

Editorial: Beyond binaries, beyond despair

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Welcome to this special issue of *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*. This issue offers writings and images which speak back to binary practices and language. Some talk from within binaries, some play with what binaries might be and do. Writers have been courageous in playing with form: poems, flash tales, video recording and academic writing. Many pieces have an audio version read by the writers as well as a PDF.

To share with you a bit of context about us. we are a community of systemic practitioners who started to meet face-to-face at least once a year in Windermere, a lovely town in the heart of the Lake District, in the north of England. We called our gathering the International Systemic Practice and Research Summer School and was organised by the Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice at the University of Bedfordshire until its last edition in 2021. Since then, we've been organising activities related to training, supervision, and publishing through the community interest company Everything is Connected Press.

We wanted to showcase ideas discussed at the Beyond the Binaries Symposium which we organised in Manchester in July 2024. We wanted to recognise the divisive contexts in which we find ourselves living. We intended it to be a theoretical, ethical and political exercise in practising togetherness using systemic theory and practice to take us further. It was then that we started planning this issue. Our conferences and workshops foreground intersectionality and context to challenge the power of the single story that frames how people are seen. We wrote a paper for the Autism and Intersectionality issue in this journal and the Autism and Intersectionality Conference called *From Autistic to Multi-Spectra Living* which echoes the intention of this journal to use systemic theory to depathologise people and decolonise practice.

Story of schisms within societies and within the person. The task at hand is how to understand what is happening from a systemic perspective. How can we make a new sense of splits, polarities, binaries, dualisms across and within cultures. They make people mad. Systemic therapy refocuses away from the concept of a thing inside a person to the contexts which influence

how a person is understood and treated and in the world. The power of language to “other” people is a practice which can escalate to life threatening levels very quickly. Social media amplifies some voices, stories become true through repetition and amplification. We find ourselves in a polyphonic crisis with competing truths.

In 2025 we seem to be living in times in which neo-fascism has become mainstream. The global empowerment of right-wing political parties (USA, Italy, Germany, France, India, Argentina, Poland, Hungary, just to mention a few examples) seems to be the result of a backlash to progressive and social-democratic governments. As if some societies have decided a shift from collectivism to individualism. But what seems to be a new element is that this wave is supported by the most important technology companies in the world. This wave of techno-nationalistic-fascist-neo-liberalism creates at least two categories of people: those who are “in” and have access to full rights and those who are “the others”, “out” of the tribe and objectified and dehumanised.

Neo-fascist discourses have nationalism as a common narrative. In the USA, the Republican Party’s slogan “America First” is in line with the French National Front’s “La France d’abord” (France First), Germany’s far-right groups shouting “Deutschland den Deutschen” (Germany for the Germans) or “L’Italia agli italiani” (“Italy for Italians”) which is a slogan promoted by the Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy). The nation with the biggest army in the world inaugurated a new government in January 2025. In a shocking set of executive orders, the new administration quickly constructed the “othering” of minoritised communities, targeting “kinds” of people, in particular trans, undocumented migrants and refugees, and people with disabilities. In what seems an inspiration from The Goebbels diaries, an account of writings by Nazi propaganda minister, the new right-wing populist and neofascist wannabe regime repeats lies with simple slogans, appeals to emotions, and seems able to scapegoat, create and demonize minorities as enemies. As if it’s necessary to degrade and dehumanise in order to “make” a society “great again”.

For some it is a new world order; for others it is shock therapy (Naomi Klein, 2007) in terms of sudden and violent disruption, a plan to distract, overwhelm, and deplete (Klein, 2025). Only a few hours after the inauguration, trans people started to be showcased as a threat to women who need protection from radical gender ideology (White House, 2025a); undocumented migrants are presented as illegal aliens and criminals invading the country (White House, 2025b), people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities are blamed for an air tragedy (Pengelly, 2025); students who engage in protest are threatened to be deported (Debusmann, 2025); and those who have survived the genocidal actions in Gaza are dehumanised and threatened to be detrterritorialised (Collinson, 2025). During these times of shock people are disoriented and vulnerable so less likely to resist dramatic economic and political changes (Klein, 2007). German-American historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt (1963) wrote about the nature of political evil. She pointed out that we need a moral mission to prevent the repetition of genocidal murder by shaping the world’s political systems to both allow for and protect individuals’ rights and freedoms. But these are cruel and sadistic times in which some societies are normalising nazi salutes. American philosopher Judith Butler (2025) advises that “although there is every reason to be outraged, we cannot let that outrage flood us and stop our minds”. She suggests that “it is time to find passions of our own, a desire for a freedom equally shared and to imagine a world in which the government supports health and education for all, where we all live without fear, knowing that our interconnected lives are equally valuable.”

Trans activist Kate Bornstein (2025) shares their two rules which are “1) Nothing is as bad as it looks;

2) Nothing is as good as it looks. We have out trans people in public office, we have trans medicine, we have trans scholarship, we have trans attorneys. We're not going away."

Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice is committed to writing as transformative intervention and systemic reflexivity as a practice to break out of reductionist ways of understanding what is going on within us, with others and the world. Writing can concretise and writing can open up that which is fixed. How we use our words for the benefit of social-justice-for-all matters now.

We take inspiration from Toni Morrison (2015) who said, "This is *precisely* the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal."

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