Intersections, issue 2016: Spaces, Places, and Times of Solitude

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Call for Papers
Spaces, Places, and Times of Solitude in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Karl Enenkel and Christine Göttler, eds.

The desire to retreat to a private and secluded location, away from daily worries and cares for the purpose of study, self-reflection, prayer and meditation has a long tradition in European culture. The anchoretic ideal, most famously represented by the desert fathers such as Paul of Thebes, Anthony of Egypt, Simeon Stylites continued to inspire the imagination in both the religious and secular realms throughout the late medieval and early modern period. Fictional and 'real' places of study and solitude such as Pliny's 'diaeta', Quintilian's 'clausum cubiculum', and Petrarch's retreats at Vaucluse and Avignon played an instrumental role in the emergence and development of the Renaissance studiolo as a space of contemplation and creativity. The increase in meditation practices following the publication of the Spiritual Exercises by Ignatius of Loyola in 1548 led to a marked diversification of conceptual and physical spaces of solitary study, reading and prayer. Michel de Montaigne's famous simile of the inner self as 'arrière boutique toute nostre' documents the concern with spatial dimensions of the self and the mind in an age when both the world was expanding and new spaces dedicated to solitary, silent or secretive practices, such as laboratories, were designed.

In the pre-modern period, the Latin term solitudo and its vernacular expressions (solitudine, solitude) could refer both to the state of being alone and to uninhabited, deserted and unfrequented places. The aim of this volume is to explore the ways in which the space of solitude was conceived of, constructed, imagined and represented in theology, literature and the sciences as well as the visual and performative arts throughout the late medieval and early modern periods. We are particularly interested in contributions that investigate the meanings and spatial, metaphorical and spiritual topographies of the desert (desertum), the forest (silva) and other places of solitude and retreat that often encompass a variety of conflicting elements (and may be described as both a locus asper and a locus aemonus). Contributions may address the construction of 'sacred solitude' (sacra solitudo) by various monastic orders (Carthusians, Cistercians, Vallombrosans and Camaldolese), the literary and visual imagination of coenobitic or communal solitude (such as the Thebaid), the role of interiority and solitude in the Devotio moderna, in Jesuit thought as well as in Pietism and other reform movements. Are there liturgical time periods specifically associated

with solitude such as Lent and Easter? And what was the role and meaning of solitude in the meditation on the Passion of Christ? How was the space of prayer conceived of, imagined, represented, and constructed in the late medieval and early modern European world?

From the 1300s onwards, solitude also became intrinsically connected with the space of aesthetic production (writing, drawing, painting). We are seeking contributions that investigate constructions and interpretations of such types of 'creative' solitude as well as the fashioning and self-fashioning of the writer, artist and scientist (or alchemist) as hermit and recluse, including failed forms of self-fashioning and self-representation. What are the relevant literary discourses that shaped these forms of self-fashioning and self-representation (pastoral poetry, elegy, religious lyrical poetry, prayers, theological treatise, scholarly commentary, essay, emblem, etc.) and in which way did they influence the construction of solitary spaces? What imagery and what different forms of contemptus mundi were developed? What was the role of early modern cultural criticism, including court criticism?

Please submit a one-page abstract (300 words) and a short curriculum vitae (max. two pages) to both editors before January 31, 2015:

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Applicants will be notified at the end of February. Depending funding, a conference with all authors is planned to take place in Bern, December 9–10, 2015. Final chapters are due by March 1, 2016.

Reference:
CFP: Intersections, issue 2016: Spaces, Places, and Times of Solitude. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 18, 2014 (accessed Nov 26, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/9143>.