

## Letter from Ashland, Oregon Making Metaphysics Mainstream

By Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke

The magnificent, curly white head of hair of the speaker is reminiscent of the majestic periwig of an English Lord. However, Daniel Sheehan embodies the oppositional US thinking elite. The star lawyer studied in Harvard, successfully sued the government in a test case to compel them to hand over the Pentagon papers, fought for the initiation of country-wide environmental laws and was active as a prominent strategist of the Democratic Party in the recent presidential election campaign. His lecture this evening is about the (to date hidden) entanglement of "quantum physics and modern political theory". Right at the beginning Sheehan mentions in passing - apparently astonishing only for the German listener - the obviousness of extraterrestrial intelligence. According to the eloquent constitutional lawyer, those who even today deny the reality of UFO contacts display the same obstinate ignorance with which the government of George Bush disputes global warming.

An audience of more than 200 people in the auditorium of the small regional university - family men, senior citizens, hippie-style young men and a large number of women of all age groups, dressed from multi-colored to tasteful - listen to the speaker with evident enthusiasm. He ends his speech with a recent incident at Harvard. During the leave-taking of the highly esteemed rector, he was asked which idea, from all the ones he had come across during his long career, he considered the most important. The rector responded with the allusion of a recently discovered new gene that could be the biological equivalent of the present transformation towards a wider and more intuitive consciousness.

Where exactly are we? Well, it is a normal Tuesday evening in the small town of Ashland in the small northwest US state of Oregon. *Culture-creative present* on the west coast of the United States, well-known for its open-mindedness for all that is new.

Ashland has approx. 22,000 inhabitants. The town, located between pine-lined hill ranges and a few snow-covered volcanic peaks, is known nationwide for its excellent Shakespeare theatre. Its program attracts approximately 300,000 visitors to the town every year. The town can maintain itself from it. A large number of resident innovative entrepreneurs and researchers, spiritual healers, experimental artists, ecological institutions and local-political alternative initiatives also profit from the stream of culture seekers and visitors. Approximately 7000 to 8000 Ashlanders belong to the culture-creative minority. Seen from this perspective, the town is almost a perfect example of the proportional distribution of the new and as yet largely unrecognized section of the population. However, it can hardly be overlooked anymore how much this committed minority contributes in a crucial way to the town's political-cultural-spiritual field. It also contributes to the unspoken part of the town's attraction and dynamics. Whereas it is not without reason to suppose that these attributes have a tradition here, this region was considered by the American Indians, who lived here formerly, as a sought after place of healing power.

The "Metaphysical Library" had invited Daniel Sheehan for a lecture at the university of the small town - which is, incidentally, the only university in America with its own "American Indian chair". The library, which is equipped with a seminar room and modern media, is situated at the town center. Its events are advertised through bumper stickers, such as "Making Metaphysics Mainstream" and "Unseen Forces". The latter deals in alternative-local political topics, such as esoteric and (according to German concepts), border-science fields. In addition, the blackboard of the regular municipal library is strewn with entries, which would prompt many public-sector employees in this country to immediately notify the nearest sect counseling center.

Well, Ashland is not quite the same as America. That still consists in large parts of traditional to modern Bus(c)h country. With or without George W. However Ashland is a growing part of the New World. It stands, in the truest sense of the word, for *creative* growth of a new, more holistic *culture*. It stands for an engagement and experiment that is little tested in Germany, but extraordinarily fruitful for the concurrent and reciprocal co-existence of undogmatic-spiritual practices and politics, ecology, culture and, not least, economics.

It is to a large extent the same target group, which is committed to long-term eco-initiatives and engages itself spontaneously in the election campaign in Ashland; those who inform themselves in universities such as the "Metaphysical Library" likewise (!) about innovative approaches and developments and those who - again according to the German yardstick - buy biological and "fair

trade" foodstuff and household goods from food cooperatives having a very large assortment and which are at the same time managed in an extraordinarily heartfelt manner.

*Transformation* is the motto, under which political, ecological, economic and spiritual interests merge in a culture-creative way. Whereby not (only) the legendary American belief in progress prevails but a type of *qualitative quantum leap* in consciousness and lifestyle comes into sight. Precisely this correlation was targeted by Daniel Sheehan also with the topic of his lecture.

The writings on the banners of the nationwide movement of the ecologically-radically and at the same time spiritually open *bioneers*, as to how the model of a new and holistic community activation finds its way along the west coast and why American presidential candidates publicly refer to Sri Aurobindo, will be reported in further *Letters from Ashland*.