Diffractions, Issue 13: The Aesthetics of Mythmaking

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DIFFRACTIONS

The Aesthetics of Mythmaking: Narrative, Culture, and Power.

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“We are mythmaking creatures” (Ware 2025); human beings make and reinterpret myths. Mythmaking has remained a living action of the human cultural process since the earliest stage of human history. Myths are not static stories that stay unchanged across time; that is why agency and acts of mythmaking are powerful. Through mythmaking, inherited stories are continually adapted and reinterpreted to reflect changing cultural values and historical circumstances. Consequently, myth also assumes the form of a spectacle and ideology that must be critically examined; it often serves to naturalise or essentialise instances of domination, transforming contingent political agendas into “universal” truths. This call for papers values both the aesthetic brilliance of mythmaking in the arts and popular culture and the rigor critique of its ideological utility as a tool for hegemony. The inherent ambiguity of myth as both a meaning-making tool and a mechanism of control invites further scholarly exploration. We therefore seek to gather diverse perspectives on how these creative processes function across human experience, inviting interdisciplinary submissions that weave together multifaceted theories of myth and mythmaking.

Even the same myth can be retold in radically different ways. For Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, the reinvented myth of Ozymandias represents a meditation on antiquity and the transience of glory. More than a century later, when Alan Moore rewrote Ozymandias in Watchmen, Shelley’s ruined king was transformed into a morally ambiguous antagonist with the ambition to construct a new global saviour myth capable of uniting humanity. Moore’s self-fashioned Ozymandias also evokes the myth of Superman, a figure that can be traced to Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept (1883) of Übermensch (beyond-human). From Nietzschean philosophical ideal of self-overcoming, the Superman later takes forms in different myths: George Bernard Shaw’s play and most famously in Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s comics, where Superman represents the experiences and aspirations of Jewish immigrant communities before being incorporated into American national mythology during WWII and the Cold War. Superman mythmaking also transcended across the Pacific. In postwar Japan, superhumans like Astro-Boy and Ultraman reconstructed the archetype into social recovery and national renewal in the aftermath of atomic destruction. These examples show that mythmaking reinvents cultural symbols into new stories in response to political realities and collective memory.

While myths are traditionally framed as archaic narratives of gods and heroes, modern scholars argue that the act of mythmaking can act as a mobilizing force in society and serves as a political

power beyond its presence in art (Citton 2025; Josephson-Storm 2017). A political myth operates as a system of explanation, providing a cryptography through which the disconcerting chaos of contemporary facts is ordered and understood (Girardet 1987; Segal 2020). By offering an imaginary reading of a historical moment, myths restore intelligibility to a fractured world, manifesting in recurring structures like the nostalgia for a Golden Age or the yearning for a providential Saviour. However, this phenomenological reality of worldbuilding parallels Walter D. Mignolo's decolonial critique of "enunciation," where the content of myth is disseminated by the enunciator who ultimately possesses power (2018, 144–145).

Mythmaking is still an ongoing cultural process without a singular definition. In a way, its study can be viewed as a consequence of the emergence of anthropology, which, during the 19th century, inquired about the concept of myth. This was the work of, for example, E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer. Yet, they were not so concerned about the aesthetics of mythmaking, as they viewed it as a form of "primitive knowledge" that was the exact opposite of Western art and science. Across the 20th century, authors as diverse as Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), Ernst Cassirer (1946), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978), Northrop Frye (1967), Carl Jung (1964), Joseph Campbell (2004), and Mircea Eliade (1954) have suggested a whole range of different and often conflictive definitions for this concept. They actively engaged with the knowledge traditions of anthropology, philosophy, history, comparative literature, and religion studies.

One compelling form of analyzing mythmaking emerged at the intersection of aesthetics, philosophy, politics, and critical theory during the 19th century. Reacting against Enlightenment rationalism, German Romantics and Idealists such as Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel called for a "new mythology" to heal the alienation between humanity and nature while birthing the philosophical myth of absence—the belief that modernity is uniquely "mythless" (Josephson-Storm 2017, 17–21). This tension is central to the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who, echoing Max Weber, argued that the Enlightenment's "disenchantment of the world" sought to dispel myths through reason, yet ultimately revealed that "enlightenment reverts to mythology" (2016, xviii), as instrumental rationality facilitated the domination of human beings over one another. In this way, inquiring the aesthetics of mythmaking involves a critique of different areas of the socio-cultural construct, reaching the realms of narrative, culture, and power.

Amidst these diverse intellectual traditions and definitions of mythmaking, this call invites contributions that explore mythmaking as an ongoing process of cultural translation, forms of exercising power, political representation, and artistic (re)creation. We are interested in examining how mythmaking is still continually making, remaking, and mobilising new meanings and identities across historical periods, cultural contexts, and media forms.

Proposals for thematic articles in response to this call are welcome, including but not limited to the following topics:

- Mythmaking and memory retelling
- Superstition, hagiographies, and religion stories
- Mythmaking in different culturalforms: films, comics, and music
- Mythmaking and Nationmaking
- Mythmaking as Tools of (De)colonial Discourse
- Mythmaking and Identity: theInvention of Tradition and Self-making

- Mythmaking and Imaginary
- Lived experience and Phenomenology of Mythmaking
- The Power of Mythmaking in Social and Political Contexts
- Mysticism and Poetry
- Myth and Mythmaking in Literature from Romanticism to Modernism
- Mythopoesia
- Women Writers/Poets and Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking
- The Role of Mythmaking in Visual Arts
- The Study of Mythography in Modern Culture
- Mythic ecology
- Mythmaking, Philosophy, and Science: from myth to reason
- Mythmaking and Psychology (Jungian Psychology, Psychoanalysis, etc)

Submissions and review process

Abstracts will be received and reviewed by the Diffractions editorial board who will decide on the pertinence of proposals for the upcoming issue. After submission, we will get in touch with the authors of accepted abstracts in order to invite them to submit a full article. However, this does not imply that these papers will be automatically published. Rather, they will go through a peer-review process that will determine whether papers are publishable with minor or major changes, or they do not fulfil the criteria for publication.

Please send abstracts of 150 to 250 words, and 5–8 keywords by October 31, 2026, to info.diffractions@gmail.com with the subject “Diffractions 13”, followed by your last name.

The full papers should be submitted by January 31, 2026, through the journal’s platform, using our Style Sheet: https://revistas.ucp.pt/index.php/diffractions/about/submissions.

Every issue of Diffractions has a thematic focus but also contains special sections for non-thematic articles. If you are interested in submitting an article that is not related to the topic of this issue, please consult the general guidelines available on the Diffractions website at https://revistas.ucp.pt/index.php/diffractions/about/submissions. The submission and review process for non-thematic articles is the same as for the general thematic issue. All research areas of the humanities are welcome, and we accept contributions in English or Portuguese.

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