

Mythologies of Popular Culture

The purpose of this volume is not to provide new definitions nor to develop tools that would allow to further investigate the modern myth phenomenon in an academic environment. Such a task, however necessary, would require extensive research, systematic data analysis and a complex, yet specific and careful approach to modernity as such. Therefore, this book is rather an outline, a landscape, a means to discuss the various contexts of myth in the modern era, to focus on its functions, differences and universal features.

In Asia, myth is still an accurate expression of a traditional, vivid, lively and often approached cultural content, and the same observation is true when it comes to investigating Western culture, with its ways of portraying reality, its religions, folklore and popular takes on science. Myth is also interestingly distributed within the modern media, be it TV shows, video games or news channels. An overly simplified, mythical worldview is at the same time rich in meanings. It provides a crucial sense of “truth”; therefore, it once more helps to explain the complexity of the world, grounds the ones who are lost in modern chaos, and unites human beings, creating a feeling of *communitas*, a shared experience. Myth, as well as the ritual of its distribution and repetition, seems to be as strong as in its classical days, and to prevail especially smoothly within the ever growing area of popular culture.

The spectrum of modern myths presented in this volume is wide. We can read about the heroic myth surrounding Ghyanshyamdas Birla, a man who shaped modern life in India, but also fits well with the old Indian legends. We follow the new visual language of Buddhist teachings in Thai temples. We can see how Japanese nationalism can be perceived as myth, originating from the stories of old, yet still present nowadays.

We trace the recurring theme of revenge in Western popular culture, as well as taking a look at how history and myth blend together in the modern renditions of Viking stories. We follow the path of nostalgia and see how the

likes of *Daleko od szosy* – a TV series from the communist days – shaped the childhood memories of a generation.

We investigate the myth of bodily perfection and the fullness of time since both have been the classical traits of a hero's journey throughout the ages, and are still relevant now, as seen in *Matrix*, *Avatar* or superhero movies. We search for mythical content in fantasy literary fiction, often recycled and recreated in popular culture, and aim to find the boundaries of mythical thinking. We discuss the role of a king and regal powers in fantasy and modern mythology. We investigate the digital retelling of the Judeo-Christian motifs of creation, as seen in video games, and redefine the modern media as communal and oral – introducing “secondary orality”, a term first proposed by Walter J. Ong.

The variety and in-depth quality of the articles presented in this volume prove that the myth is still an important category, but also an “intuitive” and highly imprecise one. There are multiple definitions and takes on the myth. This blurry category is nevertheless helpful in describing irrational imaginary ideas that in turn build and give structure to cultural memory and identity, as well as being necessary to capture the dynamic of the mythological process as such, and the changes in the world around us, that materialise before our very eyes.

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