

Introduction: Multiplicity of Methodologies

by Matthias Stephan

As we wrap up another tumultuous year, one in which we again face an increasing and increasingly global crisis, we find that we are again buffeted by the breadth and quality of scholarship around the topic of Otherness. In our inaugural issue, in 2009, which stemmed from a series of seminars on the topic at both Mary Immaculate College and Aarhus University, Maria Beville noted the “wide range of approaches to otherness” that this seminar series offered. *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, in the 15 issues we have published since, has only expanded on this diversity.

Those seminar series drew largely from fields in literary and cultural studies, considering the real-life impact of our discussions of alterity, and how Otherness plays out in discursive modes and the impact of those discussions on the public debate. Our general issues, much like the first issue, which has a focus on literary output, have over the years spread the notion of Otherness, and the fields from which we draw excellent scholarship. While we continue to interact with literature and culture, this increasingly includes various forms of media and social science approaches, and the range of texts (of all forms) that our contributors interact with

has broadened, from an early focus on British and American literature, to an increasingly global draw of not only subject matter but scholars as well.

Additionally, we have also been privileged enough to have guest editors for special issues on a range of themes and approaches: Historical Fiction and Historiography (2.1, 2011), Transcultural Studies (3.1, 2012), Philosophy (4.1, 2013), Performing Arts (5.1, 2016), Critical Animal Studies (5.2, 2016), Fandom and Celebrity Studies (6.1, 2018), Urban Studies (7.1, 2019), Representation of the Other/ La Représentation de l'Autre (7.2, 2019), and Shakespeare Studies (8.2 (2021). Through these special issues, we have learned from and considered a wealth of scholarship – and helped to expand the ways in which Otherness can be understood. There is no shortage of the use of Otherness, both to depict and describe the structural processes on which our societies were founded, and by which they continue to operate, as well as to continue to challenge these notions moving forward. We could not have anticipated, in our inaugural issue, how integral the studies of alterity would become, and we are both encouraged, and somewhat saddened, by how crucial we feel these approaches are still in 2021.

In this third issue of 2021 (after an absence in 2020) brings together six scholars from across the globe, and using the most diverse set of methodologies that we have presented in *Otherness: Essays and Studies*. This is certainly true for a single issue, and, depending on exactly which method one studies the issue, likely true for the entirety of the journal's history. The issues draws from studies of poetry – classical Roman, British, Indian, Irish and Japanese – to studies of sociology, uses of ethnography in both documentary film and sexual assault studies, and linguistic studies of othering of non-native speakers.

The issue opens with **Sukanya Dasgupta**'s consideration of the critical potential of rereading of classical texts, specifically focusing on the lesser considered *Heroides* by Ovid. In presenting the ways in which both the 16th century British poet Michael Drayton and the 19th century Bengali poet

Madhusudan Dutt engage with the Ovidian source material, she is able to draw out the “immense generic possibilities of the *Heroides*, and how this in turn became a means to resist literary and political authority.” She does this by focusing on the epistolary elements of each newly produced text, and how it engages with the generic modes and critical potential of this interaction between the older ‘original’ and each of the newer texts cultural and historical present, refracting the classical “to suit their own age and time and assert themselves as quintessentially “renaissance” in spirit.”

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh follows this with a different take on the interaction between cultures through poetry. While Dasgupta presents contrasting readings of past texts, Ní Éigeartaigh considers the intersecting influences on the poetic work of Northern Irish poet Sinéad Morrissey in her Japanese sequence. Morrissey spent two years in Japan, producing poetry throughout and published upon her return to Belfast. The article considers the evolution of Morrissey’s poetry, and use of form, as her engagement with the language, poetry, and especially culture of Japan grows – with the more understanding creating the largest different in Morrissey’s output. Through a combination of close reading of Morrissey’ poetry and important theoretical input, Ní Éigeartaigh is able to present an openness to the other, through an engagement with the foreign culture and ability to absorb and engage – even with a culture that would remain, in some aspects, “impenetrable to the outsider.” The combination produces an insightful consideration of the limits of intercultural understanding, and the importance of openness with those considered Other.

Continuing with an engagement with Japan, but shifting methodological focus dramatically, **Naomi Berman** and **Flavio Rizzo** consider the cultural phenomenon of the *hikikomori*, “a term used to describe a form of extended social withdrawal.” This notion historically has a connection to Japan, though the work by Berman and Rizzo challenge the notion that this concept is culturally

determined or should be read as essentially a Japanese phenomenon. Additionally, they challenge the notion that such behavior, especially in the twenty-first century, should be considered, as is often the case, pathological – and should rather be considered as a social expression. Through a psychological and cultural analysis, they argue for a reframing of people for which this designation is appropriate, and encourage a consideration of how pathology and Otherness have been and continue to be used to police boundaries of social difference, rather than identification of either true mental illness or behavior dangerous to an individual. They, from their own different methodological backgrounds, argue for “us to re-examine boundariness in contemporary social life, particularly an ostensible artificial distinction between inside and outside, thus reframing the social location of hikikomori in the public imaginary.”

M. Emilia Barbosa takes us across the globe, from the isolate citizens of Japan, to the traditional tortilla makers of Indigenous Guatemala. This process, with its long and labor-intensive process, is not only a mode of food production, but transmission of culture, and one which Barbosa argues engages with “the complex interplay of power and representation within national identity.” Using notions from postcolonial and Indigenous studies, Barbosa considers the documentary film *Lix cua rahro* (to use the Maya term) and the performance of Sandra Monterosso – a film which engages with the traditional *tortillera*, but has important considerations of cultural appropriation, representation, and authenticity. Barbosa’s detailed analysis interrogates the essentializing stereotypes of Indigenous people, and especially domestic workers and women, as fitting into stereotypes and not allowing them the space or possibility of articulating their own identity, nor challenging these hegemonic norms. By drawing on postcolonial discourse, and considering the auto-ethnographic methods of Monterosso, Barbosa is able to see the intersections between self-expression, Occidentalism, anthropology and testimonial. She argues that “[a]uto-ethnography as

carnavalesque practice is a powerful way of destabilizing authority that often leads to rethinking identity” and through her article brings attention to Monterosso’s performance and its possibility to allow indigenous Guatemalan people to choose their own fate and express their agency.

Lynsay Hodges also draws on the autoethnographic, though uses that as a different methodological expression than that often used in postcolonial theory. Hodges uses what they deem “phenomenological autoethnography” in their reconsideration of the language used to describe and frame sexual assault. As they describe, their methodology allows them to both claim legitimacy and outline the basis for their continued engagement with autoethnographic description of past experiences, documented by journals and creative expression. Using that as a basis, Hodges places their experiences in conversation the concepts of the abject and the monstrous, using those Othering devices to understand their own embodied experiences and driving their methodological motivations in relaying the results to a larger audience. As they argue, “monsters exist through the Self’s construction of itself, in which its vulnerability and other perceived ‘negative’ characteristics are projected onto the Other.” Yet, in considerations of sexual assault, the ‘raped subject’ is often both subject and abject. Their presentation provides explanatory material for the process undergone by those experiencing trauma that abject their own selves, and the processes that one undergoes in so doing. As their title suggests, the language that one uses in describing embodied experiences is vitally important.

The final paper in this issue also focuses on the use of language. **Anna Bothe Jespersen** and **Míša Hejná** use sociolinguistic analysis to consider the role of immigrant second language speakers of Danish, and hypothesize that they are cast as “the linguistic *other* on the margins of the standard/non-standard dynamic.” By using surveys of native Danes and immigrants, they consider the role of language switching and its perception by both groups with regards to its frequency and

affective meaning. Their research highlights the awareness of both groups of language switching (from Danish to a global English), and the potential for this to be taken as a sign of otherness. As they note, “Not speaking “perfect Danish” – a frequently mentioned phrase in both groups – thus seems to index out-group membership: you do not speak like us, you are not like us.” While their work remains unable to ascertain a conscious strategy among native Danes, their analysis provides a basis for further research, and insights into the potential for othering in standard language practices among native speakers.

As one can see, there is a great breadth of methodological difference among the articles in this issue of *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, which, I argue, attests to the importance of using the lens of Otherness as insight into an array of cultural, linguistic and social phenomena. As the world becomes increasingly global, and our crises become shared among a greater percentage of the world’s population, Otherness is an essential means of ensuring that all are considered and that we don’t rush into ‘solutions’ that leave some, if not most, behind.

Bibliography

Beville, Maria. 2010. “Introduction.” *Otherness: Essays and Studies* 1.1.