

## **Introduction**

### **Challenging Norms and Representing Diversity**

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We all find ourselves in trying times these days, in the middle of a global pandemic, and with a changing political landscape that rather than drawing us together in the promise of globalization, has resulted in an ever more polarized society. Even with a common threat, the imagined promise of a coming together often found in utopian and dystopian discourses alike, has not materialized. Rather, we are faced with increasing diversity, nationalism, and global divides between regions that have and those that do not. Nations have divided over religion and access to increasingly scarce resources, the Global North and South debate the efficacy of providing vaccines and to whom they should be first distributed. The world has debated individual responsibility and freedom, often rejecting or even Othering those with whom they disagree. This increasing tension has only exacerbated an already fertile landscape for considering the concept of Otherness, the discourses that contribute to its construction, and the processes by which people are Othered, use and even weaponize Otherness, and the consequences of those actions.

As political tensions run high, and violence erupts in hotspots across the globe – from the farmer’s strikes in India, to climate protests in major cities, the gender and racial concerns that led to the #metoo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, to direct violent assaults on governmental institutions – there have also been calls to return to a sense of normalcy, a sense of decorum. There have been calls to return to the common values, to universal constructions of polite discourse, rational debate, and unity. In the US, for example, there has been a look back to its origins, to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, as expressing common guiding principles to which all men can participate. Yet, as James Boyd White notes, in considering the opening line of the Declaration ‘When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people,’ the voice presented “is not a person’s voice, not even that of a committee, but the ‘unanimous’ voice of the ‘thirteen united States’ and of their ‘people’” (232). In framing the Declaration as expressing the will of all Americans, Jefferson helped to forge an American identity, but at the same time his discourse covered over the diversity of the people for whom he purported to speak. As Angela Harris notes, “Despite its claims, however, this voice does not speak for everyone, but for a political fraction trying to constitute itself as a unit of many disparate voices; its power lasts only as long as the contradictory voices remain silenced” (1990, 253). This construction does not create an American identity that is all-inclusive, a ‘We the People’ that includes all of those who have the right to claim to be American. Rather it constructs a particular set of Americans and normalizes the notion that this subset of a population is the norm by which others should be judged – and rejected. It allows for that rejected population to be Othered should they be, by whatever shifting criteria, not constitutive of that norm.

This normalizing influence, rather than returning a debate back to an unbiased, universally rational platform, actually serves to reinforce a status quo which often supports the very dynamics which led to the increased tension.

Exploring the concept of Otherness, and those situations in which othering happens, allows us to consider the underpinnings of that supposed normalcy, and through consideration of the multiple experiences of those present, and in confrontation with the idea of the Other, change our collective discourse. The set of papers found in this issue of *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, all work, in their various cases and fields, to challenge this sense of normalizing discourse.

In our first issue in 2010, Maria Beville wrote that “Otherness is in many ways, a slippery and difficult term. A contradiction is apparent whereby the very process of naming the other, whether in specific or generalized terms, is bound by the simultaneous disappearance of the concept.” That contradiction is brought to the fore when considering the operation of Otherness, in its ability to both construct the ‘same’ and be separated or rejected from it. The naming of the Other can demystify, allowing the Other to take a place within representation, but by that same operation it is no longer Other. It becomes known. That represents an inviting into the discourse, and reflects an ethical framework. Several of the chapters in this issue draw on ethical discourse, primarily from Levinas.

Levinas’ description of the encounter with the face of the Other, the face that demands consideration even before identification or recognition, before ascertaining the intentions of this entity, challenges the notions of tribalism and an inherent sense of the protection of the same. The Other, in its Otherness, produces an ethical obligation, a demand of compassion, protection, and a restriction on the actions of them faced with this Other. With this confrontation, one is not free to act, to assert its will, without restraint. One is now embedded in a community, one must give up an assumption of dominance and superiority – following this ethical stance.

In *On Cosmopolitanism*, Derrida, drawing on medieval tradition in France, develops this stance in his concept of hospitality. In articulating what he calls “*the* Great Law of Hospitality – an unconditional Law, both singular and universal, which ordered that the borders be open to each and every one, to every other, to all

who might come, without question or without even having to identify who they are or whence they came” Derrida presents this Levinasian ethical stance as a Law, binding the actions of the hosts (18). This stance has broad implications, not only for migration and the flow of capital, but on climate change, human rights, and intercultural communication.

Not everyone, historically or even in these times of global pandemic, agrees with this open stance. As Susan Yi Sencindiver, Marie Lauritzen and Maria Beville argue in *Otherness: A Multilateral Perspective* “encounters with strangers often breed suspicion, hostile mistrust and denigration” just as “it can also result in the recognition of the open arms of hospitality – representing the most elementary of ethical self-other relations” (21). Those uses of Otherness also need to be explored, and the challenges to norms by people who seek to divide and Other, as well as seek to understand and open arms, is equally present in the current issue.

Alain Badiou argues that those ethical stances, as articulated by Levinas and Derrida, ultimately lie in religious principles, embedded in a particular ethical discourse, and thus not having the possibility to appeal universally. Postmodern scholars, like Lyotard and Derrida, have long sought to understand the underpinning assumptions of our discourse, the mechanisms that allow for us to treat something as universal, as a norm, as binding upon all people. Absent a universal appellant, it becomes incumbent on a consensus to support our actions and discourse, morals rather than ethics, which, like legal discourse, are built on explicit notions, like laws, adhered to by a consensus. Yet, even that is challenged, and thus can be best understood by considering the operations of Otherness. As Maria Beville notes, “whether a relationship defined by fear, hostility and struggles for domination, or by independence, representation and hospitality, polarity in the lexis of otherness consistently arises” (2010).

The invocations of fear, and assignation of our anxieties of precarity, loss of identity, or changing circumstances (personal, political, environmental), to an

Other, is also present in a number of the articles in this current issue. Ian Hanley-Lopez defines “a ‘race’ as a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry. I argue that race must be understood as a *sui generis* social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics” (193). That social construction, as he details, is fluid, as our own social structures often shift, and race is not the only identity marker that is fluid in this fashion. We have seen shifting definitions of belonging along lines of citizenship, class, gender, queer, and other visual and non-visual cues – with consequences often rooted in the aspiration or maintenance of power and privilege.

This power and privilege is not limited to political action – in its etymological roots dealing with the city and the population, but also speaks to how we treat our environment as well. The aesthetic considerations of some of the papers, and the appeal to the very structures that we use to organize ourselves and our thinking, speak more broadly than human social conventions. Furthermore, there is also a call to incorporate our frame to consider the situation of non-human animals, questioning the too common convention of othering those that cannot speak for themselves, in a language that we, anthropocentrically, consider the only means of communication. In a contribution to *Otherness: A Multilateral Perspective*, Svend Erik Larsen considers the possibility of narrating the Other, noting that in times of globalization, “we can no longer narrate the other as *Other* – in the heart of darkness, or dress the other up as the gods, demons and monsters of antiquity in order to position it in a particular place with a clear identity. It is embedded in our everyday surroundings, a fact that is enhanced in the multicultural setting of globalized cultures” (202). This spatial consideration, noting that Otherness is within society and not only an appeal to an outside or distant form, is

also found throughout this issue. Whether considering the house, or the battlefield, the city or a dining table, notions of Otherness pervade our discourse.

Consideration of the non-human animal are not distant from other concerns, they function as part and parcel of the discourse and rhetoric of Otherness. Migrants are not only presented as undesirable on economic grounds, but are associated with other elements we are happy to exclude from society – whether that is as criminals or, using the metaphorical association, predators – both human and non-human. As Sune Borkfelt notes, in that same volume, “human perceptions of non-human animals, and also the question of how our representations of non-humans affect our perceptions, warrant further discussion not just because these perceptions determine our treatment of non-human animals. They can also influence our perceptions, and thus ultimately our othering, of some human groups, which we may somehow associate with those non-human animals or with the places where these animals live” (139). In discussing these issues, and making them present, we hope to challenge the naturalness of these frames, the norms upon which they rely, and the universal appeal they make. As we can see, it is the rhetoric of Otherness, which is often invoked to support exclusion, demonization, and abjection, which is the inverse of the ethical obligation to which Derrida and Levinas aspire, the frame of responsibility.

The issue begins with these ethical questions. **J.A. Bernstein** opens the issue with an insightful article that interrogates the human/animal divide after the advent of Modernism. **Where “Beasts’ Sprits Wail”: Rosenberg, Sassoon, and the Emergence of Animal Philosophy** challenges the naturalness of the use of a human/animal divide, based on a perceived or constructed ontological or cosmological divide. Rather, he contends that it is an ethical divide in how we treat those that share characteristics with humans, such as a common mortality, that is salient when considering our actions and assumptions. In this he draws on *Animal Philosophy* stating that “It is not reason that makes humans human, according to

Levinas, but his relationship with the Other” (Atterton 2012, 54). This is demonstrated through a careful analysis of the poets of World War I, notably Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon, and their treatment of the animals found in the war. These readings destabilize the human/animal divide by denying anthropocentric interpretations, following Darwin and Salt among others, and presenting the commonalities found in their wartime experiences. The cruelty of the war challenges not only the efficacy of war in solving political problems, but highlight the necessity of ethical considerations, not only looking back to the Great War, but forward in our own time’s consideration of animal rights and our own ethical framework in dealing with Otherness.

**Alice Borrego** also draws on Levinasian ethics in her consideration of State-Of-The-Nation novels. Drawing on Ricouer’s notion of responsibility, in its historical and political dimensions, Borrego connects this to a responsibility to the Other in its ‘unabsorbable alterity’ (Levinas...). **The Collapse of Responsibility: Staging Fragmented Communities in State-of-the-Nation Novels** questions the idea that responsibility, as a universal (or normative) framework can exist in a post-WWII society fraught with fragmentation. Through a careful reading of the evolution of the state-of-the-nation novels, she presents the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion, which lead to the ‘in-betweenness of the fragile,’ positioned as an outcast that needs to be cared for. The chronological presentation then provides a look at more contemporary contributors to the genre, which showcase the individual cut loose from the underpinnings of a normative sense of responsibility and community, exposing the inability of the nation to engage and answer the demands of the fragile.

Moving from a philosophically or ethical approach to an esthetic one, **Veruska Cantelli** considers the position of people with lives on the margins of society as represented in the prose works of Tomioka Taeko. Cantelli’s exploration in **The Dance of Bones: Tomioka Taeko’s Stage of Reprobates** uses the esthetic

elements of Taeko's prose in presenting the themes of a dislocation of knowledge and its instantiation outside of normative structures. Removed from the implicit meaning-making of society, as well as from traditional narrative tools in placing the characters, the considered novels exemplify both the Otherness and the height of Taeko's prose. In placing these novels into dialogue with other constructions of identity, or ways of framing social structures, Cantelli exposes the challenges of Taeko use of language and its ability to showcase rather than explain. This Cantelli connects with feminism and the writer's collective ('gumi'), which are structured outside the reproductive expectations of Japanese patriarchy, and this dislocation of knowledge, which Cantelli emphasizes, is reflected in the rejection of norms and the embracing of an outside or Othered status.

Continuing the theme of expressing Otherness through imagery, **Belkis González** considers how visual culture can be used in presenting the shifting value of kinship, relationships, and identity. In **Queer Kinship: "Exposed to the Other as a Skin is Exposed to What Wounds It"** González considers the art of Catherine Opie and its visual representations of kinship. In this, she highlights how such representations, situated by astute readings of the photography of Opie and its expressed contextual frameworks, not only represent but also present and make visible marginalized queer identities. González then situates her readings of Opie's own work in comparison to the film *The Kids are all Right*, providing additional contested readings of family through visual media of both the photograph and the visual aspects of the film spaces. The consideration of collective identities outside the normalized frame of society connects this piece to Cantelli's, and González further draws on a Levinasian framework in presenting the self/Other liminality of Opie's photography.

**Marshall Lewis Johnson** continues with a reading of the portrayal of a visual image, as he frames the construction of the iconic Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde. **"All art is quite useless": The Gothic Doubling of the Portrait in Oscar**



Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* uses the notion of 'circumnarration' to (re)read this well-studied novel in a new light. Johnson juxtaposes the 'monstrousness' of Dorian's homosexuality as depicted (visually) and portrayed (novelistically) with the 'eternal beauty' as expressed at the end of the novel. The image, and his homosexuality, is thus both liminal and Other, which also reflects Dorian's own relationships with these Othered aspects of his identity – as a function of Victorian social norms. Johnson's use of Gothic doubling, or the splitting of the self, shows how Dorian's abjection of parts of himself "acts as a significant indication of the limitations of Victorian social mores along with the far more lasting power of art." Contrasted with the article by González, where Opie uses the perception of her own Otherness to challenge her exclusion from normative frames of family, here Dorian's own abjection of parts of himself is what leads to his self-acceptance of his socially and legally unacceptable (at the time) identity.

Shifting and uncertain identification is also a feature of **Siobhan Lyons** consideration of the Nietzschean notion of the *Übermensch*. **Unmasking the Übermensch: The Evolution of Nietzsche's Overman from David Bowie to Westworld** charts the interpretations and uses of the concept in a variety of settings, after a detailed consideration of the uncertain framings and definitions of the concept. *Übermensch* is variously read as transcending humanity and its anthropocentric goals, in both a posthuman and transhuman framework. Furthermore, Lyons considers the notion of the human as overcome by the *Übermensch*. Each of these frames lie on the liminal nature of the signification associated, whether that falls along the moral lines of good and evil, or the traditional notions of self and Other, Lyons challenges these traditional binaries placing other forms of relationality in focus. This liminal figure is then applied in pop cultural contexts, notably considering the musical framings of David Bowie, or the conceptual television series *Westworld*, especially those contexts in which

humanities own base assumptions are challenged in interesting and meaningful ways, as highlighted by Lyons' analysis.

**Rachel Narozniak** also considers shifting definitions in her consideration of the policies of Giuliani's stint as mayor of New York. **The Sex That Didn't Matter: Structural Violence in the Giuliani Administration's Redistricting of New York City** presents the framing of disability and difference in New York City's rezoning of the Time Square area. Drawing on both disability studies and historical accounts of the Samuel Delany, Narozniak shows how The 42<sup>nd</sup> St. Development project Othered the same-sex population which once frequented the area and how that project determined that they were "bodies that did not matter" as they were bodies that did not conform to the socially imposed norms concomitant with the economic 'development' of the area. Narozniak uses the concept of structural violence, and a social model of disability, to draw attention to what is lost when normative definitions are presented rhetorically and treated legally as universal ideals, Othering a population that doesn't conform and through that action of Otherness is displaced. The construction of the same-sex patrons of Times Square before the rezoning as Other allowed the Giuliani administration to displace them, demonstrating a shifting and politically motivated use of Othering in Narozniak's important spatial and structural analysis.

Following on the theme of the rhetorical use of Otherness in constructing a system, **Eva Pallesen** considers how the concept of organization and management studies is framed through a historical use of Othering. Her analysis in **Organization, seduction and the othered senses: The erotic ear and the poisonous tongue** considers how aspects of the senses, and the priority given in particular to the visual, has reduced our understanding and led to a splitting of bodily concepts. In readings of literary, philosophical and musical texts, Pallesen argues for the reincorporation of the auditory and taste, providing for a reconciliation of the Otherness created as a legacy of the scientific reliance on

Cartesian concepts. Pallesen argues for, using a Levinasian ethical framework, an openness to the Other in an organizational context, and a centring of the corporeal encounter, arguing for the body not only as a site of research but as an active tool, especially in the organizational scholarship of Othered senses.

A similar call to a shift in the ethics around Othering, especially as framed in a scientific context, can be found in our last article by **Sara Schotland**. In **Disfigured, Neanderthal, and Thoroughly Alien” Exploitation of the Other in Asimov’s “Ugly Little Boy”** she considers the short story by Isaac Asimov, which through time travel and science fictional frames, allows Schotland to consider the notions of stigma, disability and Otherness in a discussion of the Neanderthal boy, Timmie. In the story, Timmie is not recognized as fully human, and thus is not subject to the same ethical framework as other humans would be. This consideration of the liminal nature of our own identity construction, and how his physical appearance, background, and ‘alienness’ are used to justify his differential treatment. Schotland argues for a care ethics framework which treats all others as deserving of our care and not limiting our ethical responsibility to those that share certain (ever shifting) characteristics with the self-same. She then uses this to further discuss real-life othering of ‘aliens’ in the form of migrant populations, who deserve a similar notion of care. This empathetic framework, she argues, should be applied regardless of Timmie’s liminal positioning, as man/ape, human/alien, or present/past. This ties both Bernstein’s consideration of the human/animal liminality using Levinasian considerations and the notion of a shifting frame of Othering using visual considerations, all within notions of Otherness.

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