

Chapter 16

Some People Aren't People on the Inside: Online Connectivity and Otherkin¹ Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT

So-called alternative online niche communities are prone to ridicule, derision, and dismissal owing to the challenges they pose to prevailing onto-normativities, those ingrained modes of thought that dictate how we describe reality. Relying on the divergent approaches of classic SWOT analysis and post-structuralist philosophy and queer theory, this chapter explores how online connectivity shapes expressions of one niche community, the Otherkin. Otherkin are conceived as flows of desire, difference, and becoming rather than as a marginalized sub-culture occupying virtual space. As such, Otherkin are queering and destabilizing established norms in ways that call forth radically new ethics, aesthetics, ontologies, epistemologies, and social connections. This chapter relies upon Otherkin online texts and expressions to make the case that such destabilizations are essentially creative acts and that online connectivity affords Otherkin strengths and opportunities as well as revealing weaknesses and representing threats to their niche community.

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INTRODUCTION

What if I told you that some people aren't people on the inside? What if I told you my soul wasn't human; that I was "kin to the other" or *Otherkin*? (24arimar, 2009; Dreamsinger, 2009). How might you respond to the radically new? The *Otherkin*, howsoever they express their subjectivities, all believe themselves possessed of a non-human soul first experienced as an *awakening* of their *otherside* (Windtree, 2012). *Otherkin* exhibit no idiosyncratic semiotic system. They struggle towards a common vocabulary. Preferences in music, visual culture, and fashion are adopted or valued only insofar as they support a personal exploration of the *otherside*. The *otherside* soul may be a natural animal (i.e. wolves, felines) or described as mythical beings (i.e. elves, dragons). This chapter explores conventional reactions to online communities considered thus removed from the so-called mainstream and examines those habits of thought challenged by the *Otherkin*. *Otherkin* subjectivities thrive online and demand our respectful attention but we must take care to ask the right questions. Which onto-normativities do online expressions of *Otherkin* subjectivities destabilize? Not, what do *Otherkin* expressions *mean* but rather what do *Otherkin* expressions *do* in this contemporary moment of neo-liberalism, late capitalism, and the society of control?

REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

I have elsewhere encountered descriptions of the *Otherkin* as a subculture. For the present purpose, I reject the Latin prefix *sub* (under or inferior) and its hierarchical and judgmental connotations. Describing *Otherkin* as a flow of subjectivity better conveys its mode of expression. *Flow* also captures the *Otherkin*'s singular focus on the fluidity of their lived-experience of destabilizing onto-normativity. There exist many ways to confront the shock to thought represented

by *Otherkin*. We can ridicule and deride *Otherkin* beliefs. We can dismiss their subjective experience as pathological or code these expressions as mere online detritus contributing nothing and therefore of no value to pedagogy or scholarship. Finally, we can show indifference. Reacting in this way would be a mistake. An analytical approach that fails to accept that *Otherkin* claims are in earnest also fails to seize upon the importance their online exchanges and community represent: their demand to pursue new ways of being in the world.

Community building through online connectivity is key to *Otherkin* experience. As Laycock (2012) writes, "Otherkin identities provide an effective source of meaning only because they are supported by a community." (p. 66). Nevertheless, individual subjective experience is privileged as a personal journey. Although some might detect traits of egocentrism including a preoccupation with one's subjective experience and internal state of being (Woodruff-Borden, Brothers, & Lister, 2001) in *Otherkin* utterances, there is so much more than psychological "isms" circulating here. Through new subjectivities, beliefs, modes of interaction, and pursuit of personal epiphanies and truths, the *Otherkin* embrace an expanded consciousness and awareness that re-enchants their ontologies (Wicker, 2005). We shall discover why openness to *Otherkin* awareness is important.

Otherkin eclecticism and heterogeneity are not easily theorized. In fact, for the present purpose it is necessary to bring into uneasy interdisciplinary partnership a system of analysis based on business management analytics and the post-structuralist philosophy. The goal is to elucidate and cogitate upon how online connectivity affords *Otherkin* niche communities the capacity to engage in powerful neoteric subjective expressions. To wit, Humphrey's (2005) SWOT analysis is apt to consider the mundane: those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that *Otherkin* enjoy or endure owing to their online connectivity. Whereas, arcane questions related to post-structuralist destabilization of onto-normatives

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