Call for Papers

Administory Vol. 8 - Administrative Cultures and their Aesthetics

This special issue of Administory focuses on the relationship between different traditions of literature or art, on the one hand, and of state administration, on the other. By highlighting the "story" in Administory, it seeks to unpack aesthetic configurations manifest in literary and artistic works engaging with bureaucratic topics and spaces, set in (or against) a variety of historical backgrounds. Drawing on literature, but also on film or other arts to highlight different administrative cultural contexts and then contrasting them in their specificity is the goal of the edition. We therefore welcome contributions discussing the ways in which specific narrative or visual strategies and stylistic devices identifiable in these works help to shape a distinct imagery of specific administrations, with their underlying complexities, tensions, and paradoxes. In short, the issue deals with the aesthetics of specific administrative cultures.

To what extent and under what auspices does the rhetoric of monotony, repetition, impersonality, and colourlessness constitute the defining trait of “bureaucratic ambiance”? How do particularly literary discourses integrate, reproduce, or subvert administrative writing practices by borrowing from their textual forms and formulations? Looking at the materiality and the corporeality of officialdom, in the spirit of Jan Banning’s seminal photographic exhibition Bureaucratics, how do photographs or paintings capture or reflect the diverse aesthetic properties of administrative cultures at various levels, in diverse epochs and in different regions? Ideally, these inquiries will inform a wider conversation on inventories of bureaucratic objects and the identity of bureaucratic subjects, charting the circulation of affective, textual and pictorial flows within administrative apparatuses. In addition, they ideally profile the different characteristics that distinguish administrations in the Anglo-Saxon world, for example, from those in German-speaking, French or Scandinavian regions.

Historical and sociological studies of state administration have emphasized the importance of the “look” of bureaucracy, and in literary scholarship as well as in film studies and art history there is a rich tradition of exploring the administrative intricacies deployed in works of fiction, in poetry and drama, or in movies and in paintings. By spotlighting literary, artistic and cinematographic responses to or reflections of administrative forms and designs, setups and workflows this issue seeks to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the interplay between artistic and administrative forms. Exploring bureaucracy’s influence on aesthetics, this special issue is inspired, amongst others, by Dean de la Motte’s analysis of modern French literature’s celebration and narrativization of the “accretion of writing, circularity, stasis, re-production, rewriting, postponement.” Another highly productive framework for the study of public administration and literature is proposed by Ceri Sullivan’s exploration of the “aesthetic problems” produced by bureaucracy, or by Kerstin Stüssel’s concept of “mitschriften”.

Aiming to supplement and continue these efforts, the special issue invites contributions on:

- comparative approaches to administrative cultures and literature
- links between administrative and literary, artistic or filmic forms
- materiality and corporeality of officialdom
- affective regimes in bureaucratic narratives and scenarios
- administrative tropes, figures and aesthetics in fiction, poetry, drama, in film, painting and concept art
literary writers employed as state officials
early modern commissioned artists such as Jan van Ravesteyn, state-sponsored modern artists such as Alexander Rodchenko, and later conceptual artists such as Sol Le Witt, Claes Oldenburg, or Ingrid and Ian Baxter, who dealt with bureaucracy as an aesthetic phenomenon under different conditions
Examinations of and critiques of bureaucracy in feature films like Brazil, in documentaries like Frederick Wiseman's, and also in television and streaming serials like Madmen and The Office

We welcome research that goes beyond the Western canon and explores administrative aesthetics in ancient, modern, and contemporary works of art, film, and world literature. The contributions can be written in German, English or French.

The issue is edited in collaboration with Jonathan Foster (Stockholm University), Alexandra Irimia (Western University) and Burkhardt Wolf (University of Vienna). If you would like to propose an article for this volume, please submit an abstract (max. 2,500 characters) including a title and a short CV until May 31st to Alexandra Irimia (airimia2@uwo.ca) and Jonathan Foster (jonathan.foster@english.su.se).

ADMINISTORY sees itself as a platform to publish and discuss cutting-edge research on the history of administration. The journal, which appears once a year with double blind peer-review procedures, is interdisciplinary, trans-epochal and transnational as well as methodologically open. ADMINISTRY thus establishes itself as an interface between historical-cultural research and the debates on state and administration in the social sciences, law and political sciences. Contributions are published in English, German or French.

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