HANS PETER DUERR, TRAUMZEIT — Über die Grenze zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation
(Dreamtime: On the border of savagery and civilization)
(Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1978, 415 pages)

Reviewed by Kristina Muenzenmaier

Hans Peter Duerr provoked and shocked the German scientific community with the appearance of his second book, Traumzeit (Dreamtime). His first book, Ni Dieu — Ni Maitre (Neither God, nor Master), a critique of transcendental philosophy, was published in 1974. Traumzeit (Dreamtime) appeared four years later.

It is important to understand the significance of Duerr. He is the forerunner of a new generation of German ethnologists who have begun to emerge out of the fascist wasteland. Fascist propaganda was, of course, a deformation of ethnology (racism, ersatz-gemeinschaft metaphysics, falsification of folk history, and so on). The hoped for recovery of German ethnology demanded that the discipline be cauterized of these infections, and that ethnology be reconnected with the great German enlightenment tradition, represented by Herder and Foster. It is probably safe to say that this has not yet been achieved in the German academy. The false appeal of the fascists to national consciousness and socialist needs, and, moreover to an abreactive irrationality, (when Nazism was in fact, the epitome of state capitalism) has not been entirely exorcised. Duerr’s opposition to civilization and to instrumental rationality, his apparent counter-cultural principles — no matter what their intention — are precisely the kind of German a-political metaphysic which functioned during the latter years of the Weimar Republic and had the consequence of supporting the gathering fascist assault on the cultures of Europe, beginning with Germany itself. A word of caution is therefore necessary while we await the political denouement — or at least assimilation — of Duerr’s work. We have reason to recall that reactionary and radical assaults on civilization may appear to converge phenomenologically at a particular moment — but it is the historical depth, the systematic understanding of exploitation, the political consequences of the opposition to instrumental rationality along with the demystification of the state — which divides the marxist tradition from the fascist elitism and debased metaphysics that traduced the German people in the past.

The response to Traumzeit (Dreamtime) has been impressive. The book has gone through five printings within three years and has been read by a large number of non-ethnologists. Thus, this book has made anthropological thinking accessible not only to the small clan of anthropologists but also to a wide range of interested readers from various backgrounds. The spiritual heritage of Duerr is a mixture of Wittgenstein’s mysticism and the pragmatic scepticism of Feyerabend. He combines a critique of the theoretical

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rationalists with Castaneda's form of ethnological inquiry and the search for the "other part of reality." Duerr advocates the position in Traumzeit that it is only possible to recognize the truth if we break through our limitations of scientific rationality. The experiencing of the wild and of the irrational — and here he goes further than in Ni Dieu — Ni Maitre — is a necessary condition for an understanding of ourselves and of our own form of life-culture. In order to be tamed, in order to discover what has been suppressed by civilization, one has to leave the normal way of life and discover the "other part of reality." Only the ethnologist who experiences the two aspects of the world, the rational as well as the irrational, will be able to perceive and consequently to overcome that barrier which separates savagery from civilization.

Traumzeit begins with a description of what Duerr refers to as "wildness" (or savagery), wildness which has to be seen in contrast to tameness: witches and elves are flying through the air, and an army of raging men is robbing and plundering; women throw away their "caps," the symbol of their suppression and dance half nude, with let down hair, in ecstatic wildness; organizations of women in spinning-rooms threaten to catch and castrate men (p. 47).

This wildness — à la Duerr — can be seen as an expression for the time "between times," whereby "between the times, means a crisis in the order of things. Normality is repealed, more clearly, order and chaos are no longer opposed to each other. In times of crisis . . . people die and swarm as ghosts and spirits to assist in the reanimation of nature, of which they are a part" (p. 51) [1]. The borders between order and chaos, wild and tamed, are dissolved either through transformation of humans into animals or role reversals. "The new world makes its appearance. Children die in the wildness in order to be born as adults in the new order" (italics mine). With the dissolution of the border between wildness and civilization, the consciousness of this border disappears and with it the reality of the border itself. The existing ambivalence is still recognisable in the image of the wild, i.e., the savage is already destructive but still recognised as fruitful (p. 51). Duerr is here less concerned with role reversals as an expression of social conflict and political change than with the more general expression of the crisis of man himself, who loses his everyday image and becomes part of the other reality "outside of time and the existing order." Only through experiencing the wild, only through being "outside of the order," can the new order be recognised and supported. In order to understand ourselves and our lives we have first to understand the other: one has to leave the world in order to recognize it, one has to be wild in order to be tamed, one is able to live with all the senses only if one is prepared to die (p. 58). The borders to our own animal natures have to be dissolved. Thus, a werewolf is a human being who eradicates the border between civilization and wildness, who is able to breach the barrier that separates his own civilized being from his wild being (p. 108).

The ethnologist's task is to become conscious of himself and his own form of life. This understanding can be reached through the experience of the "other part of reality." Here Duerr distinguishes between the "other reality" and the experience of "the other part of reality" (in contrast to Castaneda). The ethnologist then first has to leave this part of reality and his own society in order to gain consciousness of it. "What is for the Indian usual is for the ethnologist the strange form of life of the Indian" (p. 127).

However, for most ethnologists real understanding is not achieved in the sense of "Nachvollzug" (experienced after). Rather he incorporates the werewolf "into the