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The Second Coming of the Gods Postmodern Uses of Ancient Myths in German and Austrian Literature – or from Literature to Sociosemiotics

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The Second Coming of the Gods Postmodern Uses of Ancient Myths in German and Austrian Literature – or from Literature to Sociosemiotics

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Abstract

When the novel "The last World" by Christoph Ransmayr was published in 1988, it was the beginning of a new kind of reception of ancient myths in literature. In his novel Ransmayr created a hybrid time, where it seems that Ovid is still captured in his exile in Tomi and his mythological stories have come alive. Ransmayr is the first author to show the connection and influence of ancient times and presence.

The gods walk among us. This picture was the core of the beginning of postmodern literature in Austria. In 1995 Michael Köhlmeier follows with his novel "Telemach" in which the son of Odysseus travels through a dystopic post-WW2 scenario and realizes that the ancient war of the Illias has never ended.

This was the beginning of a huge wave of literature dealing with the second coming of mythology. From Salman Rushdies "The Satanic Verses" (also 1988) to Stan Nadolnys "The God of Impertinence" (1995) and Neil Gaimans "American Gods" (2001) to name but a few, the gods were no longer products of imagination or allegories in philosophical concepts, as they have been in modern literature throughout the 20th century, they now walk in flesh and blood.

In the nature of human soul and society, literature often has a special kind of insight. The postmodern approach to ancient myths opens up a path to a new understanding of human behavior and the formation of patterns of thinking and behavior. With a new kind of sociosemiotics we can take this insight and link it to the theory that human behavior and myth depend on each other. Mythological patterns are fundamental to every act and thought of a human being. This seems to be the theory behind postmodern use of ancient myths.

In this lecture I would like to take a deep look into this theory and I will show the benefits of a sociosemiotic theory which takes literature into account.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Austrian Literature, Semiotics, Sociosemiotics, Mythology

The New Mythology

Mythological stories and human actions have always been closely related. This phenomenon is probably most visible in religious rituals. But our attitudes and actions are widely being defined by the general cultural patterns which have been handed down for the past thousands of years. Not even 200 years of Enlightenment made a significant change. The demystification of the world, as Horkheimer and Adorno called the project of Enlightenment[1], may have worked superficially. But humanity's profound belief in the animation of the world and the existence of gods, demons and spirits has barely been affected.

Horkheimer and Adorno considered myth and reason to be two cultural concepts which are dialectically related. In the age of postmodernism however, myth was seen as the downside of reasonable and scientific thinking. Myth is not defeated by reason. Reason merely changes its form. Myth is not considered in it's narrative form anymore, but in its scientistic form. What presents itself as science and progress is the appearance of transformation of the myth.

This resulted in the understanding that myth not only preserves culture, it affects the creative actions of individuals.[2]

The demystification only takes place on the surface. Beneath that, the mythological structures keep on influencing society and individuals. The ideology of Enlightenment inhibits the view on this subconscious reality. Freud pointed it out, C.G. Jung began to explore this cultural underground but it was postmodernism that brought these gods back to light. Until then, the Greek ancient gods were merely seen as a long lost hope.

The Postmodern Turn

The ability to look at the world with irony is one of postmodernism's greatest characteristics. Parody, deconstruction and pastiche are important mechanisms of postmodern art[3] and literature[4]. It is an attempt to go from the discreditation of the meta-narrative back to a comprehensible world.

According to Lyotard, the meta-narrative is a narrative structure underlying the society and giving meaning to it. The world is explained through many different narratives, but they can only form a meta-narrative if they all adhere to the same instance of legitimacy. Such a meta-narrative would form a complete and consistent version of reality.[5]

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[1] Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno. 1988. Dialektik der Aufklärung. Fischer. Frankfurt am Main. 9

[2] Mircea Eliade. 1988. Mythos und Wirklichkeit. Insel Verlag. Frankfurt am Main. 138

[3] Colin Trodd. 2001. Postmodernism and Art. In *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism.* Ed: Stuart Sim, Routledge. London. 89

[4] Barry Lewis. 2001. Postmodernism and Literature. *In Routledge Companion to Postmodernism.* Ed: Stuart Sim, Routledge. London. 125

[5] Jean-François Lyotard. 1994. Das postmoderne Wissen. Edition Passagen. Wien. 119

Postmodern thinking started to question this version of the world. The standardized level of legitimacy for the narratives that constitute our reality does not exist anymore.[6] Ideologies and institutions are incapable of reconciling different versions of reality.

In the course of the 80s and 90s of the 20th century, Lyotards perception started to assert itself and it appeared in scientific, social and political discourses. The loss of the standardized level of legitimacy was most significant in the political discourse. Power could not be legitimated with reason anymore and other language games according to Wittgenstein[7] were not able to do this work either. The only thing still able to help to implement the meta-narrative was terror. In this case, the meta-narrative would rule over reality but it would be legitimated through violence instead of language games.

In the postmodern era society was offered the choice to either submit disparate discourses to strict rules with joint effort or to interrupt the language games and let terror prevail.[8] Lyotard defines this as follows: „By terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened (there are many ways to prevent someone from playing)."[9]

Postmodern philosophy clearly manages to comprehend the fundamental conflict of our time. We can choose between pluralism and terror. In the history of mankind, this situation is not new. Over the course of time it seems that western civilizations faced this decision more than once.

The Roman Imperial Period, the so called Pax Romana was one of these time periods. Vergil, Horaz and especially Ovid, the great poets of the time, knew about this fundamental conflict and they knew that the power under which they lived only seemed to be peaceful and that it could only be maintained with violence.

But there is an even greater connection than the awareness of this conflict between the poets of the Roman Imperial Period and postmodernism. Ovid used similar literary stylistic approaches to the postmodern poets. It is the parody, the ironic and the frivolous, but most of all it is the free assembly of the cultural material that connects the poets over thousands of years.

Punishment as a Cultural Model

The terror of the Roman regime compelled Ovid to exile in Tomi. Today, we do not know exactly which of those enraged Emperor Augustus more: Ovid's permissive love poetry or the metamorphosis.

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[6] Ibid., 128

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein. 1993[8]. Philosophische Untersuchungen.In *derselbe Werkausgabe 1.* Suhrkamp. Frankfurt am Main. 248 (§ 21)

[8] Wolfgang Welsch. 1993 Unsere postmoderne Moderne. Akademie Verlag. Berlin. 5

[9] Lyotard, Das postmoderne Wissen, 184

At first sight, the "nulli sua forma manebat" can be seen as subtle criticism of the imperial rule that is designed for eternity, yet it basically is Ovid coming to a scathing judgment about secular power and vanity. This motto is the motor to the ovidiane text machine. All and everybody is subject to transformation. Humans and gods, grasses, birds and trees change their shape and end up in a circle of creation and doom, that virtually appears as orgiastic opulence.

In the novel "Die letzte Welt" Christoph Ransmayr sends Ovid into exile because he had the nerve to make a speech at the opening of a sports stadium about an episode of the metamorphoses. It was a story about how humanity changes into a race of hard and emotionless creatures.[10]

In a review of Ransmayrs novel in 1990 in the "Observer", Anthony Burgess said that it "appears at a time when Ovids are not sent into exile but become presidents."[11] Arguably, he hinted at the Czech president of the time, Vaclav Havel. However, Burgess missed the fact that at the same time, the Romanian author Mircea Dinescu has been under exacerbated house arrest[12] and Ransmayrs novel has been banned in Romania.[13]

So, the tale of the protesting poet, of his fight against power and his exile has not been obsolete at the time of publication and it surely is not obsolete today.

With this, Ransmayr is naming a mythological model – a certain pattern of narration of universal significance. This structure of rebellion and banishment can be traced back to the titan Prometheus, who did not only steal the god's fire but who also created humankind. These arbitrary acts have enraged the gods and Prometheus was punished. He was chained to the Caucasus and with him being immortal he was there for eternity for Zeus' eagle to come every day to eat his liver. The creatures of Prometheus suffered a similar fate when they rebelled against or mocked the gods or if they somehow drew attention to themselves. Ovid's metamorphoses are telling this story. It is about Lycaon, who served Zeus human flesh to put him to the test; about Marsyas who ridiculed Apollo and got skinned and about Echo who came too close to Zeus and got robbed of her voice by Hera.

The state power's punishment of the poet is a cultural model that has always been rooted in mythology. The punishment of the rebel is a motif of mythological narratives and it is being adopted as a model to our social reality.

Mythology and Sociosemiotics

When we look more closely we can see that every human action can be traced back to myth. It is Ransmayr's novel "Die letzte Welt" that is able to

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[10] Christoph Ransmayr. 1991. Die letzte Welt, Fischer. Frankfurt am Main. 60ff
[11] Anthony Burgess. 1990. Multiple metamorphoses in multiple time. In *Observer Sunday* (13 May 1990)
[12] Rolf Michaelis. 1990. Engel auf Krücken. In: *Die Zeit* (12. Jänner 1990)
[13] Roger Cohen. 1990. Author Updates Ovids Impertinently. In: *The New York Times – Word and Image* (Thursday, May 10, 1990)

open our eyes so we realize how exactly these cultural patterns shape our lives. Ransmayr's idea to set the story in a hybrid time[14] where different time periods overlap and merge into one contributed to this eye opening.

Michael Köhlmeier uses a similar effect in his odysseus-novel "Telemach". He does not only retell the story of the telemachy (the first four songs of Homer's Odyssey) but he blurs the time boundaries. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator tells us that war would stretch over more than three centuries.[15] The Trojan war thus became a model for all the following wars. For the past 3000 years, men had to go off to war and take part in a massacre which has long lost its reason. Therefore it does not matter if Telemach seeks for Nestor in ancient Pylos or if he would have to go to a Pylos somewhere in a jungle where Nestor would be an aging and cynical arms dealer.[16]

The times have become blurred and soon we do not know anymore in which war Odysseus went missing. It could well be that Telemach was born during or right after the second world war. He never got to know his father, so he goes in search of him. It is an experience as old as the war. It has formed a cultural pattern which can be invoked again and again.[17]

With that we have reached the threshold where literary conclusions and Lyotard's narrative knowledge transform into scientistic knowledge and scientific theories. With their poetic texts, Köhlmeier and Ransmayr reveal cultural patterns which are so abstract, that at all times they can be filled with new content. Of course, this knowledge is anticipated by Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralism but not in the same extent as hereinafter.

Cultural Patterns

The idea of cultural patterns and their transferability is absolutely crucial to sociosemiotics. It was Douglas R. Hofstadter who was bold enough to express this idea. First of all, he describes genes as patterns. These genes may appear in different organisms, but their patterns can stay the same over thousands of years. Hofstadter's theory is that novels can function as patterns in the same way genes do. The novel could exist in different cultures and languages, but it would stay the exact same novel.

Quite a lot can be spoken against this theory. First of all, the comparison between genes and novels seems inadmissible. Karl Popper has used a similar analogy when he compared a wasps' nest to a book. He said that a book will always be a book, regardless of whether somebody would read it or not, just as a wasps' nest will always be a wasps' nest, regardless whether humans referred

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[14] Salman Rushdie. 1997. Der Künstler, zermalmt von den Mythen eines Tyrannen. In: Die Erfindung der Welt. Ed: Uwe Wittstock, Verlag Fischer, Frankfurt am Main. 14
[15] Michael Köhlmeier. 1997. Telemach. Piper. München. 7
[16] Ibid., 325ff
[17] Douglas R. Hofstadter. 2007. Ich bin eine Seltsame Schleife. Klett-Cotta. Stuttgart. 294

to it as one or not.[18] He is wrong in either case, but to variable extents. The book as a material carrier of cultural patterns remains a book, even if nobody reads it. Thus far, one can agree with Popper. But for the book to be the cultural pattern with current and effective texts it needs its readers.

But there is one fundamental objection to Popper and Hofstadter: A book is a collection of intentional symbols. This can't be said about the wasps' nest let alone about genes – except when taking a creationistical or cabalistical philosophy as the starting point which cannot be assumed about Popper or Hofstadter.

At this point, we have to read Hofstadter differently. A gene and a novel cannot be compared based on their intentionality, but a certain analogy is there if we can see a pattern in both of them.

The second objection to Hofstadter relates to the transferability of patterns. His opinion that a novel can be translated into another language is supported by the practice of translation. Nevertheless, it is a well founded tradition of literary studies to be opposed to this thesis. Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf and various representatives of deconstruction like Jaques Derrida all question the translatability of texts. However, Hofstadter is not talking about translation per se, he defines it as transmission. With that, he does not think of a literal or a particularly sophisticated translation, but a raw and inaccurate adaptation.

For Hofstadter, a cultural pattern is as abstract as fast food or lip service, cleverness or fear.[19] We have mental images of these relatively big cultural units – cognitive types according to Umberto Eco.[20] When we communicate with these mental images, we create a nucleus of meaning which we share within our semiosphere.

Cultural patterns develop through semiosis. Likeness is generated with the use of abstraction and analogy. This process requires considerable achievements in abstraction. In order to recognize and appoint analogies, certain markers have to be categorized as relevant and irrelevant. Some properties have to be highlighted, others have to be anesthetized. What we are trying to achieve is the categorization of reality – the intellectual ability Kant is calling synthesis.

The Transmission of Patterns

How can it then be that cultural patterns are preserved and spread across the borders of a semiosphere? Our knowledge on the antiquity is not only clouded because of the long period of time, different processes of structural change like the rise of Christianity as the state religion have generated heavy losses.

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[18] Karl Popper, 1973. Erkenntnistheorie ohne ein erkennendes Subjekt. In: derselbe. *Objektive Erkenntnis – Ein evolutionärer Entwurf.* Hoffmann & Campe, Hamburg. 142
[19] Douglas R. Hofstadter. Ich bin eine Seltsame Schleife. 235
[20] Umberto Eco. 2003. Kant und das Schnabeltier. Dtv. München. 154 f

It is likely that it came to a systematical destruction of ancient history in the course of these religion fights. Since the fifth century, so called barbaric peoples began to invade the Roman Empire and destroyed the state's administrative structures. As a result, it came to a rise of illiteracy, libraries lost their value, papyrus scrolls were misused and nobody cared for the preservation of cultural patterns which were stored in the texts.[21] The art of writing and reading was forgotten and with that a great part of ancient knowledge.

So we only have a blurred cultural pattern of antiquity and even if we tried to concretise this pattern, we would still have difficulties to fully determine it. On the other hand we do not have any difficulties at all to incorporate these cultural patterns into our lives.

Why is it that we think we understand the levels of meaning that are connected to the stories of Tereus, Philomela and Procne? Summarily, Ovid is telling this story:

Tereus, son of the god of war Ares and king of the Tracians supported king Pandion in his battle against the Thebans. In reward, he received the hand of Pandion's daughter Procne and had a son named Itys with her. Secretely, Tereus was in love with Procne's sister Philomela, so he stalked, kidnapped and raped her. He cut out her tongue so she could not tell anyone about his atrocities, but the gods are cunning. They showed Philomela how to communicate with her sister. Philomela weaved images of her martyrdom into a coat, the servants talked about them and so Procne found her sister.

Their revenge for Tereus was cruel. They killed Tereus' son Itys, cooked his corpse and served it to Tereus as a meal.[22]

In Ransmayrs novel, Tereus is not the great king and hero anymore. He is a dull and angry butcher from Tomi who smashes the skulls of numerous bulls. An irrational anger even drives him to hit Procne.[23]

The cultural pattern changes from Sagas to the lowland of domestic violence. As a result, the myth can be approached through sociological analysis. The fields of action of the gods and the heroes now belong to drunk butchers and humiliated housewives. The pattern becomes available for us again. Myth is deeply rooted in our lives and through this perspective we can see that we are actors who continuously stage new variations of a massive but still limited repertoire. According to meadsche's "play"[24] the interplay of our subjective and common narration of the world unfolds. We become a member of an ensemble while not only playing our own roles but by living the roles of others.[25]

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[21] Fred Lerner. 1998. The Story of Libraries, New York. Continuum. 37f
[22] Ovid.1972[2]. Metamorphosen. In: derselbe, *Werke in zwei Bänden, Bd. 1,* Aufbau Verlag. Berlin. 143
[23] Christoph Ransmayr. Die letzte Welt. 30f
[24] George Herbert Mead.1934. Mind, Self an Society. Ed.: Charles W. Morris. University of Chicago. Chicago. 153
[25] Erving Goffman. 2011[9]. Wir alle spielen Theater. Piper. München, 73

In Search of the Common

Sometimes and even more often than we think the gods join in on this play. In Köhlmaiers novel, the goddess Athena, in the shape of Mentes, performs as an advisor to the young Telemach. With wit and in great detail, Köhlmaier describes how Athena slips into the body of the old man and how he only stubbornly surrenders to the occupation of his body through the goddess. But this process of embodiment does not only irritate the human side. Athena has to submit to Mentes' passion for banjo playing and smoking.[26] In Sten Nadolny's Novel "Ein Gott der Frechheit", Helle, sister of Phrixos and daughter of the king of Thebes suffers from similar problems. In Nadolnys version of the Greek mythology, Helle does not die when she slides off the golden ram and falls into the Hellespont which was named after her. She survives the incident and reappears in Stendhal in Eastern Germany as Helga Herthitze in the 90s of the 20th century.[27]

Helga is the narrator of the story about the god of impudence and his liberation. She is the one who fantasizes about gods that come back to life again in a postmodern manner and she addresses the reception of myths from the Philhellenes to Ransmayr.[28] Helga falls in love with Hermes who, like he did in Ancient Greece, causes one complication after the other. He was trapped in the inside of a volcano for thousands of years and comes into a world where Hephaistos has taken command.

As it turnes out, Hephaistos is following a terrible plan. He wants to wipe out humanity and grant death's mercy. The gods are only able to die when the last memory of them is gone. None of the gods seems to have objections. Apollo hates the commercialization of art anyway[29], Athena has long given up on humanity and the earth and has accepted exile in her hometown.[30] Merely Hermes, the god of impudence, still has a chance to save the humans and the gods from total destruction. For that, he needs help from the underworld.

Hephaistos has banned all the gods who may have become dangerous for him. He banned Anteros, the god of returned love, into the underground where he is guarded by Hades and therefore cannot do anything about Hephaistos' intrigues.

Hades charges a high price for Hermes. The messenger of the gods has to sacrifice his sandals and his hat in order to free Anteros from the darkness of the underworld.[31] Now it is possible to ruin Hephaistos' plans. If Anteros infects the gods, including Hephaistos, with mutual affection again, it will be possible to prevent the end of the world.

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[26] Michael Köhlmeier. Telemach. 23 ff
[27] Sten Nadolny. 1996. Ein Gott der Frechheit. Piper. München. 29f
[28] Hilda Schauer. 2010. Mythenrezeption in Sten Nadolnys Roman Ein Gott der Frechheit. In: dieselbe. *Postmoderne Erzählweise aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht.* Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Berlin. Berlin. 53ff
[29] Sten Nadolny.Ein Gott der Frechheit. 163
[30] Ibid. 240
[31] Ibid. 238

Mythoplokos – Μυθόπλοκος

We are not the gods, but we are the ones who give them shape and room. We all tell the story of our shared construction of the world together, that is what connects us for better or for worse. If we want to illustrate this process, we have to agree with Sappho, who says that Eros is the one who weaves the myths.[32]

She gives Eros the name mythoplokos, weaver of myths. According to Hesiod, Eros is one of the first gods, one of the first creators of the world.[33] Eros appears right after the chaos in the following of Gaia. He is the prettiest of all the gods, he defeats the minds of the humans and the gods, confuses them and brings the world on track. Eros has a creative power but he is not a preserver. He keeps everything in motion and he always spins new tales out of the myths. This surprises us, because we cannot follow the back and forth. Eros was not only Ovid's model for his love poetry but for his metamorphoses as well.

Ransmayr's novel "Die letzte Welt" also holds this principle of shared storytelling. It is a demiurgical process in which many participate. On the one hand, it is Ovid himself who tells a global history in his metamorphoses, in which he tries to organize the time periods with the stories of individuals. On the other hand it is Cotta who tries to put together the story he thought had been lost out of fragments. And third, it is Christoph Ransmayr himself who operates on Ovid's narrative as a demiurge.

The text motor of the novel surpasses the inner-fictional and the formation process. Ransmayr seems to suggest something far more extensive. "There are only stories, nothing else", he says in an interview.[34]

But how can we semiotically grasp the weaving of the stories?

Umberto Eco proposes that every text and every cultural object should be looked at from three different points of views: *intentio operis, intentio auctoris* and *intentio lectoris*. If the recipient wants to grasp the *intentio auctoris*, he has to determine the authors purpose. In case of the *intentio operis*, the recipient has to find out which possibilities of interpretation the text itself has to offer. The *intentio lectoris* is about the work of the interpreter, their particular disposition and the meaning they get out of a text because of it.[35]

Eco points out the potential of sense of the text, but also the cooperation of the recipient. The question concerning the authors opinion fades into the background. This is particularly important for our investigation, because the authors of myths are not clearly identifiable.

Furthermore, there is a second problem with the *intentio auctoris*. At best, we get it as a text as well, which has to be interpreted again. If we ask the

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[32] Sappho. 1925. The Poems of Sappho. Williams & Norgate. London. 93

[33] Hesiod. 1994. Theogonie. In: derselbe. Werke in einem Band. Berlin/Weimar. Aufbau-Verlag. 8

[34] Christoph Ransmayr. 2011. Erzählen im Duett. Interview mit Martin Pollack und Christoph Ransmayr von Mia Eildhuber und Stefan Gmünder, In: *Der Standard.* Wien. (Samstag 24. September 2011, Album A2)

[35] Umberto Eco. 1995. Die Grenzen der Interpretation. Dtv. München. 35ff

author of a literary text, it is possible that we get an answer which is in the form of a different text type than the original poetic text. But it would still be a text which would again require interpretation work.

This problem cannot be eliminated because it is a basic property of semiotics that new signs arise out of signs. Therefore, interpretation is not a final process, every interpreter starts a new process which eventually gets canceled for pragmatic reasons.

Metaphorically speaking, the text always stands between me and others. But it is also the text which makes it possible for me to communicate with others. Empathy can only find complete expression through cultural patterns and texts we share. But our ability to empathize and our joint attention[36] are still responsible for our ability to communicate through cultural patterns.

Joint Attention and Storytelling

Social reality consists of a structure of narratives which is built by all of us. Exactly how we are building it and how we define the individuals who do is subject of this last part of my paper.

A few properties, which are mostly reserved for humans are required to work together on the construction of the world. The most important one is the ability for intersubjectivity. If we want intersubjectivity to be basis of understanding and the construction of the social reality, we have to show how humans create intersubjectivity and how it contributes to the process. We want to base intersubjectivity on a semiotic definition: from a semiotic point of view, complete intersubjectivity exists if two individuals interpret the world in the exact same way and thus reach the same denotations and connotations.

Though we cannot reach this ideal situation, we can at least come close to it. Two individuals cannot be brought to congruence, they cannot fuse together, but they can concentrate on the same object and reach joint attention. But how is it possible to acquire the intended meaning of the other? Alfred Schütz' phenomenological sociology gives us a few hints. According to Schütz, we can acquire the intended meaning by two intertwined operations. Firstly, with the interpretation of a stranger's actions[37] and secondly, with the transmission of these self-interpretations to the observed actions. As a result, we do not perceive the other as "transcendental, but as a psychophysical subject".[38] Basically, this means that we do not see the other as an object. Essentially, we see others as equal to ourselves, they have the same stream of consciousness and experience.[39]

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[36] Michael Tomasello. 2000. The Cultural Origin of Human Cognition. Harvard University Press. Harvard. 62
[37] Alfred Schütz. 2004. Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt – Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie. *Werkausgabe Bd. II*, UVK, Konstanz 224
[38] Ibid. 225
[39] Ibid. 226f

When Schütz says that the "phenomenon of growing old together"[40] is the criterion to understand the other, he indirectly mentions the basic similarity of peoples consciousnesses. "By 'understanding others we mean the interpretation of the consciousness of the alter ego, which we have learned through the external process".[41] Only the same or at least similar structures which are capable of consciousness can approach each other through common aging in a way that their ontologically acquired features are no longer an issue. Your consciousness and my consciousness build structures which meet each other at numerous junctions.

Eros or Terror

With this togetherness and the constant weaving of new stories we achieve a permanent re-creation of the world. The Australian Aborigines were right. We have to explore the Songlines[42] over and over again in order to retell old stories. Only a story which gets told and filled with life creates reality.[43]

To me it seems that the weaving of stories we do together is controlled either by Eros or by Phopos who is also known as Terror. Both are children of Aphrodite and Ares.[44] So they were both born out of love and fight and humans cannot tame them. It is not us who take them by their hands, they escort us through our world.

The weaving of the world is not just an activity that connects us humans, it brings us to the mercy of the gods. As we are used to in enlightened times, we can take this as a metaphor. The gods are images and figures which present to us our subconscious. This is how analytic psychology in the tradition of C.G. Jung tries to explain the constant return of the gods. According to C.G. Jung, apparitions of spirits are nothing more than the projection of archetypes of fathers and mothers into extrapsychical reality.[45] Gods, heroes and demons are shapes of our inner self and our collective memory, which are holographically distributed to all individuals.

If sociosemiotics want to explain human actions, thinking and feelings on the basis of cultural patterns, all levels of storytelling and weaving of the myths have to be taken into account. As I hopefully was able to show, theories also have to follow the postmodern paradigm. The playful interaction with the myths and the transformation of their structures into a scientistic knowledge shows us on a meta level how the construction of the world works. Old cultural patterns are being updated constantly and often filled with new content. Eliade

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[40] Ibid. 227

[41] Ibid. 239

[42] Bruce Chatwin. 2004 Traumpfade. SZ Bilbiothek (Hanser). München. passim

[43] Mircea Eliade. 1973. Australian Religions – An Introduction. Cornell University Press. Ithaca/London. 42ff

[44] Hesiod. Theogonie. 39; Nonnos. 1985. Leben und Taten des Dionysos. In: derselbe. *Werke in zwei Bänden, Bd.1*. Aufbau Verlag. Berlin/Weimar. 80

[45] C.G. Jung. 1997⁵. Die Beziehung zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewußten. Dtv. München. 72

named this process the creative power of the myths. For us, as western oriented people, myths from the classic antiquity as well as the juedo-christian mythology can turn into Songlines. We can let ourselves be overwhelmed by this supernatural power and surrender before the gods. I think that most people actually do that and this is why our world looks the way it looks. It is Terror who way too often prevails over Eros. But we can say it with Joseph Campbell: "Each individual is the center of a mythology of his own."[46] If we want to take this seriously, we have to see the reawakening of the Greek mythology in the postmodern novel as an attempt to start from the beginning. A world creation which cannot be different from a mythogenesis starts by the individual while the poets are the vanguard. They, like shamans once and some priests and saints still, manage to make contact with the other world and return without any harm. As Robert Graves says: "the poet's first enrichment is a knowledge and understanding of myths."[47]

These travelers are needed at any time, but in our time we need them especially. It is not irrelevant, which myths we use to weave our world. We have thrown ourselves into the arms of Terror way too often and far too rarely we let ourselves be seduced by Eros.

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