility of certain objects of

observation and certain patterns of action.[12] The disorientation that may result can occur both within the boundaries of a culturally diverse state and in contact with outside social groups.

Social strangeness, though, arises as a consequence of drawing boundaries between social groups on the basis of particular social markers, such as skin colour, birth or nationality. Even perceived cultural differences (e.g. certain practices, ways of worshipping, dress codes) can take on this role of a social marker by which a boundary is actively drawn between 'ingroup' and 'outgroup', leading to the social distinction between 'belonging' and 'not-belonging'. Such processes of boundary maintenance create a sense of distance and this distance is essentially not of a *cultural* but of a *social* nature.[13] In the case of racism (cultural or otherwise), the status of 'not belonging' involves expulsion, or at least partial expulsion, from the moral community and, as a consequence, dehumanization. The point of the conceptual distinction between cultural strangeness and social strangeness is to draw a contrast between experiencing cultural strangeness and processes of 'othering', such as racism. Cultural strangeness is my concern in this article. Later on, however, we will discuss a way in which these types of strangeness sometimes intersect.

THE POSITIVE MOMENT: CULTURAL STRANGENESS AND A SENSE OF MEANING

References are frequently being made to the positive aspects of cultural contact. However, this appreciation is generally too limited because it refers to either a cognitive gain, such as self-knowledge and a broadening of horizons, or a political gain, such as self-relativization, which makes political tolerance possible. In this way, cultural contact has only a kind of instrumental significance because there is no meaning that could be inherent in the experience of the difference itself. In existential terms, therefore, this type of contact often remains marked by anguish, pain and shock.[14]

I believe that such pessimism is unfounded and that the experience of cultural strangeness can indeed be accompanied by a sense of meaning or even fascination. In order to understand this, we first have to appreciate the positive experience that can be associated with a sense of our own finitude. Not until we realize that we can't bend everything and everyone to our will and contain them with our reason is there an opportunity for wonder and a sense of meaning. Then I will apply this proposition to a concrete phenomenon – the metropolis – to make it relevant to the theme of cultural diversity.

If we understand the quest for meaning as a desire to be connected with a larger context, then it would appear to go without saying that

pluralization of that larger context is always experienced as a threat to the sense of meaning. In that case, differentiation quickly seems to come down on the side of disenchantment and meaninglessness: 'evermore unfolding and differentiation increasingly less meaningful culture' ('immer weiterer Entfaltung und Differenzierung immer sinnloser werdenden Kultur' (Weber, 1986[1920]: 571)). And as we have seen, cultural strangeness *can* indeed be threatening or even disorienting. But with regard to the experience of strangeness, a peculiar anthropological ambivalence occurs that can be described as the entwining of meaning and lack of meaning. The fact that the sense of meaning and lack of meaning are 'entwined' does not mean that we always experience both at the same time, or that the sense of meaning is necessarily quickly followed by disenchantment. Nor does entwinement mean a kind of non-distinction, as if the sense of meaning cannot be distinguished from a sense of emptiness and futility. What it means is that the experiences of both meaning and lack of meaning display a structural similarity, namely an involvement in realities that are not immediately given and that to some extent elude our consciousness; realities that we will call 'transcendent'.[15] This could mean that the negative experience (described above) with regard to cultural complexity at the same time opens up the possibility of a positive sense of meaning and significance.

To clarify the relationship between this notion of transcendence and the sphere of common sense, it is important to acknowledge the distinction between the concepts 'transcendence' and 'transcendental'. Whereas the first concept refers to what escapes our horizon of understanding and control, the second refers to the preconditions for the possibility of human thought or judgement. In that regard, common sense is 'transcendental', while those aspects of reality that escape common sense can be called 'transcendent'. And while common sense in this way determines the porous and transposable boundary of the domain of the transcendent, it is not itself transcendent in the sense of being beyond our cognitive grasp, although it can never be made completely explicit either. (Trying to make explicit the *whole* universe of common sense would amount to an incoherent undertaking, for this universe itself constitutes the context of understanding within which something can appear as meaningful).

The longing for meaning can be understood as a longing to be part of a larger entity or process that transcends the limits of our own finite and contingent existence (Burms and De Dijn, 1990: 3, 8). This relationship between 'part' and 'whole', characteristic of all metaphysical and religious frameworks, is closely linked to the notion of 'transcendence'. That which transcends us to a certain extent surpasses our powers of imagination and opportunities for manipulation. As soon as we fully comprehend something and are able to control it, it loses its transcendent character. Because the longing for meaning is a longing to be bound up in a larger reality that

transcends the individual, that longing is directed at an exteriority of meanings. The sense of meaning does not come about by seeing in everything and everyone a mere reflection of our own particularity. It is precisely when we come into contact with something that goes beyond the limits of our own existence that there can be a sense of meaning and depth. As Robert Nozick says: 'Attempts to find meaning in life seek to transcend the limits of an individual life. The narrower the limits of a life, the less meaningful it is . . . For a life to have meaning, it must connect with other things, with some things or values beyond itself' (Nozick, 1981: 594).

The purport of the above is that human desire is not exhausted in a longing for familiar and predictable realities. The sense of meaning would even be irrevocably lost if we could only experience our social and cultural environment as a flattering expression of our own identity. Human longing is characterized by *both* an orientation toward what we can recognize *and* an interest in what appears to elude our immediate understanding, and offers some resistance to our attempts at interpretation. It follows from this that a sense of meaning is characterized by a constitutive ambiguity or lability, which is the condition of possibility for both a sense of meaning and lack of meaning. Because that which moves us always resists being internalized and fully controlled, it is capable of appealing to our imagination one moment and evoking disenchantment the next – for instance by being incorporated into other contexts. In other words, the transcendent – that which escapes our understanding and influence – can evoke both fear and wonder, both anguish and fascination.

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* ties in well with these reflections on the notion of transcendence (Burke, 1990[1759]). Things that evoke both pain (shock, trembling) and enjoyment, delight and unease, and that somewhat unsettle the observer, Burke calls 'sublime'. They are opposed to 'beautiful' things, which only evoke enjoyment and emanate peace. Sublime objects are characterized by capriciousness, unfamiliarity and suggest infiniteness through a lack of clear contours. Theoretically, the terms 'transcendence' and 'sublime' are extensions of one another (this is even the case on a semantic level in Dutch and German, with 'the sublime' referred to as 'het verhevene' and 'das Erhabene' respectively); both terms relate to a side of reality that cannot be fully surveyed or controlled and therefore surpasses to some extent our powers of imagination and our influence (Sircello, 1993; Weiskel, 1976). This lack of surveyability can, however, be constitutive of both fright and wonder. Some examples of situations that can evoke the sublime affect are a volcanic eruption, a gloomy environment in which predators can be heard, a painting that offers no direct clues to interpretation.

Now if we are completely overwhelmed by anguish, there can be no talk of the sublime. A necessary condition for the sublime affect, according to Burke, is an awareness of *our own safety*, so that the sense of awe does not

turn into a vital fear and a tendency to flee. If the threat is not acute, there is emotional scope for experiencing the sublime. As soon as we feel that we ourselves are not safe – because we are about to be engulfed by molten lava or attacked by wild lions – the positive sense of delight turns to the *unheimlich* and terrible. 'When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful' (Burke, 1990[1759]: 36–7, cf. 47, 123). Let us call this necessary condition of the sublime affect the *safety-requirement*.

This fundamental affective ambivalence implies that the experience of cultural strangeness does not solely have to be perceived as an existential threat to our common sense.[16] It is precisely in the realization that our own horizon of understanding cannot encompass all of reality that a positive moment, an awareness of depth and significance, may lurk. It is at these times that we are able to experience reality most intensely and derive a meaning from it that appears to come from outside our own production and control.

METROPOLIS AND MAGIC

In order to illustrate further this potentially positive experience of cultural diversity, I will discuss some general aspects of city life. Every city has its own characteristics that make it unique and, with that, also the experience of city life within. There is so to speak no essence of the city, but only family resemblances. The most minimal definition of the city is that it concerns a complex society of which the geographic area is very small compared to the number of inhabitants (Maunier, 1910). This dense population is characterized by an intense heterogeneity that stems from migrations to the city of very diverse social groups. In the city we therefore find, within a limited space, a high level of cultural complexity and subcultural variety. These typical properties make the metropolis a relevant phenomenon in the context of the attempt to articulate some of the positive aspects of living with cultural differences.

Just as an imaginary communality can be part of the collective imagination (Anderson, 1983), so too can the belonging to a culturally and ethnically diverse city. This sense of belonging can be deepened when it is accompanied by a sense of wonder about the inexhaustible human creativity that is being expressed in this urban environment. In that sense, this section can be read as an attempt to appeal to the modern imagination; an imagination that is quick to be taken in by the identification of identity with uniformity (Tully, 1995: 201).

Peter Berger writes about the experience of the big city in terms of a

certain form of transcendence (Berger, 1977). He views New York as the prototypical cosmopolis of our time. For Berger, one of the meanings of the term 'transcendence' is that a metropolis like New York is the living embodiment of a vital human freedom. This dynamic freedom is expressed in the enormous diversity of overlapping and never fully definable forms of human life:

> In this small space are pressed together all the races and all the nations of the world. A short subway ride separates worlds of mind-boggling human diversity – black Harlem borders on the Upper West Side, the *barrio* on the territory of East Side swingers, the Village on Little Italy, Chinatown on the financial district. And that is only in Manhattan, beyond which lie the mysterious expanses of the boroughs . . . (Berger, 1977: 261)

Through its multiplicity and unpredictability, the metropolis forever somewhat eludes our individual comprehension. We can observe the social heterogeneity – from an outdoor café or a bar stool – but we cannot 'take it in'. It is the locus of a strangeness that will not disappear. Around every corner is yet another person whom we do not know, have never seen and will usually never see again. In addition, the urban population is not ethnically or culturally homogeneous, which means it does not display continually recurring signs or symbols that give us something to go by. The magic of the metropolis is linked to the impossibility of complete predictability, calculability and familiarity. It is precisely this peculiar nature of the urban dynamic that is constitutive of the sense of meaning. It is this dimension of the city that Iris Marion Young has called the 'erotic dimension' (Young, 1990: 239–40; cf. Barthes, 1986). The word 'erotic' is used in an unusual, broad sense here and refers to the moment of excitement that characterizes contact with the 'other'. Although this also implies an aspect of anguish, at the same time we like being drawn out of our secure routine to encounter the novel, strange and surprising. The erotic dimension of the city is also related to the fact that the big city has always been associated with provocative and playful forces (Barthes, 1986: 96). The playful space of the city centre offers not only the possibility of meeting the other, but also of being an 'other', playing an 'other'. The rise of the city has permitted new roles – delineated by Walter Benjamin – such as that of the flaneur and the dandy, who direct their attention not to the 'one' but to the 'many'.

The city is also the place where different traditions meet, where an interplay between political, literary, philosophical and artistic sources can occur. In the cultural ensemble of the city, a different perspective is not a distant horizon, but is relatively close at hand – in the cafés, theatres and bookshops, or through local radio stations and magazines. This is the place where we can encounter unfamiliar things or practices without specifically looking for them (Hannerz, 1992: 203).

We should guard, however, against sociological naivety here on two accounts. First, this analysis of urban fascination runs the risk of naively celebrating city life without acknowledging a tragic side of the metropolis. This negativity is not so much related to the inevitable double-edged quality of the experience of the transcendent, as it is sociological in nature. The city does not coincide with the bright lights of the city centre and its atmosphere of luxury and abundance. Cities, especially those in the developing world, contain much deprivation, notably in their slums and ghettos. Although slums are generally characterized by tolerance for deviant behaviour (and as a consequence attract peripheral social groups), there are many problems that affect the well-being of its inhabitants: poor living conditions resulting in health problems, discrimination, poverty, family and marriage problems, alcoholism, drug abuse, homelessness, street prostitution, crime (Clinard, 1966; Massey and Denton, 1993; UN-Habitat Report, 2006). This is the city too. Yet it would be just as one-sided to ignore these social problems as it would be to totally identify the urban experience with them. In that latter scenario, the city becomes associated with immorality, artificiality, chaos and danger. My point is to break with such a one-sided association by uncovering the grace and positive excitement that is part of the multicultural metropolis as well.

Second, according to some sociologists, many cities are becoming increasingly less the heterotopias that they once were. For example, Keiran Keohane refers to certain city centres as 'homogenized spaces, sanitized gilded cages'. In Berlin, Paris and Dublin, 'unruly, disorderly and heteroclite forms of life have been excised and domesticated'. Despite his sobering analysis of these cities, where 'there is a scarce and decreasing possibility of encounter with difference', he nonetheless still sees room for the magical experience in the flea markets and second-hand shops that are an integral part of city culture (Keohane, 2002: 42–3). Thus, even in these homogenized city centres, strangeness is still able in some places to break through the stultifying commerce and sterility.

The metropolis, after all, is the place of useless labour (Berger, 1977: 264). It is the place where bizarre and uneconomical practices flourish, although different types of city differ in this respect. There are straightforward industrial cities such as Rotterdam or Hamburg, where much of the work can be labelled 'economically responsible'. But cities such as Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco or Calcutta are full of odd shops, products and services that no-one seems to need, but which nevertheless claim their right to existence. These cities are not so much characterized by rationality dictated by criteria of utility and efficiency. The magic of the city is embodied in the intuition that reality can change its form and undergo the strangest of metamorphoses. Common sense is constantly running up against its boundaries in the face of all the curious activities that are partially hidden behind the facades of the metropolis:

> Look at them: promoters of Renaissance music, producers of non-verbal
> theatre, translators of Swahili literature, purveyors of esoteric erotica, agents of
> non-existent governments, revolutionaries in exile, Egyptologists, numismatic
> experts, scream therapists, guidance counsellors for geriatric recreation,
> Indonesian chefs, belly dancers and teachers of belly dancing (and, for all I
> know, belly dancing therapists) . . . (Berger, 1977: 264)

The magic of the city is not exhausted in its social intangibility. The city is
also characterized by a specific architectonic shape: the many architectural
styles, the complex infrastructure, the enormous bridges and monuments.
This morphological dimension contributes to a realization that we can
never fully frame the city with our consciousness. There is something in-
exhaustible in the spatial dimension of the city, like a labyrinth in which you
can get lost, stumbling time and again across different courtyards. Cities
accommodate old architecture alongside modern buildings; recognizable
architectural styles stand next to imported ones. In many cities, the aware-
ness of mystery is reinforced by the parallel universe of the underground,
the permanently dark underworld where metros, in Benjamin's words,
hurtle through tunnels like 'dozens of blind, raging bulls', transporting you
through neighbourhoods that appear worlds apart (Benjamin, 1982: 136).
The city dweller is constantly aware that reality can never be fully grasped,
that there are other worlds, both underground and aboveground. In this
respect, New York is indeed the paradigmatic metropolis. Alongside the
underworld of the subway, there is the 'elevated' world of gigantic sky-
scrapers, the polar extremes of a vertical city. In all those millions of spaces
above, men and women make decisions, have conversations, and make
appointments without taking into account personal plans and aspirations.
The metropolis is the place to feel small, to be just one among many.

   The everyday experience of urban multiplicity implies a certain insight
that goes beyond the purely exotic fascination that can emanate from
contact with unfamiliar worlds. This experience offers an insight into both
the inexhaustible variation of life itself and the limited ability of our own
horizon of understanding to grasp this reality in its entirety. The metropo-
lis makes vivid the awareness that there is no ultimate horizon from which
we can understand everything and everyone from the 'inside'.[17] But it is
precisely this realization that is constitutive of the mystery of the city and
that enables a certain openness to this multiplicity. Fascination is prompted
by the sense that we can never arrive at an absolute and final understand-
ing of social and cultural reality. That sense of finitude need not trigger an
'unhappy consciousness', but can evoke awe with regard to a reality that
remains, to a certain extent, beyond comprehension. Berger expresses this
profound understanding of the human condition most aptly:

> The city is a place of strangers and of strangeness, and this very fact implies a
> fascination of a special kind. Ordinary-looking houses contain unimaginable
> mysteries within. Casual encounters are transformed into revelations of

shocking impact. Passions explode in the most unexpected occasions. All of this helps to account for the excitement of the city, but it also makes for a general vision of the world: Reality is not what it seems; there are realities behind the reality of everyday life; the routine fabric of our ordinary lives is not self-contained, it has holes in it, and there is no telling what wondrous things may at any moment rush in through these holes. This vision of the world is perhaps not itself religious, but it is in close proximity to the root insights of the religious attitude . . . Thus, when people say that New York City is a surrealistic place, they are saying more than they intend. They are making an ontological statement about the reality of human life. Behind the empirical city lurks *another city*, a city of dreams and wonders. (Berger, 1977: 266)

It is important to distinguish between viewpoints in this context. Tourists are quick to exaggerate urban strangeness. But cities have their own forms of cultural sharing, their own meeting places and social circles (Gans, 1995; Young and Willmott, 1962). In the words of Bernhard Waldenfels: being a stranger to a city is not a measure of strangeness *in* the city (Waldenfels, 1990: 255). What is more, through intensive contact, cultural strangeness will inevitably become familiar and will increasingly become part of an everyday orientation in the world. This inevitable process of habituation, whereby the 'strange other' is slowly transformed into the 'familiar other',[18] however, does not alter the fact that a multicultural society will always retain a degree of strangeness. For city dwellers and tourists alike, encounters with strangeness and unfamiliarity remain an inevitable aspect of the urban environment.

CONDITIONS FOR AN EXISTENTIAL SHIFT

A philosophical reflection on the affects that cultural contact may evoke does not have direct moral consequences. A moral society is not necessarily an aesthetic society. Yet, indirectly, there is a moral significance in developing an understanding of the *conditions* for the social experience of cultural diversity as a *positive* social given. Although I briefly touched on some factors in the discussion of culture shock, this subject has not yet been analysed systematically.

When does a sense of meaning in relation to cultural transcendence turn into a sense of disenchantment or even revulsion? One possible answer to this question is that the turning point is 'undecidable', that there are no criteria for the moment when cultural diversity evokes a sense of aversion. But although it is true that the sense of meaning cannot be instrumentalized, nor ever directly created, an appeal to 'undecidability' would not suffice here. After all, as Edmund Burke has clearly recognized, the fascination for transcendent realities turns into aversion if we suddenly perceive

these to be an acute threat to our own physical or psychological integrity. I have referred to this condition as the safety-requirement. We are therefore able to say something about the affective turning point. With regard to the experience of cultural strangeness, we can formulate the following hypothesis: cultural strangeness cannot fascinate or enthral those who perceive the presence of this strangeness, rightly or wrongly, as an acute threat to their (1) psychological, (2) vital, and/or (3) national integrity. I am referring here to an 'acute threat', because a mild sense of threat can in fact form part of the attraction of something or someone. And the qualification 'rightly or wrongly' refers to the fact that I am concerned with the *perception* of threat, not with the question as to whether this perception is realistic.

To clarify this, I will explain these three categories in greater detail. In doing this, it will be necessary to link phenomenological analysis to more sociological themes. After all, the experience of cultural difference is ultimately *socially situated* and that situation affects the nature and tenor of the experience.

Before doing so, however, I should point out that reference to a 'turning point' or an 'affective shift' in relation to cultural strangeness could create the false impression that cultural heterogeneity constantly inundates the subject with strong passions, either positive or negative. But people's feelings do not normally oscillate between these extremes. With regard to cultural diversity, it is dominated instead by a mild kind of affective indifference, which should be distinguished from affective neutrality. This inevitable indifference is related to two processes. First, the process of habituation. Hans-Georg Gadamer has correctly pointed out that experience that traverses an immediate 'pre-understanding' cannot be repeated with regard to the same subject. We can never be surprised twice in the same way by a particular cultural practice or form of expression (Gadamer, 1990). This means that cultural otherness in the urban context will often become integrated into daily routines and a shared background understanding. The result is a mild indifference towards it.[19] Second, it is not humanly possible for a city dweller to be constantly 'open' to all stimuli engendered by the urban dynamic. Intense exposure to a rapid succession of impressions and compressed contrasts automatically leads to filtering and distance. City dwellers have to protect themselves from the bombardment of stimuli emitted by the urban environment, which they do by cultivating a degree of closedness. That is why Georg Simmel characterizes the city dweller as blasé (Simmel, 1969: 52).[20] Thus both the portrayal of the positive moment and the negative moment must be understood as two polar extremes on a *continuum* of affects. In reality, these affects seldom occur in the ideal type discussed here.

Yet the question remains as to what the social factors are that push the ambivalence inherent in the social experience of cultural transcendence in a negative or positive direction. The central task here is descriptive in

nature, namely to provide a phenomenological interpretation of this striking (and theoretically overlooked) ambivalence and the social conditions that might influence it, not to morally justify hostile behaviour towards immigrants and strangers. I return to this point in the conclusion.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

Because personal identity is dependent on confirmation and recognition from a broader social and cultural context, pluralization of this context can be experienced as a psychological threat. Hence, if citizens of a multi-cultural society are not well integrated culturally and socially, there is a greater chance that cultural strangeness will be experienced as an acute threat. In an anomic situation, the calling into question of one's own common sense through cultural contact can be experienced as frightening, given the already poor support of it from stable patterns of recognition.

It has been empirically shown that there is a strong link between an anomic personal situation and the tendency to develop negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities (Billiet, 1995; Billiet and De Witte, 1995; Billiet et al, 1996). Here, anomie signifies a feeling of being stripped of secure and meaningful relationships with others and with the social environment in a broader sense. The possible fascination for cultural strangeness in this setting is no match for feelings of aversion, which are linked to a lack of confidence in solid ground on which to stand.

VITAL INTEGRITY

A second limitation on a positive experience of cultural pluralization arises when immigration is experienced as a threat on a more vital plane. There are several aspects to this perception of vital threat.

To begin with, immigrants can be perceived as a threat to vital self-preservation because they represent additional competition in the struggle for primary goods. This applies in particular to the lower social classes. When it comes to housing and employment, immigrants often occupy the same segment as the bottom layers of society. Unemployment, poor housing, a financially uncertain future – these are all factors that may contribute to the belief among these classes that immigrants are partly responsible for their problems and uncertainties, that immigrants reduce their 'chances of survival'. This feeling is reinforced if there is a perception that large groups of illegal immigrants are entering the country unchecked.

This can give rise to a perceived threat that prevents cultural pluralization from being experienced as enriching.

In addition to this, a generalizing association can arise between 'ethnic minorities' and 'crime', for example through popular news coverage or negative anecdotes. With regard to a lot of western countries, however, even sound social science has shown the involvement of a relatively high proportion of certain ethnic minorities in national crime (Haen-Marshall, 1997; Tonry, 1997). This can lead some to conclude that 'they' are all dangerous criminals. It goes without saying that the fear of Islamic terrorism following the recent attacks in the USA, Madrid and London has fuelled this conviction. Those who are afraid of falling victim to crime or religious terror as a consequence of immigration obviously find it increasingly difficult to experience multiculturality as an 'enrichment'. Within such a framework of meaning, the contribution of imported cultures to the multi-cultural nature of the heterogeneous large city can only assume aggressive and threatening proportions.

NATIONAL INTEGRITY

What is at stake in this third sphere is the way in which *social* strangeness can interfere with the experience of *cultural* strangeness. Here, social strangeness is the product of a virulent nationalism according to which certain groups are perceived as not belonging. The question is how this construction of outgroups affects the experience of cultural strangeness, which can be an aspect of the social sphere of these outsiders. If a nationalistic ideology has a hold on thinking, in the sense that people are convinced that multiculturality is pathological and the presence of foreigners a danger to the survival of the nation, this reinforces the shift towards the negative experience of cultural strangeness. Here, cultural ambivalence engenders most likely only feelings of aversion and resentment. Those who believe in this homogenizing view of society see the foreigner as a threat to the survival of that society and hence to their own existence. After all, the point of the nationalistic conception is the close interrelationship between the individual and nation state. Alongside the idea that society should be culturally homogeneous, an ethnic primordialism often plays a role too. This primordialism attributes special status to particular individuals and groups vis-à-vis a particular territory because they are supposedly descended from parents or forebears who were the 'first' to live on that land (Roosens, 2000). If nationalism maximizes this principle of ethnic primordialism, the most extreme consequence is to regard those who came later, such as immigrants,[21] as having no right at all to live on that territory, regardless of whether they have adapted culturally or not. They are then seen as

intruders. In such a constellation of meanings, cultural strangeness will evoke disgust and irritation, rather than amazement or joy. Unfamiliar ways of thinking and living cannot enthral those who see them as *Fremdkörper* (foreign bodies) threatening the national fabric from within.

Of course, these three types of perceived threat – the threat of anomie, the perception of vital threat and the perception of threat to the nation state – are also *in themselves* explanations for aversion to foreigners. However, these factors also influence the register of existential affects that we have discussed earlier, given that they constitute a violation of the safety-requirement. More specifically, they are factors that mediate the existential shift within that register from meaning to lack of meaning in relation to the experience of cultural diversity.

It could be argued that we do not need the phenomenological analysis in order to explain aversion to foreigners. Why not stick to the three more sociological types of explanations? There are two answers to this question. First, aversion or hostility to outsiders consists of many different layers: existential, economic, political, sociological, sociobiological (Bader, 1995: 14–31). Therefore, any attempt to come up with exclusive, monocausal theories in this domain should be discouraged. So the fact that this broadly phenomenological perspective tries to address the way in which some of these 'layers' – in this case the existential and sociological – interact, is in itself not a sign of theoretical weakness. Instead, I believe it shows how negative dispositions to cultural strangeness in one domain can actually reinforce aversion to it in another (cf. Sandercock, 2003: 113). Second, an additional strength of this approach is that it captures the remarkable affective ambivalence that is at the heart of encounters with cultural strangeness. By doing this, it is able to do justice to the *positive potential* of these encounters in existential terms. As we will see later, this approach makes it possible to think of strategies to stimulate this positive side of the social experience of diversity.

The extent to which the three factors of perceived threat are susceptible to ideological manipulation increases progressively from the first sphere to the third sphere. If negative attitudes toward foreigners result from an anomic situation, this is a psychological rather than an ideological phenomenon. For example, these attitudes have nothing to do with a view of the relationship between nation and state. A lack of intersubjective cohesion is here constitutive of the experience of pluralization as a threatening process. Aversion to immigrants in this context arises from the strong need for solidarity with like-minded people, which – for whatever reason, such as unemployment – has become rare in day-to-day life.

The second sphere is somewhat more open to ideological manipulation than the first. In a negative way, this can happen by speaking in a generalizing or unnuanced way about the link between criminality or terrorism and ethnic minorities. It is also possible to exaggerate the number of immigrants

per year by citing misleading statistics or creating the vague suggestion that we are being 'swamped' by 'floods' of immigrants.

Finally, the third sphere is the most susceptible to ideological manipulation. The ideology of nationalism is linked to affectively loaded views about 'healthy' and 'sick' political communities. Viewed from the ideology of strong nationalism, as long as there are different ethnic or cultural groups within the state boundaries, society is in *crisis*. The nation, whether it is cultural or ethnic in nature, must coincide with the boundaries of the polity. To be clear, nation building does not *have* to lead to intolerance, provided it is an inclusive and liberal form of nationalism that safeguards the recognition of minorities and basic civil, social and political rights of the individual (Kymlicka, 2001: Part III; Kymlicka, 2002: 343 ff.). However, if nationalism is exclusive – for example, with political leaders appealing dramatically to ethnic loyalties – then nationalistic consciousness can take the form, through stereotypes, of an almost religious ecstasy that can ultimately lead to genocide.

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis is that cultural pluralization cannot be understood solely in terms of either 'enrichment' or 'disenchantment', but is instead characterized by a fundamental ambivalence. The ambivalence I have discussed is not the one caused by a tension between moral aspirations on the one hand and existential feelings of aversion on the other. It is an ambivalence that takes place in the arena of existential affects themselves. But this does not mean that this existential ambivalence is without any moral relevance.

First of all, this ambivalence *does* introduce the possibility of an intra-psychic tension between moral values of respect on the one hand and existential discomfort on the other – namely, when the negative moment dominates in intercultural contact. As I indicated briefly above, the notion of 'strong evaluation' is important here for creating conceptual space in which respect for diversity can coexist with these existential feelings of discomfort. Strong evaluation involves living with a sense that some dispositions and feelings are qualitatively higher than others. It requires a language of 'higher' and 'lower,' a 'language of evaluative distinctions, in which different desires are described as noble or base, integrating or fragmenting, courageous or cowardly, clairvoyant or blind and so on' (Taylor, 1985: 19). Such a language that expresses a concern with the qualitative *worth* of different desires is not an individual invention. It should be part of a culture of respect, in which values of inclusion are central instead of values of exclusion, as is the case with racist culture.

The human capability of strong evaluation makes the conceptual

distinction meaningful between a *justification* of hostile behaviour to cultural strangers on the one hand and the attempt to *describe and interpret* some of the contributing factors thereof on the other. I explicitly distance myself from the first project. Strong evaluation implies that even in a situation of perceived threat and anomie, citizens are able to act in accordance with moral values. The hierarchical nature of human motivation makes it possible to distance oneself from dispositions that are at odds with the principles of mutual respect and to identify with those aspirations that meet these moral standards.[22] This is not a matter of evaluating one's feelings and dispositions from a sphere of rational considerations, Kantian style, because strong evaluation itself is embedded in feelings, emotions and aspirations that are inherently reflective and embodied in a language of qualitative contrasts.

This study is morally relevant for other reasons too. Too optimistic a social philosophy could incur the risk that any feelings of intercultural discomfort will be quickly branded as 'racism'. This could spark off a negative spiral of accusations and polarization, which cancels out any initial sympathy for cultural diversity. This diversity then is only allowed to be idealized, while any expression of discomfort is interpreted as an expression of reprehensible political views. But anguish in the face of cultural strangeness need not have anything to do with exclusivist political ideology. As we have seen, it may be based on an anthropological dynamic. It is this interpretive framework that enables such negative feelings, also for the subjects themselves, to be interpreted as other than 'hidden racism'. The practical significance is that loyalty to ideals of living together with cultural and ethnic others need not be undermined by an emotional purism that interprets any form of discomfort as a 'deeper loyalty' to racism or nationalism.

Furthermore, it is morally important to be aware of not just the negative moment of cultural contact, unless it ties in with a specific research question. If cultural difference is perceived only as a 'loss of meaning', it does not contribute to a motivation to recognize this difference, let alone cultivate a degree of openness towards it. Regarding multiculturality as a moral necessity, for which a high emotional price must unfortunately be paid, not only fails to do justice to complex social reality, but at the same time erects a social barrier against the political recognition of minorities.

Finally, there is yet another reason for according this view a practical relevance. As stated, the affective shift toward social disenchantment is mediated by the perception of the other as an acute threat. I have differentiated that threat into three spheres: the psychological, vital and nationalistic. This gives us an indication of a multilayered policy orientation that could reduce the risk that cultural diversity will trigger social instability. It should be stressed that the principles of mutual respect must always be a precondition for the development of such policy.

With regard to the *first*, psychological, sphere policy should be aimed at

preventing 'hotbeds' of anomie. Although the extent to which social change can be effected by government policies is very limited, politics can create conditions for the social involvement of citizens, for example in the form of a sufficient supply of work. Another possibility is encouraging local community formation, such as residents' associations, cultural and religious organizations, local political parties and other organized social groups that create a sense of community.

The *second* type of perceived threat, namely on the vital plane, benefits from policies that reduce the perception among citizens that there is an uncontrolled entry for economic migrants. A balanced immigration policy and effective communications can reduce this risk. It is also important to combat illegal immigration so that citizens of a country do not feel that they are being 'swamped' by unwanted migrants (cf. Kymlicka, 2005). In addition, it is vital to prevent the incorrect impression being created, not only by the government, that immigrants simply make inroads into the supply of primary goods without contributing to it. In the next 50 years, economic immigration may even be necessary to maintain the European labour force and counter the effects of population ageing (Castles and Miller, 1998: xi; UN-Report, 2000).

With regard to the second sphere, policy should also be aimed at removing or minimizing factors that reinforce the general association between ethnic minorities and criminality. An obvious factor is of course criminal behaviour itself. Here there is a need for policy on crime suppression, but also on crime prevention. For instance, practices that encourage criminality, such as discriminating against ethnic minorities when recruiting employees, should be combated.

The *third* sphere of perceived threat, through nationalism, will benefit from policy which, while recognizing the importance of a national language and identity – among other things, in order to make national solidarity possible – does not allow this to degenerate into a celebration of overweening national pride. After all, the political encouragement of a strong national consciousness often goes hand in hand with increasing intolerance and contempt for cultural and ethnic minorities.

With these very sketchy suggestions at the three levels of analysis, I am not claiming that unease vis-à-vis the 'other' can be banished from society by means of a politics of mental comfort. Existential unease with regard to cultural strangeness will always exist in a multicultural society for the reason that the ethnocultural other calls common sense into question. What I have been trying to make clear at the end of this article is that such existential feelings of discomfort only constitute a real threat to a multicultural society if they are accompanied by social anomie, by fear of foreigners on a more vital plane and by the notion that newcomers destroy the 'integrity' of the nation state. This will not only dramatically increase the level of aversion, but will frequently result in dehumanizing and racist practices.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 'Was uns ganz und gar unvertraut ist, kann uns faszinieren, ebenso aber auch in Schrekken versetzen, und beide Erfahrungen liegen dicht beieinander' (Janz, 2001: 9).

2 What Pierre Bourdieu calls 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977: 164–71; Bourdieu, 1990: 68).

3 'Mauer gegen Überraschungen' (Habermas, 1988: 93).

4 See also the analysis of the 'embodied subject' in Taylor, 1979: 14 ff.

5 In addition, the *level* of strangeness people normally are involved in or concentrate on should be qualified; people are primarily and mostly (or in Heidegger's original formulation 'zunächst und zumeist') practically involved in a familiar and recognizable world.

6 'This could range from complete control (as in an idyllic vacation to a sun-swept island) to absolutely no control (such as forced and permanent relocation for political or economic reasons)' (Lonner, 1986: xix).

7 According to Furnham and Bochner, although there has been considerable research into the difficulties that foreigners and migrants experience in adapting, there has been too little into the impact that newcomers may have on the receiving society (Furnham and Bochner, 1986: 11, 17, 147).

8 'Since its introduction over thirty years ago "culture shock" has become one of the most widely used and misused terms in cross-cultural psychology' (Bochner, 1994: 245).

9 Eventually, this negative experience can even affect someone's mental health: 'No matter where the studies have been conducted, two major findings emerge. First, it appears that frequently, but not always, migrants experience more mental illness than host nationals. There are important (and seemingly explicable) exceptions to this rule, but overall the findings seem pretty well consistent. Second, there are important differences between migrant groups both as regards the extent and type of illnesses they suffer from' (Furnham and Bochner, 1986: 110; cf. Chapter 4, 'Mental health and migration').

10 The fact that anguish in the face of the strange does not assume specific judgements is related to the fact that strangeness is characterized by a lack of attributes. After all, the reason why something is strange is because it eludes our horizon of understanding. This is the basis of the well-known distinction between 'anguish' and 'fear'. Whereas 'fear' is directed at an object, it is a characteristic of 'anguish' that it lacks a specific object. (Only in a very minimal sense are these existential feelings cognitively penetrable, namely in that they are dependent on the supposition of cultural strangeness, a supposition that might be mistaken.)

11 Strong evaluation is the evaluation of one's own feelings, desires, and choices

against a background of certain values that one identifies with because they are seen as constitutive of the person one wants to be. See amongst others Taylor, 1985: Part 1; Taylor, 1989: Part 1. This background of values is culturally situated according to Taylor. Yet it should not be understood as a fixed horizon that we as individual citizens are completely determined by. Taylor's analysis of *radical* evaluation is important in this regard. With radical evaluation, aspects of the value horizon that we normally take for granted in the process of strong evaluation are themselves being questioned (Taylor, 1985: 29–44). According to this conception of human agency, growing up in a racist culture would ultimately fail as a sufficient excuse for racist behaviour.

12 As Waldenfels comments, this strangeness can refer to a lack of epistemic or practical familiarity. 'In the first case [epistemic familiarity] we are dealing with a *knowing that* that can be explicitly articulated, in the second case [practical familiarity] with an implicit, habitual *knowing how*' (Waldenfels, 1999: 91). As was perhaps clear in the definition of common sense, it is above all the 'knowing-that' dimension that is central here. However, knowing that is constantly reproduced in specific everyday practices and conversations, which is why *knowing how* and *knowing that* (or, as Bourdieu would say, 'habitus' and 'doxa') are intimately connected with one another: the one is unthinkable without the other.

13 As Fredrik Barth already put it: 'The critical focus of investigation from this point of view [boundary maintenance] becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (Barth, 1969: 15).

14 One example is Hans-Georg Gadamer. In Gadamer's philosophy, real experience is the experience that one 'gains' (*macht*), namely the experience of what does not accommodate a prevailing structure of prejudices. He believes that the *thwarting* of our anticipations creates an increase in knowledge, as well as an insight into human finitude. He thus emphasizes the value of experiencing the new, but we must pay a price for this. New experience is a 'painful and unpleasant experience' ('schmerzliche und unangenehme Erfahrung'), which is expressed in the formula 'learning through suffering' ('Durch Leiden Lernen') (Gadamer, 1990: 362).

15 I have been much inspired here by Arnold Burms and Herman De Dijn's *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen: kritiek en deconstructie* (1990), a book that unfortunately has not been translated into English. With regards to the thesis that the experience of strangeness or 'transcendence' is inherently unstable in terms of meaning or lack of meaning, Burms and De Dijn refer to the notion of 'iterability' as it has been developed by Jacques Derrida. In order to be recognizable, signs of language need to be repeatable. For that reason they need to have a certain solidity or firmness. This solidity or firmness that makes meaningful language possible by guaranteeing a certain continuity, however, at the same time opens up the constant possibility that linguistic signs get contaminated with unintended layers of significance: 'they get entangled in unforeseen combinations and thus create new constellations that might be strange or contrary to what some user of language originally intended with these linguistic signs' (Burms and De Dijn, 1990: 33–4; Derrida, 1982: 315 ff.). This characteristic of 'transforming repeatability' is what Derrida refers to with the notion 'iterability'. The relationship with the notion 'transcendence' is roughly as follows: significance of signs is dependent on their transcendence to a particular user, a

particular horizon of interpretation. Yet at the same time it is this constitutive 'outside', this residue of the sign, that threatens this particular use with a loss of meaning. Hence transcendence is the condition for the possibility of both production of meaning and loss of meaning of the signs of language. Burms and De Dijn apply the concept of 'iterability' to human experience in a general or existential sense. Derrida affirms that this more general application of the 'law' of iterability is possible (Derrida, 1982: 317–8).

16 As Albert Memmi puts it: 'Difference disturbs even when, at times, it seduces. Seduction and a sense of apprehension do not contradict each other. They belong to that agreeable curiosity that produces an attraction toward the unknown, a taste for the exotic, for voyages, for cultural and commercial adventures. The sense of "disquieting strangeness" is an intimate ingredient of the excitement' (Memmi, 2000: 27).

17 Taylor nevertheless seems to presuppose the possibility of such an 'ultimate horizon' by speaking of an 'omega point ... when all times and cultures of humanity would have been able to exchange and come to an undistortive horizon for all of them' (Taylor, 1995: 151–2; cf. Taylor, 1994: 73). Incidentally, Taylor's conception of a fusion of horizons (based on Gadamer's hermeneutics) *does* offer an important precondition for evaluating aspects of cultural otherness without simply reducing this otherness to one's own identity. However, although this fusion might be the beginning of genuine reciprocal interpretation and evaluation, it marks the end of the existential affects that arise as a consequence of exposure to cultural strangeness, or at least with regards to those elements that are part of this 'fusion'. After all, interpreting and evaluating the other's culture implies a broadening and transforming of one's horizon of understanding by incorporating the formerly 'transcendent'. Yet the existential affects that I describe here, whether they are positive or negative, are reactions to those aspects of cultural otherness that remain strange and unfamiliar, even after such a fusion of horizons; these affects are *not* to be understood as the result of a positive or negative *evaluation* of particular properties that are now better understood. (Cf. footnote 10 earlier.) Indeed, these affects feed on what remains *outside* of the effort at interpretation and evaluation.

18 By the 'familiar other' I mean the other who is seen to a degree as *socially* strange but not (or no longer) as *culturally* strange. For example, the fellow citizen who is perceived as being ethnically different, even if he or she is perceived as having assimilated or even if his or her other cultural practices have become entirely familiar.

19 That is, unless sharp oppositions occur as a consequence of processes of ethnic identity formation. For a fascinating sociological study of this typical urban indifference, see Tonkiss, 2003.

20 Georg Simmel correctly points to the indispensable blasé attitude of the city dweller, but unfortunately extends this attitude to a pathological type of devaluation of the world according to which *nothing* has any value any longer. This devaluation goes so far that even self-respect is caught in its trap (Simmel, 1969: 52). A few sentences later, rural life is then described rather naively as the place 'where one knows almost everybody one meets and where one has a positive relation to almost everyone' (1969: 53). But we must not confuse the inevitable

blasé attitude or reserve with a *blindness* to particularity or a radical detachment from the social and cultural order. Although city dwellers may appear to be gazing into the distance, surrounded as they are by thousands of anonymous others, their gaze can suddenly be attracted by something or someone that strikes them as valuable and important (Boomkens, 1998: 412).

21 Among national minorities such as the Canadian Aboriginals, the principle of ethnic primordialism actually works to the advantage of the minorities, who after all label themselves the 'First Peoples'.

22 With the notion 'principles of respect', I am referring not solely to the traditional (though important) interpretation of respect for equal personal autonomy, what I call 'autonomy-respect', but also to respect for social attachments, what I call 'difference-respect'. While the former refers to the traditional register of rights and entitlements expressed in civil, political and social rights, the latter refers to the newer and much more contested set of cultural rights of both national minorities and immigrants. For my interpretation and justification of difference-respect, see van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2007.

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