

Arts, Special Issue: Artistic Imagination and Social Imaginaries

Deadline: Sep 15, 2025

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Artistic Imagination and Social Imaginaries - polysemous readings of historical travelling accounts.

This special issue of Arts (ISSN 2076-0752) inquires into the history and legacy of colonialism, by gathering researchers, artists and activists to read medieval travelling accounts together. We welcome inquiries that probe into texts written in an ethnographic genre describing the period when European theologians, missionaries and merchants made encounters with new-to-them lands and peoples. Particularly accounts written by scholars who started to expand their thinking away from a medieval cosmology that was bound to the rhythms of nature and liturgical cycles that sanctified relationships between creation and Creator - an enchanted social imaginary (Taylor, 2007;1989) - to more extractivist ways of relating to the world. (Pratt, 2008; Mignolo, 1995; 2018) We are not only tracking the western impetus toward Eurocentric scientific universalism in relation to living with matter, bodies and a created world of minerals, plants and animals (Carter, 2023; Jennings, 2017). We also acknowledge that theology and spiritual practices - both in Europe and elsewhere - have not only inflicted harm through dominion, they have also provided hope in times of trouble, and freedom to the oppressed (Thurman, 1996; Freire, 1970; Russell, 1988; Holmes, 2017). This is why we want to listen to, sense into, imagine and open up an arena for other stories, those that speak through the artwork, crafts, music, poetry, liturgical and ritual practices that honoured local, feminist, traditional and indigenous ways of life. There are also examples of mutual learning and encounters that lead to awe and a sense of knowledge created together with, and for, each others flourishing. How can we, not only hear, but also share such narratives?

This issue stems from a series of transdisciplinary symposia organized under the Praxis of Social Imaginaries project (2023-2027). Here, artistic research methods and works, combined with action- and community-based research, aim to reinterpret the meanings of these accounts for the present. Our research community comprises individuals from diverse scholarly and artistic backgrounds, specializing in both indigenous and traditional knowledge practices, as well as experiences of inclusion and exclusion. We also represent a variety of cultural backgrounds, ages, and situated knowledge practices, which have informed our collaborative processes of experimental sessions and community learning.

We pose questions such as: What can be learned from descriptions of encounters with “the Other” and unknown lands, creatures, and places? How can we engage with the minority or silenced voices in these colonial accounts? What role can various artistic practices play in rei-

imagining different worlds and retelling “lost” stories?

Through these polysemous readings, we aim at investigating new and innovative ways of how past narratives can support the acknowledgement of present-day power imbalances. We suggest that a move away from text centred archives as the only source of historical writing, together with a performative paradigm of investigation may open up new ways of understanding both the past and the present. We invite authors willing to explore permeability within disciplinary thinking and sensory practices like eating, smelling, touching, moving with and singing the texts to expand the embodied ways of knowing together with both human and non-human others.

These approaches, categorized as decolonial research methodologies, use methods such as:

- Taking everyday experiences, bodies, and social movements as text
- Privileging storytelling and oral historicity
- Granting epistemic justice to testimonials

Our community values traditional forms of art and artistic research practices, as well as the embodied knowledge found in crafts, gardening, and cooking. We aim to explore the ‘cracks’ in colonial power structures through art, storytelling, and re-telling historical accounts from new perspectives (Anzaldúa 1987; Mignolo, 2013). This is what we call a polysemous reading practice based on artistic interventions.

We invite contributions to this special issue that align with some or all of the methods described above and address the following themes:

- Arts and Othering: Exploring how art has been used to depict and challenge the concept of ‘otherness’.
- Medieval Travel Accounts Re-visited/Re-interpreted: Re-examining medieval travel narratives to uncover new insights and perspectives.
- Landscapes and Mapping: Analyzing medieval and indigenous approaches to geography and cartography.
- Geography in Context: Studying the significance of crossings (sea, land, rivers) and landmarks in medieval geography.
- Hospitality and Ceremony: Exploring the customs and rituals of hospitality in medieval and indigenous societies.
- Rituals, Celebrations, and Festivities: Investigating the role of rituals and celebrations in movements between the medieval and today.
- Medieval Traveling through the Senses: Delving into the sensory experiences of medieval travelers, including sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile impressions.
- Character through Clothing, Food, and Gesture: Understanding identities through their material culture and social practices in the medieval and today.
- Contemporary manifestations of medieval encounter misunderstandings – land ownership, nomadic paths, borders and blockages
- Ecologies – medieval experiences of other-than-human encounters and contemporary perspectives (animism, other-than-human personhood, posthuman ecologies)

https://www.mdpi.com/journal/arts/special_issues/Q062D92KLW

Use the link above for submissions and forward the email receipt directly to the editors.

The full articles are due on September 15th.

IMPORTANT:

1- Please indicate your participation in the special issue by attaching a cover letter to your contribution where you state that your article is for the Artistic Imagination and Social Imaginaries: Polysomous Readings of Historical Travelling Accounts.

2- Though there is usually a submission fee for this journal, the editors have negotiated an exceptional waving possibility for those who are not able to support it. Do mention if that is your case in your cover letter.

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