

[Just art. Documentary poetics and justice \(Synthesis journal, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens\)](#)

Announcement published by Nikolaos Stratigakis on Wednesday, October 2, 2019

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

December 1, 2019

Location:

Greece

Subject Fields:

European History / Studies, Humanities, Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies, Philosophy, Contemporary History

The unprecedented scale of violence unleashed during World War I inaugurated a new relationship to the document amongst writers and artists in Europe and North America. Whereas in 19th century works, documents were predominantly treated as source material to be transformed into works of art or fiction, in the aftermath of the 1914-1918 conflict, four new trends took centre-stage. Firstly, testimony comes into its own as a genre, defining itself against both fiction and ego-narratives, claiming documentary status in order to shore up its legitimacy under the pressure of negationist discourse on the one hand and in the context of an increasingly positivist historiography on the other. The genre would only gain in importance after World War II and the Shoah, with the work of Primo Levi or Charlotte Delbo amongst others. Secondly, avant-gardes in the literary, performing and visual arts engaged in the appropriation and repurposing of documents produced by the press, state bureaucracies and legislatures. In addition to surrealist and Dada works, such practices gave rise to experimental works such as Charles Reznikoff's singular Testimony. Documents enter these projects in unmodified or minimally modified form, giving rise to works which foreclose arts' tendency towards idealisation and elevation above concrete and circumscribed experience. At the same time, building upon the tremendous expansion of the role of the press in the 19th century and reinforced by the crisis of the Great Depression, the model of the reporter as producer of documentary narrative and evidence sees the flourishing of photojournalist publications and the rise of the non-fiction novel, which would come into its own with John Hersey's Hiroshima and Truman Capote's In Cold Blood. Finally, in theatre, documentary and verbatim practices emerge with works such as Karl Kraus' The Last Days of Mankind in the interwar years and Peter Weiss' The Investigation (1965). Such shifts in the relationship to the document cannot be restricted to the industrialised West and its attempts to come to terms with historical and socio-political crises: colonial, post- and de-colonial contexts as well as reactions against authoritarian regimes and the exercise of power deemed illegitimate have seen similar practices flourish across the globe in the course of the 20th century.

In both their form and content, these different currents of documentary aesthetics all accord a privileged place to the judicial system, interacting with its regime of proof, the frameworks of the enquiry and the trial, and its mission to administer justice. Historically, the works of Reznikoff, Capote and Weiss are perhaps the most emblematic; today, artists, writers and theatre practitioners such as Luis Camnitzer, France Leibovici and Julien Serroussi, Vanessa Place, Anna Deavere Smith, or Milo Rau continue to produce documentary works in close contact with the judicial

Citation: Nikolaos Stratigakis. *Just art. Documentary poetics and justice (Synthesis journal, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)*. H-Announce. 10-02-2019.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/4888285/just-art-documentary-poetics-and-justice-synthesis-journal>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

system. However, though such works structurally undermine claims to aesthetic autonomy and voluntarily confine themselves to the historical particular, they circulate in extra-judicial spheres and invite forms of judgement that differ from those administered by the legal system. What motivates this recourse to art, and what effects might this aesthetic supplement seek to engender? Do such works act to shore up the judicial system in place? Do they seek rather to complement it or palliate its shortcomings? Or do they sometimes turn the tables and put the law itself on trial? To what ends? What, if any, alternative conceptions of the just do they generate? And what, if any, changes do such works aspire to effect on the course of the history they engage with?

Exploring the role documentary poetry, literature, theatre and art play in legitimating or questioning legal systems over the past century and in contemporary contexts, this issue of Synthesis invites submissions that reopen the question of literature and art's critical potential as a laboratory for extra-legal conceptions of justice.

Special Issue Editor: Naomi Toth

Contact Info:

Abstracts of 300 words should be submitted to Naomi Toth at ntoth@parisnanterre.fr and synthesisjournal2008@gmail.com by **1 December 2019**.

Notification of acceptance will be delivered by **10 January 2020**.

Accepted articles are to be submitted by **30 May 2020**.

Final articles should be 6,000-8,000 words long and include an abstract of no more than 300 words.

All enquiries regarding this issue should be sent to the guest editor, Naomi Toth, at ntoth@parisnanterre.fr.

Contact Email:

synthesisjournal2008@gmail.com

URL:

<https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/synthesis>