Et vanskeligere terreng og mer teoretisk utfordrende er spørsmålet om ulike normer for skuespill og spillestilens betydning for tilskuerens stillingtagen. I bokens siste tre kapitler nærmer forfatteren seg dette komplekse spørsmålet fra flere sider ved å se på moderne films ulike konvensjoner for skuespill, og ulike spillestilers betydning for tilskuerens reaksjoner. Dette er interessant, og det er her Riis' egen teoretiske posisjon kommer mest til uttrykk.

Problemet med boken er at dette området viser seg å være omfattende, og både det analytiske og det teoretiske kunne med fordel vært enda mer elaborert. Samtidig må det jo betegnes som en styrke ved en bok hvis emne i utgangspunktet synes noe smalt og spesielt, når hovedinntrykket er at man ønsker seg mer av det samme.

Anne Gjelsvik
universitetslektor
Institutt for kunst og medievitenskap, NTNU, 7491 Trondheim
e-post: anne.gjelsvik@hf.ntnu.no

Karen Ross «The other» in Norwegian feature stories

Elisabeth Eide’s thesis is an original piece of work written in an accessible and fluent style and contains a number of interesting insights and analyses. The thesis consists of six chapters divided into two parts. The first is a study of the representation of India and Indians in A-magasinet, a supplement to the daily newspaper Aftenposten. An analysis of 74 feature stories from the 1930s to the early 1990s is the primary focus for this part of the study. The second part is an in-depth textual analysis of six contemporary feature stories written by women journalists about individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds in Norway, supplemented by interviews with the reporters and some of their sources. The (slightly narrow) literature review is treated to a thorough discussion and interpretation, and the various critiques mounted against the principal theory that guides the work – Edward Said’s concept of ‘orientalism’ – are dealt with fairly and competently. The conceptual modelling (the taxonomy of ‘othering’) and methodological approach which is elaborated in chapter 2 is persuasive, and the framework set out there provides a workable structure within which the empirical data are analysed in subsequent chapters. The empirical data are handled with considerable intelligence and, notwithstanding some of the comments provided in the
commentary below, the interpretation and analysis of each of the datasets – the *A-magasinet* articles, the ‘minority’ articles and the interviews – are assured and authoritative. All in all, Elisabeth Eide has produced an insightful and thought-provoking study. I now turn to consider the various elements of the work in more detail.

The first chapter, a comprehensive discussion of (mainly but not exclusively) Said’s theory of ‘orientalism’ and his critics, shows a mature understanding of the topic. Eide makes a valid point about the instability/contingency of the ‘western’ category creating problems in understanding ‘the non-western Other’, given that one is only made meaningful in relation to the Other, or, rather, what the Other is not (p. 22). The discussion of Gayatri Spivak’s work – the subaltern voice – was well made but brief, I felt, especially since she really focuses on issues of gender within race and the more global condition of ‘the Other’, unlike Said who doesn’t really make those kinds of distinctions and whose focus is much more ethnically narrow, albeit wider than his geographical scope would imply. I particularly appreciated the annexing of ‘journalists’ within the broader project of ‘representing elites’ and intellectuals, since such a thesis insists on crediting journalists with the kind of power (of naming and representing) which they themselves continuously refute for fear of having to accept responsibility for their actions.

Eide develops an interesting taxonomy of othering by attempting to map the terrain of ‘othering’ in all its complexity: hierarchical; annihilation; reflexive; symmetrical; hybridity. I also liked the hopeful nature of many of the ‘symmetrical’ variants but worried a little about their idealization – most representations of ‘the Other’ are rarely symmetrical, unfortunately, as the detailed content analysis in chapter 3 (and to some extent chapter 4) goes on to demonstrate. I also wonder whether pretending to ‘be’ the Other (by disguise, as with John Griffin) really is an example of a symmetrical relationship, i.e. based on mutuality and equality?

In the second chapter, Eide gives close attention to definitional clarity, allowing for differences in meaning but being clear about her own working assumptions and definitions of terms. This is especially evident in her careful elucidation of the contours of discourse analysis and ways of thinking about genre and reportage. Her use of the idea of ‘rooms’ to describe different aspects of the textual analysis is an interesting strat-
egy, but one that needs a coherent rationale. Eide’s use of example to flesh out specific points works well here, helping to provide useful context and insight; I also liked the discourse analytic table, although it is probably a little too dense currently to be really useful. The sample frame used was appropriate and the methods for analysis (levels) clearly explained.

In chapter 3, the discussion of key thematics in the 24 stories selected from the early period (1927–1943) for a more in-depth analysis, makes fascinating reading, especially the absence of ‘politics’ Eide identifies in those narratives, including (lack of) mention of British rule and poverty, and her interpretation of those absences is persuasive. The analytical ‘map’ drawn in the previous chapter has an obvious utility in this one and the categories devised there provide a good framework within which to interpret the empirical data. Obviously, using a discourse analytic method ensures attention to the narrative, but I nonetheless appreciated the opportunity to read an appropriate amount of actual reportage. It might have been interesting to discuss the narratives in both a chronological and thematic mode simultaneously, in order to appreciate (historical) shifts in content/foci, linguistic devices and othering processes, which is what makes longitudinal work so fascinating and rich.

Overall, Eide’s depth analysis of the six articles was highly textured and interesting and provided some pertinent commentary and assessment of how perspectives on India changed over the publishing period of the magazine. I appreciated her caution that although the orientation of the articles suggested a ‘positive’ shift, this was as much because of the choice of articles as it was inexorable forward progress. In fact, ironically, the second article shows a much more ‘human’ understanding of India from someone who sees with an irresistibly colonial gaze, but where her gendered humanity enables her to see beyond the artifice of Empire and superiority, in ways that her successors in the 1960s and 1970s did or could not.

The material in chapter 4 is focused around the views of individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds on the way in which they and their stories were represented in the media. I liked the way in which Eide adopted a multi-perspective approach in the depth analysis of the six feature articles and the way in which her own voice is integrated with others’ voices into the story analysis. Such an integrated approach
worked well at the level of textual analysis, journalistic reflexivity and source perspective, and I found this one of the most interesting sections of the thesis, a genuinely different approach and therefore an original contribution to the literature. It produced some really penetrating insights into the drivers for well-intentioned journalism and the reactions of the (minority) sources used, making clear how such an approach will almost inevitably produce dissonance as well as delight. Importantly, this kind of methodology begins to seriously grapple with distance and closeness and to tease out both the limitations of and tensions in cross-cultural communication as well as identify potentially workable strategies for the future.

A highly original reading of journalistic motivation for and interest in the 'minority' beat is made in chapter 5, and Eide's discussions on reflexivity and empathy are well considered. I have heard, in other contexts, an argument about how the true yardstick of equality (between whichever 'us' and whichever 'them') is when there are as many mediocre women in power as there are mediocre men. Using this analogy, it is interesting to consider that a mark of media symmetry is to juxtapose the criminal behaviour of 'ethnic Norwegians' with that of 'ethnic minorities', to show how alike they are. I think revealing the views of journalists relating to broader issues of discrimination and the parallels between, say, women and ethnic minority groups, or between lesbians and disabled people, in terms of societal prejudice and intolerance, provides important examples of a more thoughtful and critical profession, albeit in this case, exclusively women journalists. The discussion of the dilemmas they have experienced, especially of closeness/distance to the communities they cover, is incisive and pragmatic, although I felt that one reporter (J1) was perhaps a little disingenuous when she said that the 'best' reward was receiving a response to her writing from a colleague or a member of the public rather than an accolade from the industry (p. 298).

What I was really surprised by, though, was the way in which some (3 out 5?) journalists seemed to accord so little importance to language, given that their trade is in words. To suggest that what one is called and what one calls others – i.e. the 'negro' debate – is not that important is a worrying self-delusion and a serious misunderstanding of the place of language in culture and, of course, in the perpetuation of racist
and discriminatory ideology and behaviour. The power to name self and others is one of the crucial ways in which hegemony maintains power and self-generates, and for the ‘ethnic Norwegian’ journalists in Eide’s study to argue that if it’s OK for Eddie Murphy [to call himself negro], then it’s OK for them to do the same, makes clear the limits of their real understanding of the power relations between the majority and minority communities. Such a sentiment also fails to appreciate the post-ironic inflexion of Murphy’s appropriation. In most of this chapter, Eide has begun to tease out a more compassionate and egalitarian side of the journalism trade, one which genuinely tries to investigate an authentic life experience from the position of an interested, empathic reporter trying to give voice to an otherwise marginalized community. But these same journalists’ views on the (un)importance of language indicated (to me at least) that their ability to really reflect on their own practice and deal adequately with the notion of different-but-equal is more superficial than real.

The concluding chapter provides a good summary of the body of work and many of the points you make here are legitimate conclusions to be drawn from the preceding theoretical discussion and empirical data-gathering and interpretation. I think it is important to signal the importance of reflexivity by reporters, not just because it’s good practice but because it does encourage a sense of commonality, what we share as human subjects as opposed to how we differ. It is also important to highlight, as Eide does, the fact that not all journalism about ‘the Other’ is negative. What such a conclusion suggests is that there are journalistic strategies which can be employed, which take a more inclusive, less stereotypical perspective when reporting on ‘the Other’, although, as you clearly indicate, reflexivity is not the ‘salvation’ of journalism.

Karen Ross professor
Centre for Communication, Cultures and Media Studies, Coventry School of Art and Design, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry CV1 5FB, UK
e-mail: k.ross@coventry.ac.uk