'Cultural Similarity Does Not Mean that We Wear the Same Shirts': Similarity and Difference in Culture and Cultural Theory

Interview with Anil Bhatti[1]

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Abstract

The concept of 'Similarity' lies at the centre of this interview with Anil Bhatti. Distinguishing itself from a culturalistic hermeneutic of 'Own/Alien', it concentrates on the 'as-well-as', on the area 'between' theories of difference and other aspects of identity. Through the notions of 'translation' and 'over-lapping', of 'the vague' and 'the preliminary' this concept seeks to ameliorate cultural theory.

Keywords: *Similarity, Difference, Own/Alien, Translation, Cultural Theory*

BERNHARD KLEEBERG (BK)/ANDREAS LANGENOHL (AL): *The concept of 'Culture' is* en vogue *both in theory and in public discourse. As an umbrella term, it seems to comprise social, political, religious, and other contexts that are then analysed with sole reference to Culture. Can you outline the historical process of this culturalization?*

ANIL BHATTI (AB): Seeing how Culture established itself as an explanatory formula after the Second World War, we notice a shift. Modernization theories predominated the fifties and sixties. There was the notion of the 'Third World' that has altogether disappeared today. There was commitment, and a socio-economical paradigm that explained difference, power, and oppression. Slowly, this disappeared, and difference began to be explained with Culture: you are different because of cultural difference. Difference no longer related to 'Class', 'Exploitation', 'Oppression', or the like. All these economic categories, to some extent derived from Marxism, slowly disappeared in order to explain the world with 'Culture'. And as soon as the world began to be explained with Culture, virtually anything that happened could be explained culturally. Such is the power of the Culture concept. With Culture, you can explain private conflicts — that would have formerly been explained as personality problems, problems of assimilation, and such. But suddenly, Culture was the dominating formula to explain everything that was perceived as a problem. I believe that this extensive power of the concept overwhelmed our theory, slowly but effectively.

If you speak of culturalization, you should therefore start with the question how, after having spoken of the Third World, and then of 'foreignness' (*Fremdheit*) and

'foreign cultures', we have arrived at the hermeneutic scheme of 'Own/Alien'.[2] In the early sixties, this scheme was completely irrelevant. We spoke more of solidarity then. How can I relate to something? This relating-to-something-else had to do with privilege and non-privilege, with poverty and wealth, with equality and inequality. All these terms vanished into thin air. You are different because you are culturally different, and we have to relate to you because of it — to a certain extent, this is where the figure of dialogue came into existence. This entailed making tolerance the basic figure of our relation to the world. My signature in the world consisted of being tolerant by trying to understand the world — with dialogue. Dialogue required that you had fixed identities: I am me, you are you, and I enter into a conversation with you. You must have your identity, however, or there is no conversation. That is how the scheme of Own/Alien gained momentum.

BK/AL: *How did political discourses reflect this shift?*

AB: Also development politics operated with Own/Alien, by the way. Somehow, you must be able to sustain yourselves; we'll help you financially. But because you are culturally different, motives and possibilities differ, too. Suddenly, the old notion of solidarity also vanished into thin air. It was a notion that did not have anything to do with categories of the nation-state; borders played no part. Solidarity was something that worked across boundaries. Within the old logic, it was the working class that did not function, that hadn't since the Great War. The Second International disappeared because the nation-state did not give the working class any possibility for solidarity. This possibility only began to form slowly, with the differentiation of the oppressed of this world and the non-oppressed (or rather: the powerful), in the sense of Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Now, there was solidarity across borders and boundaries, between those that were somehow understood to be the oppressed and those that were taken to be the oppressors. The shift of this logic towards Culture is a phenomenon that I believe to be insufficiently analyzed. Namely, that it was simply possible to say that there is no solidarity across boundaries, but there are cultures, and cultures are good. And cultures are, moreover, each and all entitled to their own development.

BK/AL: *Elsewhere, you've described this as the 'Herderian version of the Culture concept'...*

AB: Herder developed this remarkable idea that Europe had emerged from mixtures. These mixtures are Europe's foundation — but they are not natural. Mixtures exist, fine, but their persistence is unnatural. And, as God basically created the figure of the family as a natural connection, you've got to have families, and these families form nations. They serve the purpose of containing disturbances — mixtures are disturbances, migrations are disturbances, and these disturbances lead to turbulence, chaos. They have to be domesticated, organized. The form of organization is the nation: the people, language, territory, some foundational myth, etc. With Herder, already, we find the idea that these are all fabrications, but they are necessary to secure the peaceful coexistence of different peoples. Thus, too, Herder's anti-colonialism: Europe's sin is to

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[2] Editors' note: 'Own/Alien', 'Familiar/Strange', and even 'Self/Other' belong to an overlapping semantic field which corresponds to the use of *Eigen/Fremd das Selbst/der, die, das Andere* in German.

intervene, to disturb natural accesses, to disturb, in a manner of speaking, the access to a kind of transcendental 'allness', as everyone has their own developmental path. This is why Culture is dialogue. This notion of tolerance has been strongly criticized. To a certain extent, we can argue that it's a liberal version of segregation: everyone has their own path, a path each should follow, but you shouldn't disturb one another. This is organized nationally and brings forth dialogue, which, in its turn, is the foundation of hermeneutics. A particular version of hermeneutics, not to say: all hermeneutics, is based on Own/Alien.[3] Culture as explanatory formula follows this thought: We all have our cultures but we ought to coexist peacefully, and we should develop dialogue as a way of realizing this peace. But this is also the explanatory formula for difference, and that is interesting: Difference in all aspects is explained culturally — wherever there's a crisis, it is determined culturally. So, the recent European crisis — think of Greece, Portugal —, too, is a cultural crisis. We say: 'They can't do it, for cultural reasons!' It isn't linked to older explanatory formulae that operated more with social, economical, historical contexts and particularly with questions of the interconnection of power and regime. Basically, Culture displaced the schema of power and regime.

BK/AL: *In other words: The process of culturalization, with the Culture concept superseding socio-economical contexts, reversed the initially emancipatory function of the concept, thereby creating new boundaries that might possibly be less permeable than their socio-economical predecessors? Are we dealing with a new concept of Culture that, concomitant with the enforcement of socio-economical liberalism, raises new boundaries, while, simultaneously, a framework considering nation-states and social strata tries to abolish boundaries?*

You could say that. The Indian upper class is on best terms with the European upper class. There's an alliance and it works perfectly. The exploited and oppressed stand no chance in this game. The powerful want to sustain a Culture concept that enables these boundaries because they exist only for the non-privileged. For the ordinary person it's like this: goods and money can cross borders. Because of visa requirements, humans can't. The privileged don't require visa, only those that have to queue, so to speak, do require these. That's why I am always sceptical of the euphoria over 'non-places' and 'transit cities,' airports, and such. It's true, these wonderful things exist — but only for those that have made it. Here, in accordance with your question, the concept of Culture has been able to dismantle certain boundaries on one level, but to erect them on another — that's how politics work. As of yet, theory has not sufficiently attended to this nexus of Culture and politics because we've been mesmerized by the utopia that there are no borders, that the nation-state is abolished, that we can all move about freely. Now we realize: no, this isn't the case! There are refugees; there are borders; there are boats; there are private agencies like Frontex[4] that ensure that people do not move, etc. This isn't the old liberal utopia of people moving freely, politely interacting, arriving somewhere, and leaving later. This utopia is linked to the idea of

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[3] Author's note: I mainly think of Gadamer and the way he has been appropriated in areas such as Intercultural Studies or Intercultural Philosophy in German scholarship where the opposition of 'Eigen/Fremd' is dominant, although there are significant attempts to move towards some version of transcultural thinking now.

[4] Editor's note: Frontex is the agency that guards European borders and is especially active in checking migration from Africa to Italy by boats (cf. Lampedusa).

hospitality, an idea that Kant reflected upon in *Zum ewigen Frieden* (*On Perpetual Peace*).

Now, this is all destabilized. I believe that the all-encompassing Culture concept achieves two things here: on the one hand, it obviously refers to cultural differences, which is great. I think it's a wonderful world in which we can say that there are cultural differences — it's interesting. On the other hand, it conceals that we can have common interests, depending on our relationship to power and interest. Fundamentally, it's a question of dialectics: Culture is important, but shouldn't conceal the Other, whereas the Other shouldn't conceal cultural differences. It is this tricky balance that I try to render with the terms 'heterogeneity' and 'homogeneity.' We're heterogeneous (not in an absolute sense), but we've got to position ourselves in such a manner that we can do away with the pressures of homogenization.

BK/AL: *In a broader sense, what part do cultural studies and cultural theory take in the culturalized constellation that you just outlined? There is a certain tradition or genealogy of the holistic Culture concept that comes to mind here. It began with Herder, amongst others, and took very different shapes in the 20th century: from models of cultural spheres,* Kulturkreise, *like Oswald Spengler's, to Juri Lotman's 'semiosphere,' to appropriations along the lines of Raymond Williams's 'Culture as a whole way of life,' Culture seems to be thought more or less homogeneous. Did cultural theory give the cue to its own exploitation, so to speak?*

Do people avail themselves of cultural theory out of strategic interests, to be able to express international conflicts, like Samuel Huntington, for example? Or might cultural theory have the potential to intervene in holistic concepts of Culture as you put them up for discussion?

I like the expression of mutual conditioning. With regard to Spengler's *Kulturkreis* model, I always resort to Ernst Bloch's critique of Spengler in his book *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (*Heritage of our Time*) published in 1935. Cultural-sphere theories still exist, and, to me, Huntington is simply Spengler updated. Cultural-sphere theory, as Bloch wonderfully points out, faced the problem of coming to terms with the non-European 'material' in a temporal sense: there's progress; there's something like Europe; there's colonialism, etc. — but what to do with India and China that are both old cultures as well? You allot them some space that you call *Kulturkreis*, cultural sphere, and proclaim their legitimacy outside of modernity within that sphere. They can only be accessed by memories of what once was, in the sense of *ex oriente lux*: wonderful old cultures, but not modern. If you can classify them in this manner, you can appreciate them culturally. The interesting thing about cultural-sphere theory is that it respects such cultures in the way Antiquity is respected, in the way the museum is respected. Their entry into modernity, however, proves to be very difficult then.

BK/AL: *Can we really speak of 'respect' here, in the tradition of Spengler? Don't the notions of Culture and civilization mingle in such a manner that you can assign all different cultural spheres legitimacy, but ultimately only understand them as developmental stages of one's own civilizational process and thus at best show curious interest in them as debris of one's own primitive origin? Might not this be the mortgage that burdens contemporary cultural theories of this provenance?*

I'd say that if you look at the good archaeologists, the good indologists and sinologists, then there was respect, in the Anglo-Saxon way, i.e. with a certain condescendence: 'They were good in their time'. Exotism relates to this nostalgia along the lines of: 'Unfortunately, it can't be like that anymore, but they had their function at their time'. Thus, 'museum': basically, is the attempt to save these cultures for us. Museum means: 'they don't get it; we get it'. In this sense, it's an archive that the ones contributing to it have not yet understood. With Hegel, these civilizations haven't yet arrived at the conceptual level required to understand what's actually been accomplished. We, however, can interpret the archive correctly, and that is why we create museums. All philology began with this claim: we can edit and comment the texts; the cultures concerned have never done so. We are the commentators, the editors, the collectors. The notions of the collector, the editor, and the commentator basically originate here. And concomitantly, the Culture concept began to be overcharged with meaning.

When you charge the concept of Culture to such an extent, you arrive directly in our present and understand that the possibility for translation is linked to this concept. Separate worlds are created, which can then be interpreted with the hermeneutic scheme of Own/Alien. In doing so, you always interpret what is Own and what is Alien. And so, I always get back to this question of power: who holds the definitional power? The semiotic problem always remains — what is a sign? How is it interpreted? The countermovement arises from the question of translation.

BK/AL: *So, would you say that the pivotal significance of the concept of 'translation' in current theory on questions of 'intercultural communication' results from a countermovement to said hermeneutics of Own and Alien?*

I believe that it's, if you will, a democratic countermovement (for lack of a better term). A form of hermeneutics that assumes Own and Alien, that assumes a dichotomy, can be overcome with translation. Translation is a non-hermeneutical way to deal with diversity as everything can be translated. In contrast to the contemporary usage of the English term 'translation', the German *Übersetzung* conveys a double meaning that meets the matter more adequately: you translate *and* you ferry across a river. There's a ferry, a stream, and a movement — and that is decisive.

BK/AL: *Apart from the great interest present cultural theory takes in the concept of translation, there's the impression that this metaphor is increasingly used in everyday life as well. What is it that makes this concept so fascinating? After all, there are other 'concepts of contact', such as 'Third Space', 'Hybridity', etc., that have been introduced into cultural theory decades ago to express the fact that different cultures can meet and need not be homogeneous. What's the strategic advantage of this concept, in your opinion? Why is it so attractive?*

AB: In my opinion, the attractiveness of the translation concept stems from the fact that it's a concept of movement while the others are static concepts. Translation in the sense of *übersetzen* is movement. Its attractiveness lies in its ability to demonstrate both a shortcoming and a desideratum with movement. Now, I think of Antonio Gramsci's critique of the KPI's[5] inability to translate certain positions — I believe he

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[5] Editors' note: Communist Party Italy.

actually phrased it like that in his notebooks. The concept of translation indicates a shortcoming — you weren't able to do it, but also a desideratum — you could do it. It is crucial to think of movement when defining 'translation' and *Übersetzung* as cultural practices and not merely as philological equivalence of one word and another. When we speak of translation as cultural practice, the attractiveness lies in the fact that I can actually declare social dynamics as a shortcoming and a desideratum, which can be made up for with translation as an active procedure, with the goal of societal pacification.

Static concepts cannot do that. In my eyes, they remain unsatisfactory because they ignore the possibility of transformation. By contrast, the translation concept embraces the possibility of transformation. In our world of migration and plurilingualism, you can actually leave behind the concept of identity and achieve a situation in which you can test various options, albeit always provided that the question of power and regime is solved — and that brings us back to the question of solidarity. I do not really believe in a 'translational turn'. But I think that it's important for our disciplines within social studies and cultural theory to engage more in translation because it really is an important procedure to capture movement and mitigation — much more than static concepts such as 'hybridity'.

BK/AL: *To follow up on this immediately: If the concept of translation marks movement, how does it relate to the concept of Similarity?*

AB: This is a very important question, and as you know one that I am very concerned with. To me, Similarity arises from the insight that difference does not suffice. Similarity can't work without difference, but difference has always worked without Similarity. This has fascinated me for a long time, now: there is a very old tradition of thinking Similarity in Europe (that I described in a contribution just recently). It was pushed to the background due to the wonderful hermeneutical, tolerance-oriented opinion: we are we; you are you; we must enter into a dialogue. But if you start questioning this thought a little, various overlaps emerge. The thought of Similarity results from historical research — the world was never split up; there was always movement, always overlap. If you consider world history: England is an invention of colonialism. Without India there's no England, but without England there wouldn't be any India, either. These overlaps lead us, both in everyday life as well as in reflective theoretical thinking, to the conclusion: things are a little bit similar, but not quite identical. The thought of Similarity only works when you say: it's not just identical; it's similar. Furthermore, Similarity allows us to introduce the uncertainty principle into our analysis. Uncertainty means that every category of thought has blurred borders, not a sharp edge. This enables discretion, politeness… All these notions come together with the thought of Similarity. And it also enables us to introduce an ethical dimension into our everyday life. We are not exactly the same, but neither totally different. In this sense, the notion of Similarity, together with the question of translation, aims for the option of movement: you can formulate any which way, analyse, criticize, whatever you want, all against the backdrop of the possibility that something might not be all that alien, after all. This allows us to reconsider the thought of surface and reality, in an old-fashioned sense. The dominant idea that scientific inquiry means parting with appearance to arrive at being is thus reformulated. Appearance was the difference; being is Similarity. With this, in my opinion, a new

form of sociality sets in. And this sociality encompasses a habitus that fosters the skill to translate. With the proposition of translation, I can contour and configure complex societies, societies of migration, societies that are capable of integration, etc. a lot better than with the concepts of tolerance and dialogue. Broad planes of overlap emerge, probably more often in urban settings, where plurilingualism is possible and difference visible, than in small, rural communities. In this sense, I am willing to say that the thought of Similarity works better in big, urban, developing settings — Vienna is well analysed, Berlin, London, Paris, etc. But I wouldn't stress this point too much as I believe in something like a principle of permeability. These days, there's no truly isolated village community anymore. Migration problems arise everywhere. Thus, with Similarity, you're better off in this regard than with difference.

BK/AL: *With the concept of overlap that you've mentioned, boundaries blur and differences are overcome, in a certain sense. But then, something of an ambiguity ensues. This might normatively be very beneficial but raises the question if such ambiguity doesn't produce further differences, both on the theoretical as well as the political level...*

AB: That's right. Ambiguity should not be equated with arbitrariness; it creates new differences. But these differences, if the perspective's right, cannot be described with reference to Culture. They're differences of an economic, power-related kind, everything that characterizes humankind in a very classical sense: the ability to function as social being, with oppression, with exploitation, with power, with regime, with struggle, and all that's part of it, which we know from literature, from the great dramas. Nobody would think to interpret conflicts in Shakespeare as cultural conflicts.

BK/AL: *Isn't the concept of Similarity then part of a deculturalization in the sense that anthropological, social, or economical parameters are re-appropriated here to stress structures of Similarity?*

AB: Yes, that would be one consequence of my thinking: that the concept of Similarity opens up a deculturalizing perspective. This, in turn, frees other potentials of conflict, of connection, of solidarity, which had been overshadowed by the Culture concept. That's a step in the direction of enlightenment, I think: Enlightenment in the sense of suddenly ceasing to see the world through a veil, so to speak.

BK/AL: *The homogenization of the culturally 'different' or the cultural 'Other', which you argue against with the Similarity concept, seems paralleled in science with the purification of things, theories, etc., as Bruno Latour describes it — a process of homogenization that ultimately seems to contradict approaches to nature that are ambivalent and not clearly rational. Is your approach similar to approaches in the sociology and history of knowledge that bid farewell to the posit of unambiguousness and observe the translations of theories, hypotheses, instruments, and the things pursued instead?*

AB: It is important to me that Similarity is an open concept of search in the classical sense, a *Suchbegriff* as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge use it in their work

Der unterschätzte Mensch.[6] That sort of brings the matter down from the high horse of such a powerful concept. But yes, I'd say that my position resembles the one of recent sociology of knowledge.

BK/AL: *… and namely those positions of sociology of knowledge that also bade farewell to a hermeneutical approach and that partially describe themselves as 'posthumanist'. How can we relate this to cultural theories?*

AB: If we take the idea of Similarity as a concept of search seriously, then we take leave of a strong, hard, hermeneutical concept of intermediation, at least for the time being. Rather, we return to dialectics. I'm beginning to read the classic tradition a little more because I believe that we (and that's an oddity) have totally forgotten certain old categories while trying to be nice to each other, namely, dialectical thinking, mediation in the old sense, and went into another direction.

To me, the thought of Similarity is closely linked to a form of ethics. It's an attempt to take up an ethical stance after ethics has been downgraded. With Similarity, there's a possibility to formulate a form of ethics that relates to our multilingual times of migration. I've arrived at this by reflecting on colonialism, the liberation of colonialism, and the development of a tolerant Central European society. After the 1960s, a peculiar movement took off. It brought anti-colonial movements, reflection on colonialism, history, and the European tradition of the Enlightenment into a constellation that brought an ethical component to the fore: solidarity. And here, hermeneutics with its difference of Own/Alien has always constituted a barrier. Basically, Enlightenment, anti-colonialism, pacification, and utopia are all associated. Here, the notion of Similarity opens up a non-hermeneutical path into the discussion — and this is why Bloch plays an important part. He's particularly important and compatible with others regarding the porosity that Similarity entails. It isn't a concept that dominates everything and cuts off; it simply marks a habitus or a disposition — an ethically motivated disposition to organize the energy of a society.

BK/AL: *It seems very reasonable to link the concept of solidarity to the concept of Similarity. But how about problematic forms of engrossing Similarity? Within a neoliberal paradigm, for instance, you can easily invoke real or alleged anthropological categories like the individual striving for success, etc., and spread Similarity via global product advertising. The concept of Similarity seems to be problematic, then, when not linked to the concept of solidarity.*

AB: Yes, of course. Benetton, for example, works with concepts of Similarity; advertising works with concepts of Similarity. That's already a problem of the 19th century. The incorporation of progressive concepts into advertising is a fundamental principle of capitalism, otherwise it wouldn't work. All the more, we have to stress that Similarity does not mean that our shirts are the same or similar. The question is, if the mechanisms of distribution in the world are just. Similarity means: without ethical — and solidary — principles you can't really advance with the concept of Similarity. Attempts at separation that are geared to apartheid, even if they are very liberally intended, or attempts at engrossing have to be marked as such, if they propose that

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[6] Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Der unterschätzte Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins Verlag, 2001), vol. 1., 20ff.

we're all the same or similar. Rather, we have to say: yes, there's a problem because ethics entails power and regime. Similarity has to imply thinking solidarity, power, regime, and ethics together, to not content ourselves with a hard hermeneutics of difference, even if it has its purpose. It isn't that it's completely wrong. Hermeneutics of difference also had a tolerant impulse, wanting to be nice and say: 'You're you, how can I help you to be you?' But migrants did not really want that, they did not want to be 'them', they wanted to become something different, to transform. Advertising cuts off this possibility for transformation. Transformation means: I can speak another language, I can be a little different in part, and you can also be a little different in part and speak other languages. From this jumble, an undifferentiated Culture of Similarity comes into being. Advertising doesn't allow for this because it operates with other mechanisms. That's why we have to try to bring Similarity, solidarity, ethics, power, and regime together.

BK/AL: *Therefore, can we discover continuities between theory and both political as well as social practice? Does the conversion to new forms of protest, for instance, correlate with the conversion to another theoretical paradigm? With regard to the concept of Similarity as a category of tentativeness, to which social and political practices might it be linked? Are there paradigmatic expressions of Similarity?*

AB: Such forms exist only in a rudimentary way. If we leave the thought of nation-states behind, if the old conceptualization of solidarity of the working class is no longer in use, but solidarity is still topical, then political movements can emerge that possess the capability to coordinate transnational interests. A good to-date example for this has always been the *Attac* group, which opposes neoliberalism amongst other things. But there might be other forms of solidarity that don't think nationally, but across borders and dividing line. In a globalized world, it would be necessary to find a possibility to define and organize solidarity, to overcome borders and find different, similar situations, so the oppressed can organize themselves. To date, I know only of demonstrations organized by *Attac*. Possibly, there are groups that operate across borders and encounter other groups. But the borders exist and are raised by the powerful.

BK/AL: *In your work on the concept of Similarity, you've also often referred to the aesthetics, the literary production. In one text, you've interpreted the* West-Eastern Divan *with Goethe's reference to a possible constellation of Similarity, and not merely cultural difference. Currently, there seems to be a tendency to examine aesthetic production, e.g. films and literature on migration, with regard to the degree in which it articulates opposition against the culturalization of the world. Which role does reflection on Similarity in the aesthetic production play for Similarity as social or political practice?*

AB: That's an important question that I might not yet be able to answer exhaustively. The *Divan* is indeed important because it's commonly interpreted as a dialogue. With the wonderful phrase 'hovering between two worlds,' the *Divan* expresses the possibility to reach a hovering relation with a whole new world without consorting to hermeneutics. Here, Goethe expresses this experimental stance beautifully, but it's been neglected in favour of dialogue. This stance is also expressed

in the monument in Weimar, where Goethe and Hafis sit across from each other and seem to converse with each other. This misses the point, however, because Goethe's question always was: can I become Hafis; could Hafis also replace me? Can we move to and fro?

Thus, the concept of hovering is the starting point for efforts regarding the migration problem. It's totally right that e.g. Adolf Muschg described Goethe as a migrant. He was so far advanced in his thinking that he expressed this perspective, and, to me, the *Divan* is a radical piece of work, created in an age in which colonialism constructs differences and borders, posits the inability to translate, and in a certain sense says: you are you — we are we, but we can rule you. Possibly, you were great some time ago, but now our time has come. Goethe questioned these categories of difference and spoke of possible solidarity: how can you transform; how can you translate? He interpreted the great scholarly energy of the time regarding the interpretation of the unknown world (by the Austrian Orientalist scholar Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, for example) and the establishment of Oriental Studies and Indology differently from his contemporaries, namely, as a possibility to relate to the world in a hovering state, but not to interpret the world and then incorporating it. That's why I think the *Divan* is so important. It marks the beginning of the possibility to take seriously a form of migration literature that brings aesthetic production across borders, which speaks out on this movement aesthetically. This has been a perspective of migration literature everywhere, not only in Europe, also in India and other parts of the world — everywhere, where there were writers with a corresponding background, they tried to express and order their topics through the figure of migration, contributing thus to the emergence of 'world literature', which Goethe, among others, introduced as an idea. In Germany, this is a huge issue right now because the kind of literature that slowly emerges detaches itself from the question of dialogue, and the difference of homeland *(Heimat)* and an alien world *(Fremde)* disappears. Rather, texts, and genres emerge that have existed in England and France for a long time, and that try to find their way in this complex world. Another facet of this aesthetics is, of course, the aesthetics of resistance as Peter Weiss developed it in his novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (*The Aesthetics of Resistance*). There's this crucial point in the *Aesthetics* that mentions the *Spiegelgasse* in Zurich: Lenin lived at one end of the *Spiegelgasse*, the Dadaists on the other, and Lavater in the middle. Lenin is the political avant-garde; Dada the aesthetic avant-garde but they could never meet. If they had met, the revolution would have been a different revolution altogether. It's the revolution cut in half that actually evoked the catastrophe and enabled the terrible events of the 20th century. The aesthetics is, thus, very important — how could you not see that Dada and Lenin had similar goals as avant-garde? Lavater is in the middle, and Goethe as well, who was a friend of Lavater's. This very plastic way of thinking has always fascinated me. The thought of Similarity is also a reflection on missed opportunities and chances due to a fixation on difference, on orthodoxy. While the orthodox of both sides prevent communication, Similarity provides chances because it allows us to discover connecting lines that one just didn't see previously. Within hermeneutics, there are no such chances. You're either here or there, you arrive at a table and begin a dialogue, and then, at some point, you arrive at a consensus. But thinking in similarities allows a peculiar spontaneity of possibility, allows to think off the beaten path, and to take utopia seriously. Via Similarity you can arrive at utopia, an achievement which is possible via hermeneutics. Via the latter you arrive at the status quo and learn, how to manage the status quo — but even if you manage it well and

tolerantly, in a constitutional humanistic sense, the possibility for transformation does not unfold.

'Similaritatea culturală nu înseamnă că purtăm aceleași cămăși'. Similaritate și diferență în cultură și teoria culturii

Conceptul de „similaritate" reprezintă centrul interviului cu Anil Bhatti. Distingându-se de hermeneutica culturalistică a „propriului/ străinului", acest interviu se concentrează asupra similarităților, asupra granițelor dintre teoriile diferenței și alte aspecte ale identității. Prin intermediul noțiunilor de „traducere" și „suprapunere" a „vagului" și a „preliminarului", acest concept caută să îmbunătățească teoria culturii.