

Same . . . yet Other: Interpersonal Communication across Alternate Worlds

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Most everyday experiences of being human involve communication with others, from sharing information and exchanging ideas at work, to agreeing on what to eat for dinner or which television channel to watch at home. Held alongside this conception of routine communication is the assumption that every human is unique and set apart from all others by virtue of their particular individual differences. The psychologist William James describes this idea of selfhood as the “splitting of the universe into two halves” named “‘*me*’ and ‘*not-me*’ respectively” (289). The central aim of human communication theory is therefore to explain how people, whose differences mean that they cannot be sure what the other is thinking, are able to interact effectively and understand one another throughout their daily lives.

To answer this question, many communication theories position difference between individuals as a problem that must be overcome for successful communication to take place. Whether communication is perceived in terms of accurate information transmission or exchange, gaining persuasive influence, rational discourse and agreement, or the creation of shared social understandings, it is what communicators have in common that is most often judged to be essential for success. However, scholars such as John Durham Peters, Amit Pinchevski, and Briankle Chang contend that difference is also of vital importance in human communication, in terms of the ethical need to respect otherness. A practical argument can also be made to suggest that the other’s position of difference could well offer valuable insights on a particular situation or shared task.

The science fiction narratives of *Fringe*, involving two alternate universes populated by different instances of the same characters, inspire novel ways to interrogate ideas relating to the importance of sameness and difference in communication theory and practice. For

example, Peters' argues that when communicating, "the task is to recognize the creature's otherness, not to make it over in one's own likeness and image" (31). However, *Fringe* introduces the presence of pairs of characters that exhibit the same likeness without needing to be made over, making the task of recognizing otherness more difficult. In other words, the separation of "me" from "not-me" is not so easy to accomplish (James 289). In spite of this, as the *Fringe* story arc unfolds it becomes clear that, although "people in the two universes often look alike, and act alike," they can also "be profoundly different" from each other (Brotherton 90).

Psychoanalysis, Shadows, and Doppelgängers

The *Fringe* audience is initially introduced to a universe where FBI Special Agent Olivia Dunham has been assigned to a special task force investigating a series of mysterious events known as "The Pattern." Olivia assembles a team, including Dr. Walter Bishop and his son Peter Bishop, to investigate the unusual events. Towards the end of Season 1, Olivia discovers that "The Pattern" is linked with the existence of an alternate universe, which leads to Olivia's universe becoming known as the "Over Here," while its counterpart is named the "Over There." The two universes are in some ways very different from each another, but nonetheless the "Over There" is home to an alternate version of Olivia Dunham, who, since the FBI has been dissolved in that universe, is a "Fringe Division" Agent involved in investigating and stabilizing rifts that arise where the two universes come into particularly close proximity. The Fringe Division is under the control of a version of Walter Bishop, Walternate, who is Secretary of Defense of the United States in the alternate universe.

The physical similarities and behavioral differences between pairs of characters across alternate universes in *Fringe* have encouraged scholars such as Sarah Clarke Stuart to take a psychoanalytical perspective on the relationships between characters and their alternate others. From Stuart's perspective, individuals from the universes are understood to "represent

the duality within each character,” and thus are open to analysis either as shadows of the self or as doppelgängers (116). For example, Stuart’s positioning of Alt-Olivia “in Jungian terms” as “the shadow self” helps to explain how her presence “stirs up emotions that Olivia would otherwise continue to repress” (13). Alternatively, regarding Alt-Olivia in terms of the figure of the doppelgänger (as discussed by Freud) explains how Olivia is compelled to explore “her dual nature through the alter-ego, who is perhaps less rational, more creative, or more courageous” (122). In Stuart’s analysis, Olivia is the self and Alt-Olivia the other, this positioning supporting Stuart’s argument that Olivia, driven “solely by rational logic,” must learn “that she is capable of intimacy” from the “sensual” and “more colorful” Alt-Olivia (116-117).

The positioning of Olivia as the self and Alt-Olivia as the other side of that self, a feature of Stuart’s psychoanalytical perspective, flows not only from the names Olivia and Alt-Olivia (or indeed Bolivia or Fauxlivia), but also from the terms “Over Here” and “Over There.” In spite of this bias, it is possible to adopt a more flexible understanding of the two universes, which encourages analysis from multiple perspectives and acknowledges the existence of selves on both sides. Adopting this flexibility enables a more nuanced consideration of the communication between paired characters in *Fringe* as their relationships develop and change across seasons.

Individual Choices, Alternate Universes, and Altered Personalities

A basis for the presence of alternate universes is introduced in “The Road Not Taken” (1.19), when Walter explains Olivia’s visions of another reality relating to their most recent case. Walter describes the commonplace experience of life as “a linear progression” as an “illusion,” since each of the decisions made in response to the many choices with which people are faced every day actually results in the creation of “a new reality.” In each of her visions, Olivia has therefore experienced “a momentary glimpse to the other side.” In a later

episode, Walter clarifies that “an infinite number of universes” exist, all containing alternate versions of people, “but each one slightly different, changed over time based on the accumulation of [his/her] choices” (“Night of Desirable Objects” 2.02).

The key idea for the producers of *Fringe*, Jeff Pinkner and J. H. Wyman, is that the “small choices that you make define you as a person and can change your life in large ways down the line,” so the “Over There” serves as “a reminder . . . that your life is what your choices are” (qtd. in Shen). The producers’ statements emphasize the influence that choices have on the course of one’s life, but Walter’s explanation takes this a step further, to identify that the experience of living in different universes can in turn be expected to have an effect on each individual’s personality. The paired characters of *Fringe* therefore have a complex relation to each other. They can be understood as versions of the same person, with much in common, in particular their physical appearance and genetic makeup. However, differences between them develop as a result of their particular life experiences situated in alternate universes.

Initial Encounters with Alternate-Others

As might be expected, *Fringe* narratives suggest that when encountering one’s physical double it can be very difficult to remember that this other is an individual with points of difference from the self. The perception of such close physical resemblance is taken instead to support the existence of significant commonalities in personality. Even Walter is drawn to make close comparisons between himself and Walternate. For example, in “Peter” (2.16), Walter is dismayed when Walternate is distracted and misses his creation of a cure for his son. Walter’s assistant Carla Warren suggests that Walternate might realize and go back to check the compound again. However, Walter is certain: “Carla, he is just like me. I wouldn’t look back, and neither will he.”

The initial meeting between Olivia and Alt-Olivia is also framed by the idea of sameness in support of Olivia's appeal to her alternate other: "You gotta trust me, I'm you" ("Over There, Part 2" 2.23). Although Alt-Olivia's appearance is somewhat different from Olivia's—red hair as opposed to blonde and more noticeable makeup—she does share the same physical facial features as well as some behaviors, most notably where she hides the spare key to her apartment. In contrast with Olivia, who is prepared to meet someone that looks, and quite possibly behaves, very much as she does, Alt-Olivia has not been told what to expect. In the same episode, she sees Olivia for the first time on a hospital security film and is clearly shocked, causing her colleague Agent Francis to comment that she looks as if she "just saw a ghost." In spite of her initial surprise, the complexity of thinking and talking about one's alternate other is highlighted when Alt-Olivia asks Peter what Olivia is like, simply referring to her as "me," rather than using a phrase such as 'the other Olivia.'

Peter's attempt to answer helps to identify two levels at which the comparison between Alt-Olivia and Olivia can be made. He begins, "She's a lot like you," a perfectly reasonable response to their similar facial and bodily appearances ("Over There, Part 2"). Then he vacillates, as he thinks more carefully, suggesting that Olivia is "darker in the eyes" and "always trying to make up for something . . . right some imaginary wrong." He remarks that Olivia seems "haunted" and finally concludes that maybe she is "nothing like" Alt-Olivia after all. Peter's deeper consideration is less about physical appearance and more about the personality that Olivia has revealed to him and how this compares with his brief assessment of Alt-Olivia, who is portrayed as more open and outgoing in character.

The juxtaposition of Alt-Olivia's shock and surprise at seeing Olivia on camera, with her apparent acceptance of Olivia as 'me,' reinforces the complex relationship between alternate others. It can be argued that from Alt-Olivia's point of view the relation can also be theorized through the figure of the *doppelgänger*, although in a very different way from that

which Stuart suggests when working from Olivia's perspective. The shock and fear Alt-Olivia expresses on first seeing Olivia supports Freud's reference to the *doppelgänger* as the archetypal example of the uncanny, "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (76). At the same time, the level of familiarity also supports the tendency to refer to such others as 'me,' as Alt-Olivia does in conversation with Peter. Importantly, marking Olivia as Alt-Olivia's *doppelgänger* reverses the positions of these characters such that Alt-Olivia becomes the self, and Olivia the other.

Although Olivia has Alt-Olivia at gunpoint during their first meeting, being unsure as to the reception she will receive, their conversation runs smoothly enough to begin with. As they exchange details about their lives, differences are revealed. Alt-Olivia's mother is alive, but her sister died in childbirth. In contrast, Olivia's mother has died, but her sister and niece are alive and well. In spite of these differences, Olivia's appeal for help based on what they have in common seems reasonable, but it is violently rejected and this interruption forces Olivia to reappraise Alt-Olivia as an individual with concerns very different from her own. Olivia has no idea of the vehemence with which Walternate has described Olivia and her team as "invaders," "monsters" that "can't be trusted" ("Over There, Part 2"). In addition, she makes no allowances for Alt-Olivia's extensive experiences within an unstable and damaged universe. Even in light of their similarities, and her reference to Olivia as 'me,' Alt-Olivia's history and training position Olivia as a dangerous enemy other. Alt-Olivia keeps her spare gun in her coat, rather than her bag (as Olivia does), and on retrieving this weapon she takes control of the situation remarking, "You know, I don't know what you are, but you are nothing like me." In this statement, saying "what," as opposed to "who," drives home the sense in which Olivia is a monster from Alt-Olivia's perspective.

Alt-Olivia's reaction can be understood to position Olivia in terms of a darker side of the *doppelgänger* figure and, as Dimitris Vardoulakis notes, "*doppelgänger* characters tend to

be associated with evil and the demonic” (100). As for the more positive figure described by Stuart, this darker doppelgänger is linked with “a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is . . . split,” although in this case it is “threatening” as opposed to inspiring a reassessment of one’s own character (100). Both understandings are therefore connected to the existence of a single subject; however, as I have demonstrated, it is possible to position either Olivia or Alt-Olivia as the subject and either of them as the doppelgänger.

Psychoanalysis and Totalizing Communication Theory

Although the psychoanalytic perspectives discussed above do not overlook the differences between characters that are paired, they do imply that they are two sides of the same subject, as opposed to being separate individuals. This understanding, which subsumes the double as part of the self, can therefore be linked with totalizing theories of communication. Such theories relate successful communication to the accurate transmission of information, exerting influence over others, attaining rational agreement between communicators or the development of shared understandings about the world. Pinchevski describes these conceptions as the “traditional communication theories” and, as he clarifies, they are “largely about the reduction of difference or the transcendence of difference, and consequently, the elimination of difference” (65). This vision of communication follows a similar path to the psychoanalytic theory discussed above, placing the other in a precarious position by showing little or no respect for difference.

The idea of overcoming or eliminating difference is associated with the recognition of physical and behavioral similarities between individuals in Chang’s analysis of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology as the basis for communication theory. Phenomenology, as explored by Husserl and other philosophers who followed him, such as Emmanuel Levinas, is concerned with first-person perceptions of ‘phenomena,’ the meanings that are developed on the basis of these experiences, and the individual explanations about the world that result.

Chang argues that, when understood as providing this broad framework, phenomenology can be positioned as “the very foundation of modern theories of communication” (xvi). In particular, he explores Husserl’s conception of “pairing,” which suggests that the recognition of another being, and the possibility of understanding that being, is supported initially by the resemblance of its form to the self (23).

Chang explains that pairing supports the process of understanding “something new and unfamiliar by analogy with something already known and familiar,” his wording emphasizing the similarity between Husserl’s idea of pairing and Freud’s description of the uncanny, and its archetype the doppelgänger (23). As Chang notes, Husserl extends this idea to suggest that the process of pairing is further supported during interaction by a continuous demonstration of “harmonious behavior” (25). However, Chang destabilizes Husserl’s argument by questioning whether a “healthy white middle-aged bachelor” would be able to recognize a “deformed pregnant black teenager” in the terms Husserl identifies (26). In *Fringe*, the examples of characters and their alternate others lead me to question Husserl’s conceptions from another perspective, to ask whether physical pairing and behavioral harmony are enough to ensure understanding between any self and other. As I have shown, the paired characters, while physically and genetically similar, and often showing some common behaviors, are nonetheless capable of radically interrupting each other in unexpected ways, as opposed to communicating seamlessly.

Chang’s positioning of phenomenology as the basis for all communication theory is reasonable, but nonetheless somewhat unusual. As he notes, scholars such as Peters and Pinchevski instead identify a separate phenomenological tradition of communication theory, which emphasizes the importance of valuing the differences between individuals. In particular, both Peters and Pinchevski draw on the ethical philosophy of Levinas, who condemns conceptions of successful communication that begin “with the idea that duality

must be transformed into unity, and that social relationships must culminate in communion” (“The Other in Proust” 164). Levinas suggests that perspectives on communication which valorize and seek comprehension and commonality over respect and difference do “not see that the success of knowledge would precisely abolish the proximity of the Other” (164). Pinchevski, with reference to Levinas’ contention, argues that communication is all too easily positioned as “the great equalizer,” resulting in an unethical violence to otherness (65). As already mentioned, Peters suggests that one way to avoid this violence is not to make over the other in the likeness of the self, but in *Fringe* the other already shares the self’s likeness.

My analysis of communication in *Fringe*, even between paired characters, has already gone some way to avoid the violence associated with eliminating difference by rethinking situations from the perspective of each character in turn. In particular, the communication between Olivia and Alt-Olivia described above, while it can be understood in terms of the figure of the doppelgänger, can also be understood from either side in terms of a self communicating with a physically and genetically similar other. Taking this perspective highlights the interruptions between the characters resulting from their incompatible histories and experiences. A concern for recognizing the particularity of otherness on such a basis is stressed by Iris Marion Young, when she argues that the differences between people are dependent upon “the history each has and the social position they occupy” (41). It is clear that both personal history and socio-cultural positioning come into play when considering the presence of differences between paired characters across the two worlds of *Fringe*.

Swapping Lives and the Strength of Experience and Memory

As *Fringe* progresses, Olivia is captured by Walternate, and Alt-Olivia is sent in Olivia’s place with Peter and Walter on their return home. Olivia undergoes a process of chemical and psychological brainwashing to make her think that she is Alt-Olivia and is then placed within Alt-Olivia’s Fringe Division team without the knowledge of any of the

members except for Alt-Broyles. Walternate's theory is that by embedding her within the life of her alternate other she will "plateau" and "her new identity will become fixed" ("The Plateau" 3.03). Although Olivia is normally regarded as the self or subject from Stuart's perspective, this narrative places Olivia strongly as other from the moment she arrives in the alternate universe. The violence of Olivia's capture and brainwashing is somewhat extreme, but it is nonetheless a good illustration of the way in which Pinchevski argues that socio-cultural theories of communication support the reduction of difference, such that others are assimilated within a framework of shared cultural norms and societal rules (46-54).

The process of turning Olivia into Alt-Olivia turns out to be more complicated than Walternate thinks. There are practical difficulties, for example Olivia doesn't remember all relevant passwords or rules within the alternate universe, most notably the "blinking auburn diamond" indicating "compromised air quality" ("The Plateau"). Furthermore, she begins to see visions of Peter in which he encourages her to remember her true origin and identity ("The Plateau"; "Amber 31422" 3.05; "The Abducted" 3.07). What happens to Olivia serves to illustrate the strength of long-lived history and experience over more recent treatment as her old memories resurface. Olivia overcomes the attempt to 'reprogram' her, and she also gains useful insights into the alternate universe. However, even as she becomes certain of her own identity, Olivia still respects and works with the alternate universe's Fringe Division team. For example, although she should be putting her escape plan into action, she returns to ensure that Alt-Broyles' son is safe from the Candy Man ("The Abducted"). Her dedication to her job and her colleagues, even in the alternate universe, and her exemplary care with witnesses such as his son, encourages Alt-Broyles to help her escape Walternate. He is unsure about offering aid to an agent of the universe that has damaged his own, but Olivia convinces him of her belief that both of their universes can be saved with her statement "there must be another way and I promise you I will find it" ("The Abducted"). Olivia does

not see the universes as at war, and it is likely that her recent experiences only further support this appraisal of the situation.

Alt-Olivia's situation is somewhat different from Olivia's, although she is also positioned by her act of infiltration as other within an alternate world. Alt-Olivia's success relies upon her similarity to Olivia. Nevertheless, their personality quirks, experiential differences, and Olivia's cortexiphan-enabled photographic memory all have the potential to disrupt Alt-Olivia's cover. Peter is surprised when "Olivia" expresses her love for a particular song and a desire to dance, but Alt-Olivia explains away this anomaly by suggesting that "being over there and meeting another Olivia Dunham" has made her reconsider her attitude to life ("The Box" 3.02). Peter is convinced, but the audience has a very different perspective, as the ruthless pursuit of her mission's goal leads Alt-Olivia to shoot an innocent man without hesitation (although admittedly with an apology). Alt-Olivia, unlike Olivia, is still certain that the universes are at war and she is merciless in her actions.

However, as she becomes closer to Peter, there is evidence that Alt-Olivia begins to experience life from Olivia's perspective. When Peter shares how hard it is to forgive Walter's actions—"I saw the quarantine zones. I saw all the damage that he caused. He destroyed their world, my world" ("The Box")—Alt-Olivia takes Olivia's side of the argument in response, reminding Peter that Walter couldn't have known what devastation he would cause. Her conversations with Peter may help Alt-Olivia to reconsider the relative positions of her universe and the one she has infiltrated, although she continues to pursue her mission with alacrity in the short term. Over time, Alt-Olivia clearly remembers Peter's insistence, echoed in Olivia's statement to Alt-Broyles, that there must be "another way" to offer an alternative to destroying Walternate's world and all of the people it contains ("6995 kHz" 3.06). Her diary describes Peter as having a "sincerity behind his eyes," supported by a "deep-seated goodness," and this draws Alt-Olivia to believe his argument that there is an

alternative course of action which doesn't involve the violent destruction of either universe. Evidence for her change of heart is provided in "6.02 AM EST" (3.20), when, some time after returning to her universe, Alt-Olivia's efforts to cross back "Over Here" to warn Peter not only show that she has feelings for him, but also that his words have led her to question Walternate's decisions. While Olivia has been chemically and experientially brainwashed, Alt-Olivia also feels the effects of taking her alternate other's path in life. Of course, her attachment to Peter is strongly reinforced by the birth of their son, if only for a brief time before the timelines are reset at the end of Season 3 to reflect Peter's death as a child in both universes.

The different experiences of Olivia and Alt-Olivia while in the others' universe draw out the complex interaction between individual history and past experiences, alongside the effect of current situations and communication with others. In Season 3, the audience is shocked by Alt-Olivia's actions and retains a sense of loyalty to Olivia. However, the narratives also help to establish Alt-Olivia as a separate character, as opposed to being the other side of Olivia that is awaiting her acknowledgement. The impossibility of simply stepping into the other's shoes is illustrated, along with an increasing sense of the depth of personality difference that is present even between paired characters.

Returning Home and the Question of Revealing One's 'Face'

On her return home, Olivia has to come to terms with the fact that her life was taken over by her alternate other, including Peter's admission that he has been involved with Alt-Olivia ever since they crossed back with Walter. Peter explains that, while he noticed some behavioral changes, such as Alt-Olivia being "much quicker with a smile . . . [and] less intense," he believed her justification that "what she saw of her other life . . . [had] made her want to change, to be happier" ("Marionette" 3.09). Olivia tries to accept what has happened, but she is still devastated that Peter didn't recognize Alt-Olivia: "She wasn't me. How could

you not see that?” Her perspective is only reinforced by the episode’s narrative, within which Roland Barrett reconstructs the body of a woman following her suicide and the subsequent donation of her viable organs to other people. He successfully reanimates Amanda Walsh’s body, but when he looks “into her eyes” Barrett realizes she isn’t the Amanda he loves. Olivia feels that Alt-Olivia has “taken everything,” although she does acknowledge how well prepared Alt-Olivia must have been in order to infiltrate with such success. In spite of the external similarities between them, Olivia thinks that Peter, her closest companion, should have been able to perceive Alt-Olivia’s interior otherness.

The philosophy of Levinas, and the integration of Levinasian ethics into theories of communication explored by scholars such as Pinchevski and Peters, offers productive ways to analyze Olivia’s contention further. Levinas’ central concern is to describe how interactions take place between self and other, while maintaining the alterity of the other and avoiding any reconciliation to sameness. To achieve this, Levinas describes the self’s encounter with the other in terms of a situation in which, although they come into close proximity, they also maintain an irreducible distance from each another. Levinas defines this encounter in *Totality and Infinity* as “the face to face” (79-81). It is very important to note that Levinas’ use of the term *face* is problematic and often misunderstood. While the term is commonly associated with the physical form of the human face, for Levinas it refers to a more transcendent property of the other. The face cannot be seen or recognized, rather the face of the other is revealed to the self in such a way as always to exceed any idea of the other that the self has formulated. In other words, the Levinasian face is not simply a physical face; instead, the term encapsulates something more elusive, through which the personality of the other is partially revealed to the self while maintaining his or her integrity and alterity.

Furthermore, Levinas explains that, “the whole body—a hand or curve of the shoulder—can express as the face,” thus expanding the term *face* to include what is revealed

by bodily expression (262). In linking this concept with communication theory, it is therefore important to acknowledge the value of understanding communication in broad terms as more than spoken or written language. A particularly useful description is given by Fernando Poyatos in his definition of communication as a “triple audiovisual reality” consisting of: language; paralinguistics, the production of expressive sounds; and kinesics, including facial and bodily expressions as well as body movement as a whole (249). The Levinasian face can therefore be understood to encapsulate all the various ways “in which the other presents himself [or herself], exceeding the idea of the other in me” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 50).

Levinas’ conception of “the face to face” can be used to theorize the way in which, while their faces are physically almost identical, the underlying personalities of Olivia and Alt-Olivia are very different. Olivia’s charge against Peter in “Marionette,” for example, relates to his inability to recognize that the “Olivia” with whom he is having an affair, while she has the right physical face and bodily appearance, has the wrong Levinasian face. However, Levinas’ description of the face to face suggests that Peter cannot be expected to read Olivia by looking into her eyes, because he cannot simply see her Levinasian face. Instead, his appraisal can only be based on what he already knows about Olivia, and what is revealed to him over time by Alt-Olivia as she plays out her pretense. The problem of recognizing Alt-Olivia’s difference is exacerbated by the fact that the most intimate moment he has shared thus far with Olivia is her statement that they belong together made as she convinced him to return “Over Here,” only to be replaced moments after by Alt-Olivia.

The precise context of Alt-Olivia’s appearance as Olivia is important in understanding the potential for confusing those close to Olivia—not only Peter, but also Walter and their colleague Astrid Farnsworth. From an audience perspective, and as Olivia surmises, Alt-Olivia is clearly well prepared, with a comprehensive dossier of information about Olivia and her cases. Alt-Olivia’s portrayal of her more “intense” alternate other is also supported by her

unstable position in a universe broadly similar to her own, and yet radically different in some of its details (“Marionette”). Alt-Olivia is constantly plagued by the fear of making a mistake that will break her cover. It is reasonable to think that Alt-Olivia’s unease reduces her normal air of hyper-confidence, making her personality more compatible with the description Peter has given her of Olivia as “darker in the eyes” and “haunted” (“Over There, Part 2”). Alt-Olivia’s Levinasian face at this time does reveal some aspects of herself—she “is quicker with a smile”—but this revelation is constantly tempered by her need to remain undercover as Olivia (“Marionette”). In addition, her diary entries indicate that her feelings for Peter are genuine. In spite of having a long-term boyfriend in her own universe, she is finding it difficult “not to get caught up in” Peter (“Reciprocity” 3.11).

The *Fringe* episodes in which Olivia and Alt-Olivia are in their alternate other’s universe offer an unusual illustration of the revelation of otherness through the Levinasian face, blurred by chemical and psychological brainwashing on one side, and the need to remain undercover on the other. The audience becomes convinced of the differences that exist between Olivia and Alt-Olivia, as does Alt-Olivia. However, Olivia’s understanding of her relation to her alternate other is complicated by the way in which she finds, on her return home, that Alt-Olivia was effectively able to take over her life. This discovery continues to make it difficult for Olivia to recognize herself and her alternate other as separate individuals.

Alternate Others as Irreducibly Other

When Olivia reads Alt-Olivia’s diary and realizes the extent of the connection that Alt-Olivia has felt for Peter, she is led to question whether he returns her feelings (“Concentrate and Ask Again” 3.12). When talking with Nina Sharp, she admits that she would understand if that were the case: “I, I was her for a while and she’s, she’s like me, but better . . . she still has her mother and she wasn’t experimented on as a child. And she can laugh. She has real friends. She even wears a dress every once in a while.” Olivia’s appraisal

of Alt-Olivia reinforces the idea that they are versions of the same individual, but that she feels Alt-Olivia is a better person, easier to be around. Stuart suggests that “Olivia . . . learns from [Alt-Olivia’s] example that she is capable of intimacy” (122). However, the fact that Olivia is shown in an intimate relationship with John Scott in the pilot episode leads me to question Stuart’s analysis. Indeed, Olivia reveals her desire to start an intimate relationship with Peter in her argument for his return: “you have to come back, because you belong with me” (“Over There, Part 2”).

Olivia continues to mull over her problematic relationship with Peter in “6B” (3.14), the episode in which she and Peter must convince Alice Merchant that the vision she sees in her apartment is an alternate other from a different universe, as opposed to the ghost of her dead husband. Again, this narrative explores the difficulty of recognizing the seemingly familiar other’s otherness. Alice is resistant to Peter and Olivia’s arguments until Alt-Derek mentions that their daughters miss her, an impossibility because she has never had children. As she explains to Alt-Derek, “I’m not your wife. Your wife is gone, and so is my Derek.” Alice Merchant’s recognition that Alt-Derek isn’t her Derek supports the possibility that Olivia’s reconciliation with Peter is driven not by a decision to “stop repressing her [Alt-Olivia] side,” as Stuart argues, but rather by accepting that Alt-Olivia is a separate individual (13). This perspective helps Olivia to understand that Peter’s vision of their happiness together, based on the happiness he felt with Alt-Olivia, is attainable without any need for her to become like Alt-Olivia. Peter expresses his strength of feeling when he says, “I’ve seen what the two of us together looks like, and it’s beautiful.” Of course, Peter’s reasoning is somewhat flawed from the perspective that Olivia and Alt-Olivia are separate people. After all, Peter hasn’t yet experienced an intimate relationship with Olivia, only one with Alt-Olivia while pretending to be Olivia. In spite of this difficulty, Olivia’s interpretation of his statement acknowledges the importance of Peter’s belief that he was with her all along, this

being an essential part of what made the relationship “beautiful.” Indeed, as soon as Peter realizes he has been deceived, the relationship with Alt-Olivia comes to an end (“The Abducted”; “Entrada” 3.08).

Respect for Others and Working Together

An important aspect of Levinas’ face to face encounter is the core idea of respect for the other that allows their otherness, or alterity, to remain a continuous presence. In Season 4 of *Fringe*, unexpectedly meeting one’s double for the first time is still unsettling, as evidenced by Astrid’s surprise on encountering Alt-Astrid in the laboratory (“Making Angels” 4.11). However, the relations between paired characters in this season are not easy to explain in terms of the doppelgänger or shadow self. Instead, the narratives illustrate paired characters meeting one another as separate individuals, intent on locating their differences as well as aspects of their life histories and personalities that they share. For some of the pairs of characters—those who have not come into direct conflict with each other—respecting and working with their alternate other is relatively easy. This is the case for Astrid/Alt-Astrid and Agent Lee/Lincoln Lee. In contrast, when the other is clearly identifiable as a past aggressor, as for Walter/Walternate and Olivia/Alt-Olivia, the problem of developing a level of trust is more marked.

This kind of difficulty is explored by Donna Haraway when she asks how “people rooted in different knowledge practices ‘get on together,’ especially when an all-too-easy cultural relativism is not an option, either politically, epistemologically, or morally” (7). The situation in *Fringe* is unusual, but the paired characters are nevertheless clearly “rooted in different knowledge practices” by virtue of their specific experiences within the alternate worlds. An easy “cultural relativism” cannot exist between the two universes in *Fringe*, in particular for the central characters whose prior encounters have positioned them as adversaries. Haraway suggests that the answers to her question “can only be found in actual

practice, which takes difference (as significant otherness) seriously” (7). This is why it is so important that the paired characters in *Fringe* acknowledge each other as separate individuals, in order for them to be able to work together towards a common goal.

For much of Season 4, the timeline is reset by the fact that Peter has died in both universes as a child. This does alter the relationships between characters, although even in the new timeline Olivia has been held captive by Walternate to allow Alt-Olivia to take over her life for a period of time. The added complication of the relationship with Peter is removed, but Olivia and Alt-Olivia are still at loggerheads, intent on clearly differentiating themselves from each other. As Olivia points out, “Just because you walked in my shoes, don’t you think for a moment that you know me” (“Neither Here Nor There” 4.01). The appraisal of difference is clear in their relationship, but any sense of respect is lacking. However, by “Back to Where You’ve Never Been” (4.08), Alt-Olivia has developed a grudging respect for Olivia’s intuition. When her universe is attacked by a shapeshifter, she supports Olivia’s suggestion that Walternate might be involved, much to the surprise of Lincoln Lee. As Alt-Olivia points out, Olivia may be “a paranoid who doesn’t trust anyone,” but that “doesn’t mean she’s not right.” This admission signals an improvement in the relationship between Olivia and Alt-Olivia. They may not like each another, but they can now work together more effectively.

By the time the two universes are about to be separated again, Olivia and Alt-Olivia’s working relationship has helped them to reach a level of more friendly connection. In thanking Olivia for her team’s work in maintaining the healing connection between the universes, Alt-Olivia mentions that no one in her universe has “seen a rainbow in over twenty years,” although she continues to hope that rainbows will return, “looking up” each time it rains (“Worlds Apart” 4.20). This revelation, highlighting the destruction in Alt-Olivia’s universe, unsettles Olivia, forcing her to imagine the loss of something beautiful she takes for

granted. Later, as they say goodbye, they voice their mutual respect and Olivia's parting words are to suggest that Alt-Olivia continues to look up "after it rains." Olivia and Alt-Olivia don't meet again until the penultimate episode of Season 5, "Liberty" (5.12). By this time their lives have diverged even more markedly, such that Alt-Olivia's lot has improved, while Olivia's life has been all but destroyed by the invasion of the Observers. It is significant that the work Olivia did to save both universes from annihilation was successful, causing Alt-Olivia's respect for, and trust in, Olivia to deepen. Alt-Olivia immediately responds to Olivia's call for help and support, even though they will be very unlikely ever to meet again after this point in time.

Fringe narratives stress the presence of difference in human relationships, even where the people in question are very similar to each other, thus destabilizing the goal of communication as based in commonality and sameness. My analysis, taking into account the perspectives both of the characters with whom the audience first becomes familiar, from "Over Here," and also their alternate others, "Over There," supports complex understandings of their personalities and communication. In particular, I have raised questions about their changing relations to each other as 'others,' rather than positioning either side as the shadow or doppelgänger.

Aspects of the narratives do support the validity of examining the paired characters in *Fringe* from psychoanalytic perspectives. However, the way such perspectives posit a single subject, positioning the doppelgänger or shadow as its other side, is problematic and links them with totalizing theories of communication. In contrast, Levinas' conception of "the face to face" provides an explanation of self-other interactions that maintains the integrity and alterity of the other. From a Levinasian perspective, while the differences between paired characters in *Fringe* are obscured by their close physical resemblance and the behaviors they have in common, the distance between them is nonetheless irreducible and meaningful. In

particular, once the paired characters see each other as others they are more able to work together effectively. Interactions between alternate others emphasize the benefit of retaining a sense of the value of both commonality and difference in communication theory and practice. By attending to the other's specific difference, and by acknowledging them as the same . . . yet other, it is possible to meet them with openness and respect and acknowledge the value of their perspective.

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