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The Family: Binds, Thresholds and Articulations

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The cover image of this issue depicts a spider's web, an apt metaphor for the irreducible complexities of the family as both an experiential site and an object of study. Visually, the interconnected threads of the spider's web evoke the intimate and often complex connections within the family. Moreover, the dualities of the web – a naturally occurring object and simultaneously one that is carefully, purposefully constructed in addition to its dual functions as a home, a habitation with connotations of stability and safety, and a trap, a mechanism of enclosure and violence – speaks to the central problems of the family.

The family, as an ostensibly biological group has been naturalised as the fundamental unit of collective organisation. The family as a natural phenomenon, as theorists and historians have demonstrated time and again, is belied by its historical and geographical contingency. Queer theory in particular has emphasised that the family is a socio-culturally produced form. Foundational texts like Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* invites us to "consider the family as an artificial social group" and to explore the objects, logics, institutions and technologies through which the family has been reproduced and naturalised (73). As feminist and queer theorists have endeavoured to show, the family is neither innocent nor immutable. Protecting certain kinds of familial structures has long provided the justification for the ongoing legal regulation of sex, gender, marriage and reproduction, making the family a contentious site for non-normative subjects. In 2025, the protection of certain kinds of families at the expense of others has fuelled transphobic legislation, the re-criminalisation of abortion, attacks on Palestinians, and the forced separation, incarceration, and deportation of immigrants.

On the other hand, the family has proven to be a productive site for imagining new forms of care and ethical responsibility. From the queer (and not always human) networks of affiliation in the *Queer Ecologies* anthology to the capacious and resistant family-making practices of Sadiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, the family continues to inspire the examination, critique, and reworking of both social organisation and academic

method. It is these complexities that have caused scholars the world over, and now us, to ask: in the context of continued abuses conducted in the name of family against families, how do we engage with 'the family'? This intractability threads web-like through the nine articles that comprise this 36th issue of FORUM. It is also picked up poetically and reflectively by our two guest contributors Carl Alexandersson and Siân MacGregor.

In Alexandersson's poem, 'We wandered together under a clear sky', the indelible structures of intergenerational memory palimpsestically overlay the present like snowfall. The speaker's meditations reveal the subtle effects of the family as an inherited structure on the perception and inhabitation of space. Family, in his poem, is momentary yet cyclical; transient connections are remembered through the repetition of shared and familiar movements. MacGregor's reflective piece also thinks through the tensions between the family as structure and the individual, in this case the child, who inhabits it. She uses the term 'family' to reconsider networks of support and structures of power within the field of young audiences. Recognising the need to view children as "individual, expert, visible, unembedded" (1), her work often considers children and young people purposefully outside the context of traditional families, which can be restrictive. However, her reflection also shows that inclusive creative and academic practice allows children to act as individual agents within and across all kinds of different familial structures.

The nine articles are then presented in three sections, the first of which is titled Binds. A bind refers to an object that connects us to something else, often in uncomfortable and restrictive ways. Colloquially, a bind also refers to a problem, an issue that needs solving. In the interstices of these meanings, the section Binds evokes the family as a problematic and explores its limitations. We thus begin with Aaron Bowler's "Exchanging Symbolic Patriarchy for Narrative Patriarchy in *The Royal Tenenbaums*", which explores the insidious persistence of patriarchal structures in the ostensible redemption arc of Royal Tenenbaum in Wes Anderson's film. Following this, Kyoko Telfer's article examines Yoshimitsu Morita's film *The Family Game* through the lens of infantile capitalism, revealing the film's critique of the postmodern Japanese family. The section concludes with Lay Sion Ng's article, which is a creative critical blend of analysis of the family's role in sex trafficking in Japan, America and Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake*.

The next section, Thresholds, refers to space and its limits. A threshold demarcates a boundary and thus retains the restrictive inflection of the family discussed in the articles in Binds. And yet, a threshold is also a point of entry or beginning; to be 'on the threshold' is to be about to move beyond its limits. In this way, the articles in this section are focussed on the family in the context of its spaces, both private and public. In their considerations of these spaces, they simultaneously outline the limits of family space and cross its thresholds to explore the possibilities that lie beyond. This section opens with Yayuan Liu's article which considers how museum spaces across cultures and languages reflect different constructions of family. Xiangshu Liu's article then explores how the kitchen functions as a space of confinement, confrontation and creativity in the cinematic adaptation of the novel *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*. Finally, Kexin Zhang's "Trans Embodiment, Aging and the Heterotopia of Domestic Space: Reimagining Kinship and Futurity in *For Nonna Anna* and *Wild Side*" concludes this section with an analysis of the home as simultaneously a boundary and a space for the dissolution of the boundaries between genders, nationalities and ages.

This issue finishes with Articulations. An articulation refers both to an act of speech and, as in the other sections, a point of connection. However, unlike a bind or the static line of a threshold (even if it can be crossed), an articulation specifically denotes a joint that is capable of movement. In this way, each article in this section approaches connection as a point of articulation, which is to say as a mobile and dynamic locus that make it possible to articulate the family otherwise. The articles in this section uphold a critique of the normative family forms while foregrounding alternative modes of belonging within and outwith its structures. Articulations begins with Vanessa Romero's article which explores the disruptive possibilities of queer children within the family through an examination of how the tri-filial family unit in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* challenges the domination of the patriarch Prospero. Next, Valerie Sofie Tollhopf's article considers the cisheteronormative family farm as a space for fostering ethical and political affiliations between trans and nonhuman subjects. The issue closes with Madeleine Häusler's "Friends on Purpose: The Queer in Friendship" which considers the queer possibilities of friendship as a purposeful mode of belonging beyond the normative structures of the family.

The family remains a site of contention, a web woven with dichotomic strands. The multifaceted perspectives encompassed within this issue of FORUM show that, for better and

for worse, the family, like a spider's web, has the potential to be a structure of entrapment but also support.

Works Cited

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