INTRODUCTION

Facets of Otherness and Affirmation of the Self

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Ever since the early modern period, the identity of the individual has undergone a process of consolidation in societal, and above all national and international, contexts. Registration, tax records and a growing body of identification documents testify to the existence of the individual. In contrast, the *sans papiers*, illegal immigrants who in recent decades have roamed through the industrial nations, live in a state of non-existence that pushes them to the fringes of society and transforms them into people without a fixed identity, who live in the interstices between societies. The administrative registration of the individual plays an important role in the development of the modern concept of identity.[1] *Sans papiers* are therefore not just border crossers; they are also Others, and to a greater extent and in a different way than the document-bearing members of various ethnicities, nations and languages who sit in airport waiting areas. While this latter group of 'globalised' border crossers—whose existence is documented in the form of valid papers, a sign of their international status—recognise each other in a globalised world, the *sans papiers* are proscribed by every society and largely go unnoticed. Because they do not exist, they do not even qualify for the status of 'subalterns' in their respective societies. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others have shown, subalterns as a group play a central role in the construction of identity within globalised societies, especially those with a neoliberal orientation.[2] Indeed, this group's role exposes the pronouncements of leftists in the 1970s, who described the "working class" as an oppressed social group, as proclamations of intellectual self-assertion: "…representing them [subalterns], the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent."[3] The trap that Spivak points to here—namely, that intellectual engagement with subalterns always represents a form of oppressing the Other or the subaltern, thereby rendering "… the intellectual … complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow"—seems unavoidable.[4] The understanding that the Other is in some way related to the

Self—whether as the mirror-image of the Self as the total Other; as the moral, economic or however constituted improvement on the Self; as something worth striving for; or, in contrast, the complete Other—seems to be part of the experiences that belong to the process of self-perception. Jacques Lacan described this irresolvable interplay between mirroring oneself in the Other, the experience of difference, and the longing for fusion as both a necessary process of identity construction and an experience inherent in any speech act.[5] In this context, the Other, as Julia Kristeva emphasises, is everywhere. The Other is within us, and—as Kristeva argues based on Paul's letters in the New Testament—within this Other there is always an inner disruption that attempts to overcome itself by means of merging (here with Christ).[6]

Merging, mirroring and delimitation vis-à-vis the Other—in me, in you; these seem to be experiences that genuinely belong to the construct of our own personality. This raises the question of how close we can get to viewing Others in societies that, from our modern vantage point, are Others for us—namely, those of the medieval or early modern period—without falling into exactly the same trap. This question is inevitable and unavoidable, yet our imagination of the 'medieval' or 'early modern' period is shaped by these strategies of distance, assimilation and the desire for mimesis. Our awareness of the limited nature of our cognitive abilities, and of our fundamental complicity in the master narratives of the 'medieval' and the 'early modern' periods, have led us to assemble in this volume micro-studies that seek to avoid making essentialist claims. These essays are based on presentations at a conference held in the summer of 2010 under the auspices of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows" at the University of Heidelberg. In no way did the conference or does this volume pretend to put forth a history of developments in the interaction with the Other; instead, we have sought to assemble different discourses

on the Other. These studies intentionally do not follow a common theme, privileging instead explicitly contrasting exegeses of stereotypes, the intersections between them and their corrective adjustments in different contexts. Again and again, the essays confirm the fluid relationship between the Other and the Self in the medieval period,[7] a relationship that goes hand in hand with an intensive discourse about the identity of the Self.

One of the major themes in visual art, and above all in literature, is the difficulty associated with ascertaining, recognising or even losing the identity of the Self. Willehalm's wife does not recognise him because he wears 'heathen' armour;[8] brothers fight each other because they do not recognise each other when one of them obviously—like Feirefiz—has a different skin colour. But Parzival does not even acknowledge Iter as a knight. From his still foolish perspective and false identity, Parzival desires Iter's armour and kills him for the sake of this glittering prize.[9] All of these examples introduce the discourse of identity, which speaks not only to a symbiotic synthesis with the Other, but also to a topical demarcation caused by a lack of experience. The confrontation with the Other—as is clear in *Parzival*—is an experience central to the formation of a (complete) identity for the Self; this is what the hero seeks in the course of *aventiure*.[10] Even for a figure such as Apollonius, hero of the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century novel *Apollonius von Tyrland*, who navigates all dangers without error or blame, these boundaries remain symbiotic; yet the relationship he has with Milgot, a monstrous being that worships him, could not be any closer.[11] This symbiosis with the Other becomes even clearer in the episode of his relationship with the black Queen Palmina (VV 14320). In an act of revenge, Diomena, the Lady of the Golden Valley of Chrysa, sends Apollonius a magic ring that is supposed to make him as black as his beloved. When he puts the ring on, of course, he does not turn black; instead, he loses the illusion of the eternally youthful golden body that Diomena had given him. Apollonius mutates into an old man with an unkempt beard and pallid complexion, the man that he has become in the course of his long *aventiure* journey, merely losing the beauty that he had been led to believe was his: "Now the colour of this foolery is gone, but I prefer that I look like everyone else, in accordance with my age, rather than being a man with an artificially different colour."[12] If the discourse here focuses on the agreement of physical appearance and identity, or the illusory conclusions that can result from using

physical appearance to define the Self, then the discourse on self-knowledge is reified in the magical pillar. This enchanted column is supposed to give the ideal, truthful person insight into his own inner Self, into the future and the past; none of the knights are granted this vision (VV 12660). True self-perception is therefore only possible for the truthful person, remaining an encounter with a Self that must founder, not least on the manifold identity of the human subject.

Most of the contributions in this volume also revolve around the theme of constructing identity by means of viewing the Other. The authors introduce various aspects of this process on the basis of different source materials. Literary images—Boccaccio, Jean Mandeville, Isidore of Seville, the *Roman de Mahomet*—and visual representations—miniatures from thirteenth-century Palestine and Syria and fourteenth- and fifteenth-century France, and prints, sculptures and paintings from Siam dating from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—range across familiar territory in this thematic complex. The inclusion of an 'ethnographic' work, however, such as Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini's tract, *De Europa*, delivers surprising results. A study focusing on the realia of the renowned Palaiologian hat is equally extraordinary. Nearly all of the contributions weave together centuries' worth of well-known material with 'new', recently discovered knowledge about the Other. The mirror images of glorious Saracen warriors (Saurma-Jeltsch), respected Oriental academics (Eisenbeiß), or Byzantine and ancient regents (Kubiski) can also be transformed, without changing the formal repertoire, into the revolting, demonic Other, a character worthy of hate. In John Tolan's essay, these topoi are read against the grain. Boccaccio's "realistic" version[13] of the theme of the Saracen princess's exceptional moral and physical beauty and her Christian lover does not permit the lovers to become part of the Christian body. Boccaccio provides various examples in which the individual Muslim or Jew can become a moral exemplar for the Christian, while at the same time Islam or Judaism remains absolutely devilish; in doing so, Boccaccio casts a differentiated gaze on the Other as a topos that on one hand has a long tradition and on the other continues to develop, as in the epic novel of the same period.[14] The *Decameron* provides the impression of diverse images of the Other, which Tolan describes as a "…joyous paean to the diversity and complexity of Italian Mediterranean society, in all its richness and charm, in all its confusion and chaos."[15] The examples analysed here

run counter to received topoi and seem, with their relativisations, to comply with our expectations of a humanistic writer; in some other areas, however, Tolan's analysis contradicts the modern reader's expectations, unmasking them as part of a grand master narrative.

Nearly all of the essays confront the theme of borders and boundaries, between East and West as well as between the Self and the Other. Using the example of idolatry, Suzanne Conklin Akbari is able to identify a marker that is used to define both temporal and spatial distance. At the same time, her contribution reveals the degree to which the topic of idolatry represents one of those borders in which the Self is fully implicated. Idolatry became part of the history of Christianity via the Old Testament, which presented idolatry as an obstacle to the covenant with God, thereby constituting a watershed moment in the transition from the second to the third age in the cosmological order of the medieval period. Idolatry defines both temporal dimensions and space. The idolatry attributed to the Muslims dominates all of the areas that lie beyond the Christian world. The confrontation with the Other is therefore often used to define temporal and spatial structures. This also applies to the representations of the Other found in fourteenth-century Parisian manuscripts analysed by Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch. These documents unfurl a cultural geography that seems to revolve around the crown and its 'holy' genealogy with significant historical figures, inscribing these exemplary characters in their own parentage. Nancy Bisaha observes a similar amalgamation in her investigation of the image of the Ottomans in the humanist Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini's treatise, *De Europa*. The same Ottomans that on the one hand defined Europe's boundary to Asia are on the other hand so closely interwoven with the history of Europe and its individual monarchs that, although the partitioning and delimitation of geographical space is successful, the historical dimensions of this encounter become part of a European master narrative. This integration of the space and history of the Other into the definition of the Self is at its clearest in Joyce Kubiski's analysis of the Palaiologian hat. In this microstudy, Kubiski shows how two seemingly similar headgears worn by John VIII Palaeologus (1392–1448), which thanks to Pisanello's medallion experienced enormous circulation, became the epitome of Byzantine monarch hats in the West. The shapes and technologies of both of these headgears come from different sources, and over the course of their centuries-old history, they also experience

Arabic and Persian changes, again and again. Fascinated by the headpieces, artists following Pisanello proceed to use these not just for Byzantine sovereigns, but also for Ottoman and antique figures with both positive and negative connotations. A fashion imaginary, so to speak, develops out of this, representing a kind of fantastic Orientalism in the fifteenth century that is associated with other Eastern realia. Maurizio Peleggi, working on eighteenth-century Siamese painting, documents a special form of historical exoticism in which multiple strands of very different formal traditions are incorporated. The historicising costumes, gestures, and modes of behaviour of their European counterparts led Siamese artists to relegate Europeans to the outermost edges of the Siamese worldview.

None of the essays in this collection deal with an explicit discourse on race, although from the twelfth century onwards artists strove to define races visually, as Lucy-Anne Hunt shows in her contribution. Here, the focus is not necessarily on negative connotations, but on accuracy and differentiation, especially when it comes to representing, for example, Africans as opposed to Arabs in Mediterranean and Eastern Christian communities. The Nubian king—whose black skin colour would classify him in the medieval West as Other, if not a member of a barbarian people—brands his skin with the sign of the cross, identifying himself as a Christian and thereby as a member of the body of the Church. Had this volume's theme included the image of Jews, it would of course have also focused on an explicit negative discourse of race.[16] Ideas about the relationships between physical beauty and moral and religious righteousness, however, resonate both in the examples given by Boccaccio and in the visual representations discussed by Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch. The enemies of Christendom are presented as comparable to animals. But even in the most extreme form, that of the enemies of Hilary (Figure 1.1, p. 44), it is heretics within the Christian community, not Muslims or Jews, who are subjected to this anthropomorphic critique. Malice and evil are described in all of the images in terms of physical deviance, although these—like the Europeans in Siamese representations (Peleggi)—are frozen in obsolete poses, thereby facilitating in a certain way the neutralisation of a threat.

Religious discourse plays a consistently minor role in the examples discussed here. This is particularly significant in that it is not religious affiliation as such that is loaded with positive or negative implications, but rather the ways in which religion is practised. It is therefore precisely the

inconstancy of behaviour that constitutes one of the great dangers of the descriptions of the Self and the Other, as Felicitas Schmieder demonstrates in her analysis of the *Directorium ad passagium faciendum*. This text, composed in 1332, does not understand religious affiliation as an unshakeable value, but rather as an object of constant change and multiple transformations towards both good and evil. Morals, customs and rituals are therefore considered determining factors that characterise the individual in the practice of religion. In this context, certain practices such as idolatry, cannibalism and magic stand for absolute evil, regardless of religious affiliation.[17] If strangeness and familiarity, the Other and the Self, are as closely aligned as Schmieder's analysis suggests, then powerful images are required to excise and banish the dangers inherent in the Self.

All of the examples collected here therefore examine the shifting contexts in which the Other appears. Without exception, these essays reveal the profound connection between the perception of the Other and the construction of the Self. The 'relativistic' observation of the Other does not change this, as Boccaccio and Aeneas Silvio were well aware. Although boundaries and identities seem to be more strongly formed in their time, the continuing expansion of individual experience contributes to a new openness. Nevertheless, the connection of the Other to the Self remains, as before, comparably close. This is clearly noticeable in the contrast between generalisations about 'Islam' and the tolerance demonstrated towards individual Muslims (Tolan). In both images and texts, the authors seek to understand 'talking about the Other' in their respective contexts, thereby offering a wealth of contextualisations that could doubtlessly be expanded into much broader dimensions. What becomes clear in the course of this anthology, however, is that these contextualisations reveal conceptual models of judgement that possess certain similarities across time and space. The images and the texts express the degradation of the Other by means of physical deviance and insinuations about specific morals, customs and modes of behaviour. There is also a noticeable projection of negative values from the Self onto the Other. Yet what happens with the positively connoted, ostensibly exemplary qualities in which the Self is reflected or which are held up as a warning to the Self? Is it not precisely in the abundant exoticisms that an underlying, hidden critique of warrior-like qualities is expressed, which once again only serves to mirror the Self? Just as this volume itself could not escape the pitfalls of mirroring the Self in the Other. In view of the recent murders in Oslo, Norway, the meaning of an engagement with the Other, however epistemologically limited, again becomes clear: The characteristics attributed to the Other are precisely the ones to which the Self resorts when it lashes out.

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Notes

1   Valentin Groebner, *Der Schein der Person: Steckbrief, Ausweis und Kontrolle im Europa des Mittelalters* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004).

2   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. and with an introduction by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

3   Ibid., 275.

4   Ibid., 280.

5   Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 546.

6   Julia Kristeva, *Fremde sind wir uns selbst*, trans. Xenia Rajewsky, edition suhrkamp 1604 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 86–103, especially 90; for an English translation see Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Columbia University Press, 1991), 77–94.

7   Kristeva, *Fremde*, 100–103.

8   Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*, Book 2, VV 89,9–19; see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*, nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen, Middle High German text, translation, commentary, ed. Joachim Heinzle, Bibliothek des Mittelalters 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991).

9   Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, especially Book 15 for the combat between Parzival and Feirefiz; see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, rev. ed. and commentary Eberhard Nellmann after the ed. of Karl Lachmann, trans. Dieter Kühn, 2 vols. Bibliothek des Mittelalters 8, no. 1–2 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994).

10   Wlad Godzich, "The Further Possibility of Knowledge," foreword to Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi, Theory and history of literature 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), vii–xxi, especially xiii–xiv.

11   Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius von Tyrland*, VV 6636 ff.; see Heinrich von Neustadt, *'Apollonius von Tyrland' nach der Gothaer Handschrift, 'Gottes Zukunft' und 'Visio Philiberti' nach der Heidelberger Handschrift*, ed. Samuel Singer, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters 7 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906; reprint Dublin and Zurich, 1967).

12   Translation by Lee Holt; VV 14388: "Nun ist die Farbe der Gaukelei dahin, aber mir ist lieber, daß ich wie jeder andere Mensch aussehe und auch meinem Alter gemäß, als wenn ich ein Mannsbild von künstlich fremder Farbe wäre!"; see Heinrich

von Neustadt, *Leben und Abenteuer des großen Königs Apollonius von Tyrus zu Land und zur See: Ein Abenteuerroman von Heinrich von Neustadt verfaßt zu Wien um 1300 nach Gottes Geburt*, trans. with all miniatures from the Vienna manuscript C, annotated and commented by Helmut Birkhan (Bern et. al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 231–35, especially 232, and 409–10.

13 See John Tolan's contribution to this volume, p. 134–35.

14 Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the 'Chansons de Geste'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

15 See John Tolan's contribution to this volume, p. 139.

16 For Christian imaginations of Jews, see Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 95–155 with further references; for the discourse on race, see Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages, I: Race Studies, Modernity and the Middle Ages, II: Locations of Medieval Race," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 5 (2011): 336–38; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 116f.

17 David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially chap. 4 on "Rites of Evil: Constructions of Maleficent Religion and Ritual."