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ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER
Colonialism and Identity in New Sweden and Beyond

EXHIBITION AT LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
NOVEMBER 8, 2013 - MAY 2, 2014
MEETINGS AND EXPECTATIONS

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In the 17th century, the royal cabinet of curiosities in Copenhagen included an Inuit family, captured in Greenland to serve as entertainment for Danish courtiers. From Holger Jacobaeus, *Museum regium*, 1696.

stead, people awoke to a divided world where otherness was defined by a political front between East and West. At the same time, the European colonies gained their independence which in turn created a third world that was economically and culturally defined as the Other from a Western political point of view. When the Berlin wall was torn down in 1989, so too was the definition of a Western identity as absolute and undisputable. In today’s globalized world, identities have become fluid, composite, and all the more based on an idea of personal choices. However, these choices are always constrained by the individuals’ actual circumstances and possibilities. This has in turn divided the world into new categories of otherness, where some enjoy the freedom to move and choose freely in a world of seemingly limitless opportunity, while others have neither the freedom nor the opportunity to do so.
NEW BORDERS

WITHOUT AND WITHIN

From the 17th century onwards, the continued exploration and exploitation of the world would challenge some of the earlier stereotypes of peoples, while strengthening others and dressing them in scientific attire. In the 19th century, the growing fascination with taxonomies would lead to the repressive typologies of humans which equated anatomical attributes with ethnic identity, class, and moral character. This racial typology essentially created otherness and borders within societies; the Other or monstrous was no longer to be found on the edge of the world. This approach to humankind has served, and still serves, as a devastating political instrument of dominance across the globe.

The mid-20th century, with the end of the Second World War as a watershed moment, saw a strengthened critique of the divisions based on race and ethnicity. In-

THE OTHER

In classical antiquity, foreign peoples were generally characterized as Others based on their contrasting physical appearances, strange languages, perplexing customs, as well as the unfamiliar landscapes they inhabited. The further one got from the center of civilization, and closer to the limits of the known world, the more outlandish became the bodies and manners of human beings. These ethnocentric geographies often combined a sense of fascination with the contempt for the alien and unfamiliar, where landscapes were portrayed as both beautiful and bizarre, and its inhabitants as both noble and immoral. These encounters, whether real or imagined, thus offered two opposite possibilities: a confirmation of the civility and superiority of the observers as well as a critique of their own deficiencies. The medieval writers, who drew their knowledge and inspiration from the classical sources, continued this tradition of identification partly out of habit and repeated it in many literary and artistic genres.

Images of the Other were so frequently repeated that they became widely accepted truths. The early modern explorers who ventured to the farthest reaches of the world expected to see, and allegedly sighted, creatures described by the classical and medieval writers. Routine interactions with native inhabitants of Africa, Asia and America, which were brought about by trade and colonial settlements, saw a revival of the classical construct of otherness, although now carrying the overtones of Christian morals. The indigenous populations were deemed to be primitive, heathen, child-like and unable to govern themselves – an image that was used to justify slavery and colonial encroachment.

A typology of the Others: a page from Herman Lundborgs Svenska folktyper, 1919.

Monstrous races, in Hartmann Schedels Liber chronicarum, 1493.
NEW SWEDEN

WHO WERE THE OTHERS IN NEW SWEDEN?

The Swedish colonists in 17th century America wedged themselves into a colonial space that was both culturally complex and politically contested. Even though some contemporary sources describe the land as empty and virgin, it was in fact settled by two Native American groups, the Lenape and the Susquehannocks, whose interactions with each other, as well as with Europeans in their vicinity, defined the area. Because of its limited size, New Sweden only managed to gain a marginal position on this cultural and political scene. However, it became an addition to the new map of a colonized America, and formed a borderland where identities and material practices were in constant flux. This is reflected in the descriptions of Otherness in the written sources. When the Swedish described the Lenape and the Susquehannocks, their gaze passed through a lens colored by European expectations of what a native population should look like and how it should behave. However, similar to the descriptions of the Others in classical antiquity and the medieval period, the accounts are filled with ambivalence. The natives were both admired because of their physical agility and strength, and condemned because of their indecent nakedness. They were described as *terribly barbarous heathens* and *revengeful,* and at the same time admired as *wise in trade and traffic; clever to do all kinds of things of lead, copper and tin.* Accounts like these, that express the field of tension between the unknown and the relatable, are paralleled in material practices. European objects were adopted and transformed by the native communities, while their customs were taken up by the colonizers and exotic native objects shipped back to Sweden and exhibited in the Cabinets of Curiosity. This borderland quality of the settlement also meant that the colonizers themselves were relatively free to move between cultures, both native and European, and often acquired important roles as middle-men in political and economic negotiations. This position would in turn color the Dutch and English accounts of the Swedish settlers as the Others, characterizing them by their peculiar customs and their suspicious familiarity with the native population.
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American Indians, as portrayed in Thomas Campanius Holm, _Kort beskrifning om provin/cen Nya Sverige u/I America_, 1702.
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Monstrous races, in Hartmann Schedels Liber chronicarum, 1493.
NEW WORLDS

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