Otherworlding: Othering Places and Spaces through Mythologization

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *otherworld* is often conceived as a realm inhabited by supernatural beings or as a fantastic location where the possibilities of imagination are realities. It gets linked to concepts of otherness and the other, but the question of what makes something an otherworld generally remains unasked. Otherworlds are usually thought of as somehow outside of or beyond the empirical world, but the issue is not so simple.

Geographical space of the empirical world has widely been conceived as extending to places that we would call otherworlds; thus the Garden of Eden was commonly included on medieval maps (Delumeau 2000, 56–70), and Odysseus sailed to various supernatural realms in the *Odyssey*, adventures that, according to Dante, included almost reaching the mountain of Purgatory (*Inferno*, canto 26). In Irish traditions, stories tell of people wandering in and out of otherworlds and only realizing what happened later (Carey 1987), almost as though they took a wrong turn and ended up in a bad neighborhood. In some cultures, as in nineteenth-century Karelia, people have conceived of the graveyard as a village of the dead—an otherworld that they could regularly visit in order to keep up relations with their deceased kin (Tarkka 2013). In other words, an otherworld might be right next door. It has also become commonplace to

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Research presented here has been completed within the Academy of Finland project Mythology, Verbal Art and Authority in Social Impact of Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki. An earlier version of this article was published in Finnish as "Tuonpuoleistaminen Paikkojen ja tilojen toiseuttaminen mytologisoimalla," in *Tuolla puolen, siellä jossakin: Käsityksiä kuvitelluista maailmoista*, edited by Ulla Piela and Petja Kauppi, Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 99 (Helsinki: SKS, 2020). I would like to thank Joonas Ahola for his valuable feedback when developing the article for that venue.

Signs and Society, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 2020). © 2020 by Semiosis Research Center at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. All rights reserved. 2326-4489/2020/0803-0004$10.00

https://doi.org/10.1086/710159 Published online by Cambridge University Press

imagine that ghosts or other supernatural agents are active in our world, doing things and aware of us, situating the otherworld not as a place but as a level of perception (see, e.g., the films *Ghost Town* [2008] and *Doctor Strange* [2016]).

Defining otherworlds as supernatural is also problematic. Many cultures have seen as natural what would be called *supernatural* from the perspective of science-based epistemologies (Frog 2019). In such cultures, ethnic or cultural otherness blurs with supernatural otherness (Lindow 1995), so that an empirical place like Lapland in the north of Scandinavia and Finland is construed as a supernatural otherworld populated by sorcerers (Frog 2020, 587–89). Alternately, the fundamentally different reality of an otherworldly place may be social rather than supernatural, such as the ideal land that Thomas More (1516) named Utopia. Indeed, it seems to be because of this type of difference that Christopher Columbus described the continent he discovered across the Atlantic as an *otro mundo* (other world) (Sale 1989, 10). Once we look beyond cases where distinction as an otherworld seems clear-cut because it is well established, as it is for Heaven or Hell, or where the context in which a place appears makes the distinction seem self-evident, as it is for C. S. Lewis's (1950–56) Narnia, the question of what makes a place an otherworld can become challenging to pin down.

The heart of the problem of distinguishing otherworlds is that there is no world, no place, that is, owing to its particular inherent qualities, "other." Otherness is invariably linked to a perspective of what is "not other"—a point that gets manipulated in fiction, as in Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), where our world is an otherworld to a person coming from outside of it. In order to understand otherworlds in relation to perspectives, attention is here turned to the construction of places as otherworlds—a process that I describe as *otherworlding*. The present article introduces an approach to otherworlding, discussed in relation to othering.

Other, Otherness, and Othering

Discussions of "the other" are commonly traced back to philosophical writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel ([1807] 2018, 108–17), who proposed the role of the other in constructing understanding of the self. The current concept of other, however, became established by Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 2011), who remapped Hegel's relation of "self" and "other" onto categories of people in society relative to one another: she identified "man" as the hegemonic default identity in contemporary Western societies to which woman was "the other," irrespective of which of these a person identifies him- or herself with. This innovation has transformed the way that the concept of other is understood. Already through

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Hegel's concept, the word *other* had advanced from an adjective to a noun and even to the coining of a verb, *othering*, but use of the verb in connection with de Beauvoir's concept does not seem to have gotten traction until the 1960s, and it only began to advance to a commonplace, spreading across languages, in the 1990s. Today, the concept of othering or of making people, cultures, or things "other" has become widely recognized.

Othering is here seen as a process and outcome of distinguishing "us" from "other." Edward Sapir (1986, 16) observed that "*He talks like one of us* is equivalent to saying *He is one of us*." The opposite side of that coin reflects a process of othering: *He doesn't talk/look/think/believe/behave like one of us* is equivalent to saying *He is other*. In othering, features brought into focus may be of the embodied person, and thus physical, physiological, mental, emotional, and so forth; they may also extend into the supernatural, such as being preternaturally strong, psychic, or having a consciousness that can act independently of the body. Features may be linked to social or religious identity, or to moral or ethical behavior, which again may extend into the supernatural. Rather than simply recognizing differences, emblems of difference are brought into focus and interpreted individually and/or collectively as iconic of categorical otherness, whether generally or as identifying someone with a particular type of person or group seen as fundamentally different from "us." The "us" or in-group identity may vary considerably in scope, from a family to an anatomically or socially defined "human," or even some broader category that might include unseen agents, such as Christian forces of good including mortals, angels, and saints, all collectively seen as opposed to forces of evil.

Othering is predicated on commensurability: it is not simply a question of difference, but rather of difference juxtaposed with sufficient sameness that there is a possibility of belongingness. Others are fractionally differentiated from a collective category: difference is not total, as might be imagined between a person and a rock or golf cart. Difference is marked by increments, fractions. Otherness is perceived in the salience of juxtaposed fractions of difference in contrast to sameness. In processes of othering, perception and interpretation become simplified so that emblems of otherness come into focus while features that are "not other" provide their context, remain invisible (Lotman 1990, 58), or may be "erased" from consideration (Irvine and Gal 2000, 38). When emblems of otherness become juxtaposed with features considered emblematic of, or exclusive to, belongingness to the in-group, they may become impossible to ignore, creating tension, and potentially incite "deletion"—that is, action to eliminate the offending feature. Othering also links emblems of otherness to ideologies that carry evaluations

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and interpretations, such as identifying someone as a likely terrorist or rapist on the basis of emblems of ethnic otherness.

There is a tendency to associate othering with viewing people who are different negatively or as somehow inferior. The negative connotations come from the predominant use of the concept (following de Beauvoir) in connection with types of people who are marginalized, linking it to politically and emotionally charged issues. That particular species of social asymmetry does not, however, reciprocally define the concept. Othering equally occurs with rock stars, nuns, and world leaders—categories of people whose lives are imagined and judged according to standards that are "other," but these are forms of otherness that people envy or aspire to, and they get taken for granted rather than get subjected to censure. Saints, angels, and gods are subject to othering as well. The difference is not in the phenomenon of othering, but that othering rock stars or angels does not involve a moral tension that they have been othered unfairly and are, in fact, "not other."

Otherworlds and Otherworlding

The concept of otherworld has an independent pedigree with much deeper historical roots. It is possible to talk about otherworlds in almost any culture as a convenient way of discussing, for example, the world of the dead, but the term and concept does not emerge from philosophical or scientific discussion. The term *other world* is found already in Old English around AD 1200 in the sense of "A world inhabited by spirits, esp. of the dead; 'the next world', 'the world to come'; heaven and hell. Hence, more generally: the world of the supernatural" (*OED*, s.v. "other world"). In Christian societies, the term *otherworld* did not become marked as religiously or epistemologically other in contrast to words like *magic*, *superstition*, and *myth*; it was regularly used for Heaven and Hell as well as imaginal worlds identified with other religions or literature.

Discussions of otherworlds remained parallel to discussions of the other in philosophy; only as de Beauvoir's reinvention of the concept advanced to a commonplace at the end of the twentieth century did it begin to impact ways of thinking about otherworlds. Such impacts were generally rather subtle, reflecting shifts in how scholars engaged concepts of the other, otherness, and othering. Later on, these concepts became tools in the analysis of otherworlds (e.g., Tarkka 2013), which reciprocally fed back into discussions of witches, trolls, and other supernatural agents as "other," and their supernatural otherness became discussed in relation to social otherness (McKinnell 2005). Perhaps inevitably, the ascendance of conceiving otherness in social terms also led some scholars to correspondingly

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reconceive otherworlds. Already twenty years ago, for example, Jeff Rider (2000) defined otherworlds of medieval romances as "other" from the perspective of aristocratic society—that is, from the society of the protagonist with whom a reader intuitively identifies. Rider's reconceptualization of otherworlds in social rather than supernatural terms has been criticized as making the concept too broad to be useful (Byrnie 2016, 5), but the blurring of social otherness into supernatural otherness (Lindow 1995) makes it difficult to draw a clear line between them.

Otherworlding is a process of othering linked to places and spaces, contrasting "ours" or "the familiar" with "other." Commensurability is again salient: the familiar or recognizable forms a frame of reference against which fractions of difference become emphasized. Where otherworlds are imaginal, differences may be framed through systematic inversions, but, also in an empirically experienced place, contrasts in features emblematic of otherness may be interpreted as correspondingly absolute. In either case, contrasts are reciprocally informative about the in-group's values, ideas, and relations to places. Features brought into focus as characteristic of a place's otherness may concern the physical, material environment, extending into the physics of the world or its natural laws; they may also be features of society, such as that place's dominant social structures and religious, moral, or ethical norms. Although commensurability is key to the meaningfulness of otherworlding, the process simplifies interpretations so that emblems of difference are seen as significant while features of sameness tend only to be seen as meaningful in relation to contrasts. Emblems of otherness of place also become connected to ideologies that carry evaluations and interpretations, and these link to, and blur with, emblems of otherness of the place's characteristic inhabitants. The place itself can then become seen as *dangerous*, *hostile*, *violent*, or *morally corrupt* as though it has the collective agency and personhood of its characteristic inhabitants.

Foundations: Otherworlding in Nonmodernized Karelian and Finnish Cultures

Nonmodernized cultures and cultures maintaining nonmodernized traditions[1] provide a valuable laboratory for exploring processes of otherworlding because

1. "Nonmodernized" is a clumsy attempt to navigate the terminological problems produced by the commonplace distinction between "modern" and a negatively defined category labeled with evaluatively weighted terminology like "primitive" or "premodern." The heuristic distinction is commonly made between cultures in which science-based epistemologies are considered dominant, spreading in connection with technologies and education of modernization, and those with other dominant epistemologies. Although I have customarily described the second category as "premodern" and flirted with "nonmodern," traditions

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researchers approach them as outsiders and are less likely to take otherworlding for granted. A central empirical testing ground in developing the concept of otherworlding has been nonmodernized traditions of Karelia and Finland, for which there are vast archival corpora from especially the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that span diverse practices and allow nuanced perspectives on variation (see Frog 2020). Strategies of otherworlding in Kalevalaic mythology are illustratively outlined here, including examples at levels of phraseology and poetic devices as well as description and narrative representation, and this conveniently leads into examples of how ritual practices, taboos, and other types of structured behaviors can participate in otherworlding.

Kalevalaic mythology is the mythology of so-called Kalevala-meter poetry, a poetic form anachronistically named for the nineteenth-century epic *Kalevala*, composed by Elias Lönnrot on the basis of collected oral poetry. This poetic form was used across a remarkable variety of genres. The mythology centers on epic and ritual poetry commonly dubbed incantations, most richly documented in the eastern regions of Finland and Russian Karelia (Karelia being a transnational region), and from roughly the White Sea in the north to the area around St. Petersburg in the south. Mythological epics survived mainly in Orthodox areas of Karelia, documented in Finnish, Karelian, and Izhorian languages and their dialects, while the poetic form as well as some mythological plots are also shared with traditions in Estonia and Setomaa. Processes of otherworlding and how they work are saliently observable in this corpus of materials, and the corpus is large, with sometimes hundreds of examples and fragments of a single epic poem from different local and regional traditions that exhibit considerable variation (e.g., Siikala 2012; cf. selections in Kuusi et al. [1977], where the few examples from different regions make variation look chaotic). Although local and regional variation can be considerable, it is mainly at the level of names and stories; the processes of otherworlding remain consistent across tradition areas.

Otherworlds in the mythology are multiple. They are, as a rule, places inhabited by groups. There are topographical sites like *Rutjan koski* (rapids of Rutja) or *sininen kivi* (the blue stone), some of which may even be identified with a lone inhabitant, like *Kivutar* (Pain Maiden) of *Kipuvuori* (Pain Mountain). These sites are, however, mainly found in incantations and do not seem to be conceptualized as distinct realms. They are sites located in a vaguely conceived otherworld space or that become linked to particular otherworlds like *Tuonela* (Death Place[2]) or

concerned are in many cases at least partially documented in environments where modernization has already taken place, resulting in nonmodernized (if evolving or collapsing) traditions in modernized societies.

2. The affix *-la* is commonly used to make place names from a personal name or noun.

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Pohjola (North/Bottom[3] Place). Similarly, desolate, uninhabited spaces may be negatively defined as locations for banishment (see also Tarkka 2015), but they appear imagined as outside of distinguishable worlds rather than having clear identities as distinct otherworlds themselves. In these traditions, an otherworld realm is a social space, whether its society mirrors that of the singers as a village, or a similar settlement with a mistress and master of the farmstead and their community (Siikala 2002), or a northern territory like *Lappi* (Lapland) or *Turjan maa* (Land of Turja) inhabited by dangerous *noidat* (shamans, witches, sorcerers) without clear social organization (Frog 2020, 586–92). Otherworlds are constructed in epics from the perspective of the heroes, and they include any other realm the heroes visit, such as *Pohjola*, *Tuonela*, or *Päivölä* (Sun Place). These locations are identical to, and blur into, otherworlds of incantations, which are constructed from the perspective of the performer, whose position in the cosmos generally aligns with that of epic heroes (see also Tarkka 2013, chaps. 17–20).

Otherworlding occurs through a variety of devices that are often used in combination. These include epithets, as in the expression *pimeä Pohjola* (dark *Pohjola*). More important, however, are alternative ways of referring to a single place in verse parallelism. Parallel expressions often characterize the place through its inhabitants, such as *pakana kansa* (pagan folk), noting that the people of the singing cultures were self-defined Christians, and the Karelian word for "human being" was even *ristikansa*, literally "Christian-folk." Similarly, *Päivölän pidot* (feast of *Päivölä*) was conventionally called *jumaliston juominki* or *jumalisten juominki* (symposium [drinking-feast] of the gods) in parallel verses. Negations, referring to what things are not, or referring to the absence of things, are also prominent in Kalevalaic poetry, such as describing a place as a *puuton manner* (treeless mainland), making the place an inversion of the Finnish and Karelian forests in which singers lived (Tarkka 2015).

Othering of places is tightly linked to the othering of people, and these interact. The common characterization of otherworlds as social environments is based on perceived connections between people and places that they inhabit. The identification of a place with a group that is "other" leads the place to become characterized by that society and its values and norms, constructing it as an otherworld. The link between a place and its inhabitants can lead the place to embody social relations (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 27) and thus to be represented through the agency of its inhabitants, such as describing *Pohjola* as *miehien syöjä kylä, urohon upottaja* (village, eater of men, drowner of heroes). The reverse is also

3. In these languages, "north" and "bottom" are the same word.

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true: the identification of a person or group with an otherworld location reciprocally constructs otherness into his or her identity. Where people and a place or places are connected, the characterization of either can have connotations for the other through association. Epithets that identify inhabitants or things in a place as having a powerful supernatural quality, such as *tulinen* (fiery), *sininen* (blue), *kirjava* (colorful, ornamented), or *iki* (eternal), thus also participate in otherworlding. The society may also be characterized by more developed reference to, or descriptions of, its material culture and hospitality, which Kalevalaic mythology manifests as transparently life-threatening to the hero, such as poisoned drink or bed linens filled with serpents and venom. The inhabitants actively try to prevent the hero's departure in the epics describing the visit to *Tuonela* (Death Place), and the hostility of the hostess or host may advance to violence in the visit to *Päivölä* (Sun Place).

Narration of the journey itself and its structure may be instruments of otherworlding, marking the movement beyond the familiar. The ferry to *Tuonela* is said only to come for people who have died; a series of fantastic "deaths" must be passed to reach *Päivölä*. Within the epic genre, heroes' journeys to otherworlds and subsequent returns form a common, abstract narrative pattern. The recognizability of this pattern makes it a meaningful paradigm (see Nordvig 2012). The hero's journey to *Päivölä* commonly concludes with the hero decapitating the host, then returning home where his mother gives advice on where to flee to escape revenge. He then travels to *Saari* (Island, or "an island") where he has rampant sexual adventures until he is forced to leave. The location becomes characterized as an otherworld by being the destination in the narrative pattern, yet there is normally nothing fantastic or supernatural in the story, except perhaps the hero's unfailing sexual stamina. The narrative pattern itself participates in otherworlding, even if this tends to remain unnoticed where different otherworlding strategies are on the surface.

Whereas places like *Tuonela*, *Päivölä*, or *Pohjola* are known exclusively through imagination, otherworlding also occurs with places that can be empirically experienced. Roman Jakobson ([1956] 1987 , 111) famously observes that poetic parallelism "provides an objective criterion of what in the given speech community acts as a correspondence." In Kalevalaic incantations, use of places like *Pohjola* in parallel with *Lappi* (Lapland) or *Tapiola* (i.e., the forest) characterizes these places as otherworlds of comparable status; they belong to the same category of place. *Lappi* was generally remote from singers' regular empirical experience; understandings of it were therefore predominantly constructed through discourse—that is, people talking about *Lappi* and the things that happened there. The forest, on

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the other hand, was a place that people experienced on a regular basis. Just as the description of movement between worlds is a strategy of otherworlding in epics, ritual regulation of movement between the village and the forest otherworlded the forest as a place. The cemetery was constructed as an otherworld through the same devices as a place of visitation and interaction with deceased kin, in addition to the ritually orchestrated transition of members of the living village to become integrated members of that neighboring community. Just as epic descriptions of places, things, and practices are strategies of otherworlding, taboos and ritual regulation otherworlded empirical places through people's embodied experiences of place (see, e.g., Stark 2002; Tarkka 2013; Stepanova 2014).

In addition to verse parallelism, parallelism between supernatural otherworlds and empirically experienced places could also be created through ritual by identifying movement to or from that place with movement between worlds. For example, ritual use of the epic describing the visit to *Tuonela* in connection with a visit to the forest identifies the forest with the world of the dead (SKVR I_1 #368; Frog 2020, 665–67). Similarly, ritual use of the hero's visit to *Päivölä* in wedding rituals connects his movement to a supernatural otherworld with a bride's journey to the village of the groom (SKVR VII_1 #818; Frog 2017, 608–9). The paradigm of a ritual performance could equally construct empirical places as otherworlds. In Orthodox areas of Karelia, laments were performed centrally in connection with funerary rituals, for the movement of a member of the living community to be integrated into the community of the ancestors. Corresponding lament practices were connected with the departure of a bride to the community of the groom and departure of a man conscripted into military service. The symbolic correlation of these departures from the village community identified them as equivalent to departures to the realm of the dead (Stepanova and Frog 2015).

Strategies of otherworlding are not identical in all cultures and traditions. For example, the hospitality of an otherworld might be transparently recognized as an inversion by visitors, as in Kalevalaic mythology; it might appear welcoming but be dangerous, it might be "other" through surpassing expectations of quality or quantity, or it might not be marked at all whereas other features of place or its representation are emblematic of othering. These Karelian and Finnish traditions are merely illustrative of basic devices of otherworlding that appear to be widely used.

Otherworlding in Entertainment and Current Society

Devices of otherworlding are saliently observable in works of literature like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. Things we presume to belong solely to imagination,

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such as magic and dragons, are presented as integrated into the world in which the heroes operate, creating a fantastic world. The worlds of *Harry Potter* and Marvel Comics tend not to be discussed as otherworlds because they are not attributed existences outside of the particular stories in which they are constructed. Nevertheless, the construction of these world builds on engaging frames of reference that are recognizable and juxtaposing them with emblems of difference; part of the aesthetic effect of these works is stimulating the audience to imagine otherwise impossible worlds. Whereas worlds of *Harry Potter* and Marvel Comics are rife with impossible things, Jorge Luis Borges (purportedly following a dictum of H. G. Wells) restricted himself to a single fantastic element in each of his stories and sought to foreshadow its nature through hints and allusions so that the reader anticipates that the fantastic element should be there when it is revealed (Borges 1973). Yet our immersion in dazzling varieties of worlds created within a few pages of literature or in a short clip on YouTube may simultaneously conceal and point to otherworlds that we take for granted.

Science fiction has acclimatized audiences today to ideas of the void beyond the shelter of the atmosphere. Floating rather than falling has become a generally recognized sign of being beyond the grip of Earth's gravity and acting in a world where basic rules of "our world" no longer apply. Audiences are similarly familiar with conditions and consequences of exploring the depths of the sea, which forms a world of its own. We accept these as parts of our universe and may or may not notice divergences from scientifically grounded models in plot-driven fantasy, but the point of interest here is that the discourse and diversity of representations shape our imaginal understandings of these places *as other* to our anthropocentric world. We may see them as situated within our universe, and subject to an abstract system of scientific laws, but the Greeks said the same about their gods, about places that gods and heroes went and stories about them (Herren 2017): otherworlds often participate with "this world" in a broader organizing system.

Science fiction's play with questions of movement through time also opens the question of whether historical worlds are not also otherworlds relative to "our world" in the present. M. M. Bakhtin's (1981, 84–159) concept of *chronotope*, referring to the model of space and time within a genre of art or literature, can equally be extended to an abstracted generalization of understandings in a certain society at a certain time of a particular cultural-historical period. The principles of otherworlding built on juxtapositions of sameness with the emblems of difference that are brought into focus can be observed operating here as well, whether in social imaginings of the Summer of Love in the 1960s or the era

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of courtly love in the Middle Ages. Up until relatively recently, Vikings were commonly presumed to have worn horned helmets, the abandoning of which as historically inaccurate can be seen as a change in chronotope. The same can be said of the current trend of representing people of medieval Europe as often unwashed and sporting dreadlocks (which is more reflective of today's alternative styles than medieval life). These imaginal models of the times and cultures of the past are constructs of discourse rather than inherently accurate and objective representations—and they change, not simply as more accurately reflecting scientific knowledge, but also through how they are used and made relevant in the present (see also Wilson 1976). Whether or not these chronotopes are themselves viewed as otherworlds is a matter of interpretation, but they are organized, maintained, and evolve through processes of otherworlding.

Certain places remote from the majority of a society become sites of otherworlding in contemporary discourse no less than remote places like *Lappi* (Lapland) were in premodern Karelia and Finland. Such a place may be geographically remote, like Tibet as a miraculous center of spirituality, central Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), or Prague in the wake of Franz Kafka's international popularity as a place where the fantastic happens (this is not to exclude the inversion of expectation, such as locating the fantastic in rural Iowa, where "nothing ever happens"). The place may also be conspicuously closed, surrounded by a discourse of speculation, like secret government laboratories or Mason temples; or access may be generally restricted, as to the catacombs beneath Rome or the New York subway's tunnel systems. Socially remote places may equally be subject to otherworlding, such as alternative nightclubs or abandoned buildings populated by junkies. Such otherworlding can make these places sites for situating the fantastic. For example, alternative nightclubs and bars have developed as a type of place where the socially other may extend into the supernaturally other, so that clubbing appears popular among vampires in the movie *Blade II* (2002) and is a nexus for people involved in genetic mutation in the BBC series *Orphan Black* (season 1, episode 7, 2013, "Parts Developed in an Unusual Manner"). A place may also *become other* only during certain times, so a vampire nightclub may be a mundane building during daylight hours. Similarly, many a park in an urban center may be a lovely place to spend an afternoon and become dangerous and threatening after dark, its character changing with the periodic change in its characteristic inhabitants (Asplund Ingemark and Ingemark 2020, ch. 8). The social remoteness in relation to otherworlding may thus entail a temporal dimension complementary to the spatial.

Just as a narrative pattern can identify a location as an otherworld in Kalevalaic epic, such patterns are also implemented today, potentially adding a dimension

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of meaning to events that otherwise lack fantastic elements. For example, an episode of the BBC series *Sherlock* (season 3, episode 3, 2014, "His Last Vow") begins with Dr. Watson seeking a person in an abandoned building inhabited by drug addicts, where he finds Sherlock Holmes and returns him to the world of crime investigation. The symbolic (if somewhat comic) identification of this event as a journey to the otherworld and successful return is augmented by engaging a narrative pattern of the otherworld journey: (*a*) the hero first successfully *passes a (lone) gatekeeper* at the threshold of the place; (*b*) the person Watson originally sought gets to the waiting car without incident, but, when asked where Watson is, this person refers to *a conflict that the hero must overcome* ("They're havin' a fight"); and (*c*) Watson and Sherlock *escape* by an alternative route (bursting through a boarded-up door on the building's second story). As a place-type, the junkie-inhabited squat has more generally undergone otherworlding through discourse. In the episode of *Sherlock*, this is complemented by engaging a narrative pattern that facilitates interpretation of the episode as Holmes's symbolic return from the dead to his role as a detective. Such devices are commonplace: for example, a comic use of the same narrative pattern is found in the movie *Date Night* (2010), where a married couple who are protagonists bypass the gatekeeper to enter an alternative nightclub. In this case, otherworlding of what is found inside includes the wife's horrified description of the scene: "This is End of Days kind of stuff." In both *Date Night* and *Sherlock*, the techniques of otherworlding are interesting, but they are linked to, and manifestations of, broader discourses through which places like alternative-culture nightclubs and drug dens are constructed as otherworlds where rules governing behavioral norms and society change no less than the rules of gravity do in outer space.

Reflexive Otherworlding

As highlighted above, otherworlding is commonly linked to the empirical or imaginal agents, societies, or social activity connected with the place—the people or a population who are viewed as other from the perspective of an outsider. Although *Date Night* is a light comedy, its story is built on the exploration of a contrastive opposition between two or more social worlds and the transposition of people from one into another. The opposition is linked to a variety of basic plot structures, but, for an audience, the tensions surrounding them are related to the salience of otherworlding that occurs in society. Otherworlding is always from a perspective, and, as de Beauvoir brought into focus long ago, people may find themselves as the other from a society's dominant perspective. Emblems of difference linked to othering people and places are socially circulating signs that may also be taken up and manipulated. In the same way that punk style is built

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on foregrounding features of difference juxtaposed with sameness (Agha 2011, 47–48), people may consciously foreground emblems of difference of place. They may construct their environment as an otherworld in relation to dominant norms, such as treating graffiti with spray paint as indoor ornamentation. They may also strategically reflect and perhaps exaggerate outsiders' expectations of the social environment as, for example, impolite, amoral, chaotically unpredictable, or whatever image the inhabitants feel has been projected on them and places associated with them. In doing so, they intentionally emphasize the place's otherworldness as viewed from the dominant perspective of surrounding society.

Strategic otherworlding becomes an instrument affecting social power dynamics. People who might be perceived as marginalized others in a broader society can become the in-group while representatives of the majority culture who enter that place may find themselves on unsure footing owing to differences in the "rules" governing the environment, like the suburban couple entering the nightclub in *Date Night*. However, the in-group may not share a coherent identity outside of a place, as in the world of a transient rave, characterized by the type of activity in which diverse people may regularly participate. Conversely, strategic otherworlding may construct images of power and authority in society, such as the sacrality of a cathedral, a type of place inhabited by divine and ecclesiastical agents and predominantly peopled by visitors. Strategic otherworlding may be linked to maintaining social distance in discourses of power and authority, as with the palaces and temples of Chinese emperors; it may have a pedagogical purpose, as in living museums, or it may be managed as a marketable aesthetic experience, as in the case of bars thematically modeled on the work of the Swiss artist H. R. Giger, best known for his design of the monster and associated spacecraft in the movie *Alien* (1979).

Otherworlding strategies may be equally employed on a much more localized basis: otherworlding a more personalized or private space. This might take forms that seem extreme, such as mounting furniture on the ceiling, so that rooms in an apartment or studio seem surreal. It may also be more commonplace, as when a teenager covers the walls and ceiling of his or her room with images or colors that contrast sharply with other rooms in the home, or when young parents transform a room into a "babyland" to be used as a nursery. Individual rooms within a home may be constructed as otherworlds so that the "rules" of behavior, what may be present or must be absent, as well as the whole emotional atmosphere, are recognized as changing at the threshold.

Reflexive otherworlding expresses power and control. It is built on constructing salient difference in contrast to frames of norms or expectations connected

https://doi.org/10.1086/710159 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with a broader society or place that forms its context and frame of reference. Whether it is used to maintain the sacrality of a cathedral or to personalize a teenager's bedroom, reflexive otherworlding defines and constructs a space as a place dominated by particular inhabitants. The processes of otherworlding through the exertion of control may also operate without a reflexive aim of establishing difference. Small children, for example, may perceive visiting their grandmother's house as traveling to a place where rules of behavior, food, activities, and so forth are markedly different from those at home. In this case, a level of perceived otherworlding is not owing to conscious strategies of the grandparents but rather to differences in the people who exert control over the space and shape the rules there within a different set of social relations (i.e., that makes parents also children and children also grandchildren). The same effects implemented through reflexive otherworlding may correspondingly be perceivable outcomes of people exercising control over spaces and norms within those spaces. When processes of otherworlding are brought into focus, they can be recognized as operating on a broad continuum from creating differences that are powerfully marked to those that may only be perceived as marked by some people, such as small children, or that operate subtly and get taken for granted. In the latter types of otherworlding, a common feature is control or dominance exerted over a definable space, which is no different from premodern Karelian ideas of the forest and cemetery as otherworlds under the control of certain supernatural communities.

Mythologization through Discourse

Otherworlding is simultaneously a process and a product of discourse. Individuals say and do things that indicate that the social rules or even the natural laws of a place operate differently from how they would in "our" world. The particular place may only exist within a story or cycle of stories like the *Harry Potter* books. Otherworlding as an activity is also not dependent on anyone accepting it; someone may say that gravity does not work the same in a certain part of Oregon, but people might simply laugh at him. In other cases, pervasiveness of otherworlding in a community, ranging in form from telling stories to embodied behavior, can lead even the most fantastic ideas to become accepted as simply "the way things are." Roland Barthes (1972) described this process as *naturalization*, when ideas and understandings that are culturally constructed become taken for granted as part of the natural order of the universe. It can also be described as *mythologization*—that is, discourse produces a living mythology of the way things in the world are and how they work (for a discussion, see Frog [2015] and [2018] and works cited therein). Mythologization describes the process of establishing such

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models of the world through discourse—that is, through people talking about things, representing them, and doing things—irrespective of empirically based scientific knowledge. The otherworlding of outer space, for example, is predominantly through representations in books, movies, other forms of entertainment, and the discussions surrounding them. Today, there is a drive for representations in stories to align with scientifically based knowledge, but channels of entertainment remain prominent in the construction of people's understandings by giving otherwise abstract ideas about the universe meaningful frames of reference. They produce emotionally compelling and memorable situations so that we can imagine outer space from our anthropocentric perspective. Whether the model is of outer space, a cemetery as a place inhabited by the dead, or an underground nightclub, mythologization is the process whereby otherworlding structures imagination and evaluation of the "reality" of a place, whether or not it may seem fantastic.

Just as otherworlding is based on perspectives, so is mythologization, which makes it potentially important to distinguish between otherworlding discourse and imaginal understandings of place. Otherworlding discourse and the way people imagine and understand a place might fully converge through mythologization from one perspective, and the same model may be contested, ignored, or ridiculed from another; discourses from different perspectives might also compete. De Beauvoir identified othering as something that can occur with social categories from a hegemonic position in society. People inhabiting a place that has been otherworlded from the position of a broader society may reject such imaginal representations as cliché or even as offensive, although many outsiders may accept the same constructs as "the way things really are." Similarly, parents may have a very skewed image of environments where teenagers hang out or other places that are popular among them. In these contexts, otherworlding may produce the type of stories and descriptions called legends—that is, short accounts about a specific encounter that are developed on a traditional plot or motif and that engage contestable beliefs. Legends become a medium for knowing what kinds of things happen in a certain place, or norms of behavior there. Once otherworlding has undergone mythologization, it easily becomes taken for granted in relevant groups, penetrating how they talk about or engage with the relevant places. Otherworlding is then not about convincing people about a place but rather maintaining understandings that other people might contest. The same processes occur in the development of narrative worlds, where we speak instead about "the suspension of disbelief"—that is, we accept certain things that might seem improbable or fantastic within the particular story or the world of *Harry*

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Potter. When the suspension of disbelief extends to stories and activities in the empirical world, otherworlding advances toward mythologization and the reconceptualization of places as other, whether imagining that a ghost can be encountered in a certain house, that the basic rules of human societies are suspended in certain neighborhoods of Los Angeles, or the imagining involved in a child's perception of leaving home for her grandmother's house.

Perspectives

The concept of *otherworld* tends to be taken for granted and treated in binary terms: places either are or are not otherworlds, and the difference is most often determined intuitively. When attention is turned from otherworlds as places to processes of "othering," place, devices, and strategies of otherworlding come into focus. Attending to these processes in discourse makes it possible to theorize otherworlding and to situate understandings of place in relation to those processes, which can be observed in connection with different perspectives and in connection with a variety of frames of reference. Mythologization provides a complementary concept for addressing how people engage with otherworlding, distinguishing cases where people see the otherworlded construct as "how things really are," contest that model, accept it as the fictional storyworld of a good novel, and view the use of otherworlding strategies as mere rhetoric or perhaps simply as misrepresentation. Otherworlding offers a new lens for looking at diverse phenomena, from mythological realms to science fiction and racist discourse. By bringing into focus the processes underpinning constructions of places and spaces as other, the approach outlined here offers new tools to analyze phenomena in literature, art, and society, and to better understand how otherworlding in those contexts relates to supernatural otherworlds connected with religious beliefs, of which they are more than mere metaphors.

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