



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI TRENTO

Dipartimento di  
Lettere e Filosofia

## Doctoral Programme “Forms of cultural exchange and textuality”

### ON OTHERNESS

Graduate Conference  
Trento, 8-10 October 2025

### CALL FOR PAPERS

La catégorie de l’*Autre* est aussi originelle que la conscience elle-même.  
[...] Aucune collectivité ne se définit jamais comme Une  
sans immédiatement poser l’*Autre* en face de soi.  
– Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*

Otherness has always been a central concern in discussions surrounding identity, to which it is intrinsically linked. The concept defines that which is different and non-identical, thereby establishing the boundaries between the subject and the external world, the object, the non-self.

The notion of ‘difference’ proves essential in the delineation of ‘similarity’, which emerges through processes of social negotiation in relation to the Other (Mead, G.H. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press), as exemplified, for instance, by both Jewish and Greek cultures. The Old Testament testifies to the Jewish people’s need to assert their identity in order to differentiate themselves from the peoples with whom they had long shared their borders. However, despite Otherness—and, consequently, differentiation from the others—being a well-established practice among ancient civilisations (i.e. the construction of the Great Wall of China), the Greeks were the first to coin a term (*bàrbaros*) to designate the ethnical Other. Contrarily to the Greek identity, characterised by the *logos* (word, thought), the barbarian came to be defined as an entity lacking the fundamental trait of humanity, *àglossos* (Sophocles, *Trachiniae*) and was therefore relegated to a pre- or even non-human condition. Originally neutral in connotation, the term *bàrbaros* acquired a negative implication, the earliest testimony of which is Aeschylus’ *The Persians* (472 BCE). Within the play, the foreigner represents the enemy, the Other who intimidates and must be subdued in order to safeguard the Self’s own rights, borders, and existence. The Greeks often erased Otherness by imposing their customs on conquered peoples; from their perspective, the inherent superior features of the conquerors had to be preserved and transmitted in detriment of those belonging to the subjugated groups. This belief expanded beyond the boundaries of Greek culture, nurturing the cultural imposition that later defined Roman imperialism, religious crusades, colonialism, Darwinian natural selection, and pervading all patterns of discrimination that persist to this day.

Within the modern age, man endeavoured toward the construction and maintenance of an individual and national identity; however, an atavistic and more unsettling Otherness began to emerge which, unlike the Otherness of classical times, was not clearly visible. It is the Other residing within the Self, whose obsessive presence prompted Rimbaud towards his renown assertion “Je est un autre”, a linguistic rupture which reflects an ontological fracture. This break entails a further dismay within the human: the Ego loses its central position, becomes a mediator among other intrapsychic forces, and is no longer master, even in its own house (Freud, S. 1917. *Introduzione alla psicoanalisi 1915-1917* in Musatti, C.L. 1978. *Opere*, vol. VIII, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri).

The postmodern human condition is characterised by a radical fragmentation of significance in its essence, and is, therefore, defined as *disembedding* (Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press: 32). As a reaction to the well-known self-centred principles of humanism, within posthumanistic and transhumanistic theories, the subject is shaped from and through relations within

multiplicity (Braidotti, R. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects*, Cambridge: Columbia University Press) and, consequently, is defined as nomadic and non-unitary (Haraway, D.J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble*, Durham: Duke University Press).

To this day, in a world characterised by digital communication and globalisation—promoting Sameness and limiting Otherness—, the uniqueness of the Other proves unsettling and disturbing (Han, B. 2017. *L'Espulsione dell'Altro*, Nottetempo: Milano).

The aim of this graduate conference is to foster discussion on and promote innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to an all-time relevant topic, Otherness. In the following we suggest a range of examples, which are, however, not intended to be binding:

#### PHILOLOGICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

- Reconstruction of the text in its original form: relationship between original, copy, and forgery; engaging with unknown authors and their intentions.
- The composite nature of medieval and early modern miscellaneous manuscripts.
- Boundaries and *bordering* practices (Other-ness/Other-where).
- Complementarity (the double, mirror, twins, portrait, etc.).
- Canon and anti-canon within the linguistic and literary traditions.
- The engagement of the Self with the Other: estrangement and recognition, Other and eros, self-transcendence, mind/body and human/non-human dichotomies.
- Power dynamics within a society and their representations (e.g. dominant/dominated, subject/object).

#### LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

- Inter- and intra-linguistic variation: analysis of the structural differences among languages and varieties and of their subjective and sociocultural perception.
- Language contact and change: areal, vertical and horizontal contact phenomena, from both a diachronic and synchronic perspective.
- Minority (or minorised) languages and language policies: acknowledgement, marginalisation and legitimisation of minority languages in national and migratory contexts; processes of linguistic interference and creation of pidgin/creole languages.
- Cognitive linguistics: mental representations and mechanisms underlying linguistic expressions across varieties; the relationship between language and culturally shared models within a society.
- Translation as a negotiation with the Other.
- Multilingualism in literary and non-literary texts.

This Call for Papers is open to PhD candidates and early-career researchers. Participants are invited to submit an abstract for consideration of no more than **1,500 characters (including spaces)** for a **20-minute paper**, to be delivered in either Italian or English. Abstracts must be submitted in PDF form to [phd.conference.otherness@gmail.com](mailto:phd.conference.otherness@gmail.com) **no later than May 4**, together with a short biography (name, surname, disciplinary field, and university). Notifications of acceptance will be shared by **July 14**. A selection of contributions will be published in a conference volume.

#### **Programme and Organising Committee**

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