Experience of the Alien in Husserl's Phenomenology

BERNHARD WALDENFELS

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

The alien (das Fremde) is a perplexing phenomenon that tracked down Husserl more than he tracked it. This curiosity will be the theme of our reflections as we inquire with Husserl into the thing itself.

The alien is related to the uncanny. In part enticing, in part threatening, it belongs to the constant challenges of a human experience that is never entirely at home in its world. One can react to the alien in a variety of ways: one can flee or pursue, fend it off or hold it in regard. A vast spectrum of possibilities unfolds between xenophobia and xenophilia. The alien becomes virulent in those life and historical phases in which orders fluctuate and supports of order totter. Shifts of order pull shifts of alienness in its wake, with all the signs of ambivalence. The semantic field of the alien, which reaches far beyond the confines of philosophy, speaks a clear language: it extends from clinical or social alienation (Entfremdung) to the artistic craft of alienation (Verfremdung) to the infant’s shying away from strangers (Fremdeln) to the strange bewilderments (Befremdlichkeiten) of everyday life.

Had Husserl let himself get carried away with pros and cons, he would not have been the sober thinker that he was. The gesture of the distancing abstention peculiar to his phenomenology strives for an attitude in which the alien as alien comes into relief. The logos of the phenomena must also hold good as the logos of the alien. The inquiry into an alien-experience, as with all experience, therefore is a matter of questioning and bringing “to expression its proper sense.”
All this sounds more obvious than it is. In reality, there brews beneath philosophy a secret horror alieni that temptingly strives to dispell the alien of everything enigmatic and strange. This attempt to tame the alien can assume a variety of forms. One can underplay the opposition between own and alien as if they were mere variants occurring in experience. One can try to overcome the opposition in an all-encompassing order that assigns to everything its proper place. One can raise it up to the driving mechanism of a total development that strives, through all oppositions, towards a general reconciliation. Finally, and more modestly, one can mitigate the opposition by recourse to universal norms which place the own and alien on equal footing with each other. The experience of the alien as alien wanes in a host of ways in different forms of appropriation. This appropriation revolves around two poles in our modern tradition: the own ego and the general logos. The retreat into the own and the incorporation into a whole menace the alien. Here both instances, the ego and the logos, ally themselves in multiple ways. The fecund expression of the alliance is found in Kant's celebrated motto of Enlightenment, where the mere sapere aude is carried over to the gesture of practical self-appropriation: "Have courage to serve your own understanding!"—which, we might add, does not belong to you alone. An innocent motto, and in a certain respect, necessary. But it does not acquit us of the task of examining the peculiar sense of this ownness which is simply taken for granted, and likewise the alienness of reason which is thereby suppressed.

Whether Husserl himself successfully negotiated the obstacles of egocentrism and logocentrism with his theory of alien-experience remains to be seen. In any case his inquiry into an experience of the alien signifies an attempt. The radicalness of this attempt and its relevance to the contemporary debates surrounding subjectivity and rationality earns our consideration, a consideration we also find, by the way, when we think of authors like Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida.

What does Husserl understand by alienness (Fremdheit)? In a posthumously published text from 1933, in which he contrasted the familiar, common, accessible home-world with the alien-world, Husserl characterized alienness as "accessibility in genuine inaccessibility, in the mode of incomprehensibility" (XV 631). Here he had in mind "heterogeneous (fremdartige) people and cultures," which in their heterogeneity belong to the opening horizon of our familiar surroundings that is "indirect," i.e., nonintuitive. This is already a special case of relative alienness. Indeed, the paradoxical formulation with which Husserl characterizes alienness shows quite precisely what is at issue. Something is accessible—not in spite of—but rather in its inaccessibility. Alienness is precisely that. And as something that cannot be comprehended, alienness does not mean that the door to reality is bolted shut, but rather that its sense is not fully disclosed. Our eyes see and yet do not see;
our ears hear and yet do not hear. Alienness is not a property of things and persons in the world, but an aspect of the world in whose horizon they meet up with us in any number of ways. Now, the problem lies in making this phenomenon understandable without glossing over its fractures, shiftings and opacity. We need to question Husserl's theory of alien-experience with respect to this possibility. I will do this by reading the well-known texts on the bias to arrive more easily at their design and style of thought. First, I will preliminarily take up the category of the alien, then consider with Husserl the constitution of the alien, and finally, I will ask whether Husserl's theory of the alien withstands the paradox that he himself points out.

I

A categorial analysis can have the tenor of a preliminary analysis merely, because the alien understood radically, as Husserl did, can neither be fitted to an eidetic component of certain regions of being nor accommodated to the formal fundamental framework of a world in general. Any ontology that directly deals with entities as entities comes up short when it is a matter of inquiring into the occurrence of the alien as such. Nevertheless, the categorial analysis already hints at the difficulties which a transcendental constitutional analysis is slated to handle; for here the "novel language" demanded by Husserl is only attained by a "transformation of the sense" of everyday language (VI 214/Crisis 210). We will limit our overview to those categorial aspects called for by our theme.

1. In everyday German the term Fremdheit (not unlike the English expression "being strange") can mean many things. On the low end of the scale we find the alien with the sense of unfamiliar or unknown (ignotum). But the claims Husserl makes on the alien render this conception too narrow, since it restricts the alien to labile possibilities of acquaintance. Husserl's theory of alien-experience is not a subspecies of epistemology, for this already presupposes that the other is there, as well as its sense. Here unfamiliarity would only come into play if it were intensified to a constitutive inconnu, as in Baudelaire. On the high end of the scale we find the alien as other (altud/αλλό, ετερον). This sense, on the other hand, is too broad because otherness, as a fundamental trait peculiar to all beings, belongs in a formal ontology and apophantic. Moreover, alien-experience does not find its genuine place here, although alienness constantly refers to otherness, e.g., in the form of the alter ego.

Between these two extremes we find two kernels of meaning which recur under a corresponding transformation in Husserl's transcendental theory. I
have in mind the alien as "outsider," foreign (exter(n)um, peregrinum/ξένον, ξενικόν), and alien as what belongs to an other (alienum/διαλογίου). The former sense stems from a movement of drawing boundaries, segregating spheres into what is accessible and inaccessible. The latter, in contrast, issues from a movement of appropriation through which belonging and not-belonging are separated from one another. Accessibility and belonging join one another in what Husserl described as the "sphere of ownness," a sphere he attained by systematically screening out everything alien.

Finally, there is still another sense of the alien which remains in the background, namely, as heterogeneous or strange and which can be intensified to the point of impertience, unsuitability. In contrast, the own leads from the homogeneous or peculiar (Eigenartige) to what is proper (propria), which belongs to the traditional, intrinsic essence of a thing. Although these aspects are crucial with respect to the aforementioned alliance of ego and logos, I would like to leave them aside at this point.

Let us hold firmly to the central meaning, namely, that the alien is what is inaccessible and what does not belong to an other.

2. If we move from this semantic overview to the syntactic level, then the alien according to common usage is an expression for a relation. According to the formula "xRy," "x" is never simply alien but is already in relation to a "y." The word "alien" can only be employed as a many-place predicate. This formal determination leaves a series of questions in its wake. Let us select the most important.

A first series of questions concerns the type of relation. Is the relation of alienness a symmetrical relation? Can the relation be turned around so that I am always alien to someone if he is alien to me? Mere unfamiliarity does not permit such an inversion, as otherness or difference may. But what does inversion mean anyway if the relation is an expression of a prepredicative experience? We can ask moreover if alienness is a transitive relation such that the alien of an alien is also itself alien to me. Here we are concerned with what Husserl calls iterative alienness. We can also pose the question whether we are dealing with a reflexive relation in the case of alienness. Can someone or even something be alien to itself? Alternately, what do self-accessibility and belonging-to-oneself mean, if they do not include a moment where alienness is overcome? Does it make sense to assert that "I have not taken leave of my senses" if I completely belong to myself anyway? Finally, we pose the question whether we are dealing with an internal relation where alienness is concerned, such that both relata or at least a relatum would not be what it is without the relation.

A second series of questions refer to the relationship of alienness pertaining to persons and to things. If we possess the variable places of the field of relation
either with thing-names or with person-names, then various constellations come to the fore: something is alien to someone, someone is alien to someone, and to speak in terms of possibilities more remote, something is alien to something, someone is alien to something. Viewed grammatically, alienness appears on the one hand as the neutral alien (das Fremde) and on the other hand as the masculine or feminine alien (der/die Fremde). Does alienness in both cases mean the same thing? Does one form of alienness—the one pertaining to persons or the one to things—deserve to be granted a priority? In what contexts can we consider the masculine/feminine and neutral alien? Does it require, as Derrida thinks, a neutral form of the other or alien which makes specific forms of alienness possible, i.e., the alienness peculiar to things and persons, or to the masculine and the feminine?  

A third complex of questions bears on the relation of the alien to the non-alien, above all, its distinction from the own in the sense of accessibility and belonging. The characterization of the alien as in-accessible and not-belonging suggests that the alien be assumed to be the mere negatum of the own and in this sense a modification of something to be regarded as the primal-mode. But can the own be determined without contrast to the alien? Indeed, rather than it being a matter of a modification of the own, does it not concern an actual “primal division” like that by which Husserl portrays the relation between the I and other (VI 260/ Crisis 256)?  

Questions upon questions. It is now time to leave the preliminary approach to a categorial analysis and to move on to the constitution of the alien. For it is here that the questions gain a sharper contour.

II  

The experience of the alien assumes radical characteristics when it ascends to the becoming-alien of experience. Just as Husserl speaks of a transcendental intersubjectivity—since the others as “co-effecters of the constitution of the world” (XV 551) are occupied with the sense-structuring of the world—in a similar way we can speak of a moment of transcendental alienness. If everything that is, insofar as it shows itself, assumes the characteristics of the alien, then alienness can no longer be something added to what is; in the last analysis it belongs, not to what shows itself, but rather to the way in which, i.e., to how, something shows itself. This is analogous to lived spatiality and above all lived temporality, phenomena Husserl constantly draws on for comparison. What Husserl is doing here is not a second philosophy, in the sense of a mere social philosophy; rather, he makes others and alienness of the other, as Theunissen puts it, the “theme of first philosophy.” The transition from an ontological-logical consideration (which stops with a pregiven reality) to a transcendental consideration (which inquires even into this pregivenness as
such) leads to the fact that alienness also undergoes a "transformation of sense." It ascends from a mundane alienness attached to the world, to a transcendental alienness which engenders the genesis of the world. Strengths and weaknesses of the Husserlian theory depend upon this movement of thought. Let us present it in its essential stages.

Initially, the alien in its radical form is the "I-alien" (XVII 248), that which is alien-to-me as opposed to that which is "my own" (I 131/CM 100). If we regard alienness further as relation, then one of the members of the relation is not just anyone; I am one of the members. From the perspective of a logic or an ontology of relations, this is merely a special case that can be normalized by substituting the "I" with a proper name or description. Husserl would object, however, that ontification or neutralization does not allow alienness as genuine alienness to come into view. It is likewise the case with spatial and temporal relations. If I say something is earlier or later than something else or that one thing is separated from another by a certain distance, this assignment of things or events to a space and time order presupposes a "zero point"; it presupposes a Here and Now from which orders of space and time unfold and where this zero point is no longer in space and in time. And so analogously with alienness and ownness as inner-worldly relations of exclusion and inclusion. The relation of alienness observed and regarded from without dissipates immediately into the higher sphere of ownness of the observer. Here, own and alien are absorbed as moments of a whole, unless the observer himself stands in a certain way in the relation to which he observingly refers. An alienness that would only remain outside and removed and leave me untouched would not be radical; it would simply be a local alienness. The occasionality of the "I" which extends with the possessive dative to the sphere of that which is "my own" is therefore insuperable. In the final analysis, the alien concerns me. The division into own and alien (which we will have the occasion to address later) stems from a process of self-differentiation. At least one of the members of the relation plays a part in this process, by differentiating itself from the other.

Now, if we continue by asking what the alienness of this I-alien consists in for Husserl, the answer runs as follows: as Husserl has already intimated, the character of the alien bears on "a verifiable accessibility of what is inaccessible originally" (I 144/CM 114). As with all experience, alien experience is "original consciousness." The other is "himself before us there, in person," not unlike the things we touch and look at; indeed, "nothing belonging to his own essence comes to original givenness" (I 139/CM 109). To express this paradoxically, we are faced with an original nonoriginality. Experience is original because the other shows himself as he is precisely in his nonoriginality, just as what is past does not announce itself as past anywhere other than in the irreplaceable mode of experience we call recollection. In allusion to
different forms of temporal presentifying Husserl characterizes alien-experience as co-presenting, as appresentation; it is that which "presents to consciousness a there-with, which nonetheless is not itself there and can never become itself-there" (I 139/CM 109). In this connection Merleau-Ponty repeatedly speaks in his late work of an "Urpräsentation des Nichturpräsentierbaren," of an "original of the elsewhere." And Levinas goes only a little step further when he explains that the "absence of the other is his presence as of the other." This little step from co-presence to absence is not nothing, and it certainly becomes clear here how the nonphenomenality of the phenomena must still reveal itself phenomenonally if phenomenology is not to turn into some form of metaphysics or postmetaphysics. Husserl guides us to a threshold with this "accessibility of what is inaccessible," a threshold which many, all too many, carelessly cross. They point to the fact that there are always already others, since we speak a language, live in a tradition or belong to a community. But these are tranquilizing, hackneyed clichés which Husserl left to the natural attitude.

The question concerning the form in which the alien appears for the first time, i.e., whether it appears as the neutral or the masculine/feminine alien, is a question we have already implicitly answered. Husserl's response is clear: the intrinsically first I-alien is the non-I in the form of an other I; it is the gendered other, the gendered alien (I 137/CM 107; XVII 248). The reason for this is obvious. The neutral alien, which attaches to things from their side, is not alien in the radical sense, that is, in the sense of "originally inaccessible." For there are no things and no aspects of things to which I would be denied access. They all lie within the scope of my experience, if not in fact then certainly in principle, and thus belong to what Husserl described as the "sphere of owness." For example, in order to perceive the backside of the thing which is always co-present and given only as such, I need simply alter my position. The impossible gaze behind the mirror begins there, where the distance is insurmountable, there with the other who does not belong to my field of possibilities. Thus, if the world of things assumes traits of alienness, it does so only insofar as they refer to alien experiences, which in spite of all communalization, never fully coincide with those of mine. This secondary, borrowed alienness consists in the fact that the accessibility to the world of the other is "not unconditional" (I 160/CM 132). In light of alien experience, this secondary alienness encroaches even on me insofar as I take on characteristics which do not stem from me.

This distinction of primary alienness of the other and secondary alienness of the world and myself—albeit a distinction which is in no way self-evident—leads us to the fundamental presuppositions of the Husserlian theory of constitution. Why constitution of the other? We cannot and need not go into all the nuances and transformations of the concept. But this much is clear:
like everything else we encounter in experience, the other too is not there, ready-made. Instead he achieves his identity and his sameness in the course of a “structuring” which is composed of many structural elements: spatial and temporal horizons, bodily expression and movement, linguistic utterances, and many more. The other is also a core of condensation in which a variety of experiences coalesces; there is no fixed block of experience that simply stands there. The “structuring” metaphor which we come across here is, as are all metaphors, both suggestive and restrictive at the same time. Let us however leave the restrictive aspect aside and ask ourselves how Husserl conceives the structuring of the alien. Where do we get the “structural elements” which go “to structure” that which is not originally accessible? Husserl’s answer is once again considerably clear: the alien constitutes itself within and by means of that which is my own (I 131/C M 100). How could it be otherwise, Husserl would ask. If the alien would constitute itself “within and by means of” that which is alien to me, it would already be presupposed to be alien. Something that was entirely “alien to experience” (XVII 240) would not only be an absurdity, it would virtually lose its character of alienness, since there would be nothing from which it could escape. It would simply be there and would lose its offensiveness, its “punch,” like the surprise which becomes the rule. To say that the structuring of the alien occurs by means of the own is to say that alienness arises from a process of self-alienation (Ent-Fremdung) similar to the way in which the past comes about through the process of de-presentation (Ent-Gegenwärtigung) (VI 189/Crisis 185). This “self-alienation” encroaches indirectly even on me; I “am for myself the alien of those who are alien for me.” And that is decisive: I am and remain the “primal-mode” for aliens; namely, I am that one who alienates himself while he modifies himself (XV 634f).

We are familiar with this instructive piece of intentional modification or transformation from the broader context of noetic-noematic structures as Husserl analyzes them in Ideas I. Different belief-modalities like affirmation and denial or modes of objectivation like presentifying and making present, do not have equal status. Rather, in every series of modification there is an unmodified or unmodalized “primal-form” (III 257/Ideas I 251) to which all modified forms refer back according to their proper essence.¹⁰ This primal-form is the present in the case of de-presentation and the own or self-present in the case of self-alienation. In order to characterize this referring-back of alien-experience to self-experience, Husserl persistently speaks of analogizing, of repetition or of mirroring. At this point it becomes clear how the egocentric and logocentric overlap in the form of a monadology. The primal-mode of the self is simultaneously the same that modifies itself. Only the eidos, ego, found through the self-variation of the factual ego, guarantees that the ego that repeats itself in the other is not only mine.
Indeed, constitution would not reach its goal, i.e., the alienness of the other, and alien-constitution would be a truncated self-constitution, if analogizing or mirroring were to be taken in the actual or customary sense. A mirror-image would not be a new reality. The ego that devolves upon the alter ego may be mine, but the fact that this ego is not originally accessible guarantees that this ego is an alter ego. It has possibilities which become realized but at the same time are not open to me. Insofar as this is the case, the constitution of the other as self-alienation and self-modification means likewise a self-crossing-over, a self-transgression. While "the actuality of what is alien for me" becomes constituted, there becomes constituted "the new being-sense that transgresses my monadic ego in its self-ownness" (I 125/CM 94). This crossing-over is characterized by Husserl with concepts such as "intentional reaching-over," "carrying-over" or "transfer of sense," "shifting-over of sense" (I 142/CM 112-3). Or he speaks of "excess," that is, of what is "left-over" with respect to what is not-perceived and thus merely-there-with what is perceived (I 151/CM 122). The fruits of the Husserlian theory of constitution depend upon how the over of this crossing-over is to be understood. Does the structuring of the other "by means of the own" really reach a transcendence which is not only immanent, but which definitively goes over or beyond my own possibilities?

Finally, let us thus pose the question whether Husserl was actually successful in showing that alienness is that which is "originally inaccessible," without it changing behind our backs again into what is accessible or belonging. The question is neither easy to answer nor does it entail a simplistic response. On first glance it seems Husserl crossed the threshold to the alien accompanied by two escorts. The own I and everything belonging to it serves as model, as original for the alien. Own and alien meet one another for their part on the ground of a general reason presumed by every experience. Basically it is the same that becomes modified and unfolds in and through the medium of my Self. The shock of the alien and of the heterogeneous is cushioned by starting with the own and moving over on to what is common. Own experience and general reason still guarantee an accessibility even of what is inaccessible. Michael Theunissen explains empathy by means of self-alienation as virtually a double process by which I simultaneously alienate myself and remove the alienness of the other. What seems to me decisive is precisely the radicality of the perspective which keeps our reflections in suspense, namely, the insistence on the alien as alien as its "being-sense" (I 135/CM 105). The self-crossing-over, considered as "intentional reaching-over" or as "intentional modifica-
tion," already rides upon the continual belt of a sense which, in spite of all modifications and obscurities, protects us from invading alienness. But can we avoid such an intrusion in this way?

It is not the case that the self-transgression is ascribed to the I as an active operation. Experience is an event, not an activity. Like everything experienced, the alter ego becomes constituted in me and does not issue forth from me and is not left to my discretion. I can “only find the other but not create him” (I 168/CM 141). Husserl is considerably far removed from all types of demiurges. Nevertheless, if the alien becomes constituted in me by means of the own, it presupposes likewise that I have already gotten hold of myself and what is my own in advance. It is a type of transcendental “The Ego and his Own” (“Einziger und sein Eigentum”), which lies at the root of all modification and duplication; the “I am” functions as “intentional primal-ground” (XVII 234) which as such owes nothing to its mirroring and doubling.

Indeed, this move back to an original ego and to a “primordial” sphere of ownness presupposes that the own as own can be determined as such in and through itself, free from all alienness. The type of difficulties Husserl was faced with are illustrated by other related texts.

In the well-known Cartesian Meditations Husserl reaches a sphere of pure ownness by first screening out the alien. As Husserl himself concedes, that which is my own is initially and only indirectly characterized as “non-alien” (I 131/CM 100). Were one to remain at this stage, the own would be a phenomenon of contrast and not a primal-phenomenon; the “primal-phenomenon” would be the contrast itself (see XI 138), an irreducible difference like figure and ground, or like the diacritical function of signs. But Husserl does not remain here; he is concerned with a “positive characterization of this own” (XI 138). How do I get there? By reflecting on my own experiencing. If we wish to avoid a tautological circularity of the kind where my experiencing is what I can reflect upon, we must characterize the own by its type of accessibility. Indeed, Husserl does this, for the own is precisely what is originally accessible: “whatever can be originally presented and verifiable is what I am; that is, it belongs to me as peculiarly my own” (I 144/CM 114).

We are treading on dangerous ground here. The comparison between temporal de-presentation and intersubjective self-alienation can be read in the opposite direction, with regard to an intrasubjective self-alienation. What is the case with the ownness of self-experience? Initially, original self-presence is reduced to a mere core of living self-presence (I 62, 150/CM 22–3, 121). The remainder is obscurity which is partially illuminated through acts of presentifying. Only in repeated recollection does the I first show itself as the same—and simultaneously as not the same. For the presentified I, as Husserl himself admits, is “in a certain sense an other I” than the I actually
present (VI 175/Crisis 178). I have modified presents "each with an other modified I" (XV 345). The originality multiplies itself; behind the "primary original" of my own present stands "secondary originalities" of my own presenified presents and finally "tertiary originalities" of alien presents (XV 641f). Now the potentializing of the original into the "primal-original" like the potentializing of the I into the "primal-I" (VI 188/Crisis 184) points to an embarrassing difficulty that arises when one not only wants to aver or evoke the original, but to determine it. The original melts down to form the pure Now. But in what other manner should the Now of the field of what is actually present be characterized in contrast to the "just now" and the "right now." The Now, which corresponds to what has been postulated as original accessibility, is "only an ideal limit" as Husserl himself concedes (X 49). The Now is itself "relative" and points of itself to one "gone by" (X 68) which appears at the same time, but as "temporally different" (X 205). Thus, if the purported original is not so original, but opens up only from the distance and in difference, then alienness intrudes into the experience peculiar to the own. Analogously, just as the perception of temporality implies a becoming temporal of perception (X 22), so does the experience of the alien imply a becoming alien of the experience peculiar to the own. The relation to the other shows itself in this sense as reflexive. I fully coincide with myself no more than I do with others. If, along with Husserl, one guards against imputing to experience ready-made "I"s, whether individual or personal, then the "division" into I and other, own and alien, would itself have to be drawn from our experience. And if the presumed originality of the I pales, the sole possibility remains of starting from difference in a field of experience and of characterizing the various forms of accessibility differentially, and not according to the model of primal-mode and modification. This is the path that, for example, Merleau-Ponty takes when he arrives at ownness through deviation by beginning from the bodily anchoring of the individual in a social field. At the same time it is doubtful whether the alien in the neutral can simply be subordinated to the personal alien. If the "primal-impression" only signifies a borderline case, then it is never given as something "absolutely unmodified" (X 67). Moreover, the "I-alien" that appears in sensing can no longer be so easily assimilated into the experience peculiar to the own as "something belonging to full concreteness," as Husserl suggests (XV 128); the "disappropriation" already begins in the area of sensing and perception. Indeed, it occurs even in the process of counting, which seems to be so sure of itself: "properly speaking, one can barely count past three." But even if ownness and alienness cannot be divided into I and other like primal-mode and modification, it does not follow that the I and the other can be incorporated into a whole or made to conform normatively to one another. The experience of the alien as alien resists every form of totalizing and
universalizing. This is closely tied to an irrevocable asymmetry of my relation to others which Levinas has emphasized, but which is also effective in Husserl, even if only in a highly one-sided manner. For Husserl, the primal-I is not an I among others; it is actually called I only through equivocation because it precedes the splitting into I and other (VI 188/Crisis 184–5). As already indicated, by generalizing this thought it can be considered apart from the questionable origin-motif, which is of sole benefit to the I. No one is simply one among others, not because one of the members of the relation would have precedence over or be superior to the other, but because standing in the relation of alienness obviates every comparison between members of the relation.15 If I wanted to compare others to me, it would be like wanting to equate the present I with the presentified I, the reflecting I with the I reflected upon. I can only compare members of the relation insofar as I remove myself from the relation and achieve a distance from it. If I could remove myself wholly from it, alienness would deteriorate into a solitary omniscience, like a timeless consciousness that would obliterate all temporality. Every attempt to make the unequal equal already comes too late.

Let us turn finally to our last problem that appears only in the background for Husserl since he thematizes alienness in systematic analyses which start out primarily from alien-perception. In this connection alienness is determined negatively as what is originally inaccessible, not-belonging. But how could what is not itself there and what does not belong to me awake my strivings, desires, and interests, if I were not already beyond myself? If I were to effect this crossing-over to the other myself, while structuring what is strived for and what is desired “within and by means of the own,” my striving and desiring would be the monstrous product of a transcendental narcissism which would trap itself in self-mirroring.16 Moreover, this mirroring would not be shattered by the “mutual sheltering of I and you” (XIV 172). This is a sheltering which allows all alienness to be forgotten; we would be through with selections and exclusions, which already result in privileging the other as this neutral other, as of the masculine or feminine other, a privileging that always already presupposes others as a social field.17 We are far from speaking about specific grids of socio-cultural orders which render every other a certain other, for example, a relative, friend, or neighbor; a colleague or competitor; a patient, customer, or student. Here various types of collective alien-experience are formed (see I 161/CM 133–4) posing similar problems needing to be dealt with, like the peculiarity, to say nothing of the anomaly of, insanity, childhood, or animality (see I 169/CM 142; VI 191/Crisis 187).18 The methodological panacea Husserl provides consists in taking the “sting” of pure exteriority out of the alien with modifications of the self and the same. To be sure, this panacea is blind to the clash between different claims and
systems of claims which are incompossible and burst open the harmony of a universe of monads. This harmony is not even a pipe dream.

But how could we envision a lure of the alien, one which does not wondrously slip from without through a “hole” (XVII 239) into the space of my consciousness, but which also does not arise merely by its own means? A crossing-over that would not be accomplished only by me would have to be attributed to the alien so that it would be not merely non-I or other I and thus not merely a real negatum or duplicate. Where others are concerned, Husserl himself speaks with passionate undertones of “appeal” (Anruf) (XV 462) or of a type of “concernful request” (Angang) more basic than the “intercourse” (Umgang) with the other (XV 342). Indeed, this appealing (An-rufen) and concern (An-gehen) as “going into others” (XV 446) is once again channeled back to the self-modification peculiar to the own. What could be salvaged from this channeling would perhaps be a more, an excess that would thus not be exhausted in nonbeing or being other. If we are to conceive of the claim of the alien, we should do so as eliciting my response, and not as the alien present referring back to my own present. The inaccessibility that Husserl attributes to the alien present and that leads to a “primordially unfulfillable experience” (I 144/CM 114–15) should be surmounted by the inability to fulfill an alien claim, making all responses inadequate and all demands insatiable. The rift between claim and response would be incapable of being healed through a modification; for there is no self that could be modified and transferred into property and contracts. Alienness does not proceed from a division, but consists in a division.

Thus, if the “strange enigmas” of which Husserl speaks (I 120/CM 87) belong to the thing itself, it would be a matter of maintaining and intensifying them, and not of removing them. Alien-experience would not be a variation of experience; rather, experience would be alien-experience through and through to the point of experience itself becoming alien.

Translated by Anthony J. Steinbock
State University of New York—Stony Brook

NOTES

1. For the larger context of these reflections, see my Ordnung im Zwielicht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), esp. 122–25.
3. [Husserl will be cited by volume and page number according to Husserliana. All translations of Husserl are mine. For the convenience of the English-speaking reader, however, I will include references to the corresponding English editions whenever possible. I would like to thank Professor Waldenfels for his helpful suggestions on the final version of this translation.—Trans.]


11. Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1977), 141; trans. Christopher Macann, *The Other* (Cambridge: MIT, 1984), 150. In another place (85, 90), he speaks of an "alienness that comes over me in alien-ation"—and which is naturally not "suspended." Does not that have to mean: which I let come over me?


15. The insight into the "essential asymmetry" that I sought to develop from the interplay of question and answer earlier in *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), e.g., 150f, 306f, I would today advance more strongly against the demand for symmetry which is also tied to a communicative reason.
16. A narcissism that grasps a self in sensible-bodily reflection and that reaches into a zone of open "intercorporeity" to which other Narcissus have access is nevertheless conceivable; cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible*, 185; *The Visible*, 141. The ambiguity of the mirror-image that hovers between connaissance and méconnaissance, between own and alien, comes into play when one becomes aware of the paradox of a "differential repetition" (Bernet, 53); cf. Lacan's well-known study of the so-called "mirror-stage."


18. The problematic of normalizing omitted here plays an increasing role in the later Husserl. It occurs in the context of the attempt to do justice to the multiplicities of socio-cultural experiences and forms of life without giving up his central and encompassing perspectives and the constitutive difference of ownness and alienness. Husserl thereby comes upon a problematic which was radicalized by authors like C. Canguilhem and M. Foucault and which also plays a decisive roll in phenomenological authors like Alfred Schütz; cf. the relevant articles in *Sozialität und Intersubjektivität. Phänomenologische Perspektiven der Sozialwissenschaften im Umkreis von Aron Gurwitsch und Alfred Schütz*, ed. R. Grathoff and B. Waldenfels (München, 1983).