

Ex-position Feature Topic Call for Papers

Harmony and Chaos: The Dialectics of Order and Disorder

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The ideas of order and disorder are universal conceptual categories found across diverse disciplines and cultures. They often emerge as opposites that help humans characterize observed phenomena, experiences, and imagination. Changes in regimes, the development of societies, and the evolution of cultural trends, for instance, are sometimes comprehended through the filter of order and disorder. Representations in arts and literature may also be examined under pairs of similar attributes, such as symmetry and asymmetry, harmony and disharmony, unity and disunity, and so forth.

It is by no means an accident that the creation of the world is often conceived as a process of bringing formlessness into order, as can be found in creation myths in various cultures. Hesiod in *Theogony* and Plato in *Timaeus* both described the world as originating from chaos, the primordial condition of disorder. In Genesis, the earth was first “without form and void” upon creation (Genesis 1.1). God then brought divisions into the world—the divisions of light and darkness, Day and Night, the Sun and the Moon, the land and the seas, and vegetation and wildlife. The formless darkness was characterized as Chaos in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The harmony of Eden—the established order created by God—crumbled after the Fall as Satan brought distrust, discord, and disgrace into the world. Moreover, the ancient Chinese divination text *I Ching* similarly denotes the formation of the world as a process of differentiation from the undivided mixture of original elements.

The waxing and waning of order and disorder may also be found in works involving romantic relations, spiritual struggles, or political conflicts, either as explicit metaphors or underlying structures. In Donne’s “Elegy XIII,” the poet described the emotional turmoil generated by the loss of love as falling into the darkness of “old Chaos.” Similarly, Shakespeare’s Moor in *Othello* associated the dissolution of love with perdition and Chaos (*Othello* 3.3: 90–95). In *The Faerie Queene*, as the Redcrosse Knight is separated from Una under the deceptive schemes of Archimago and Duessa, he falls into a state of spiritual confusion and encounters a series of chaotic perils. Only by the rescue of Arthur and the help of Una (who symbolizes truth and unity) could the knight recover and finally attain holiness. In *The Tempest*, having

escaped the political storm in his dukedom, Prospero established a new order on the formerly uncultivated island where untamed creatures and spirits like Caliban and Ariel resided. Apart from the above more well-known instances, numerous illustrations concerning the conflicts, interactions, and syntheses of order and disorder may be explored in different fields under different disciplines.

This feature topic calls for research from scholars working in art history, literature, philosophy, cultural studies, and beyond. We also welcome studies on the cultural dialogue between East and West. Topics for consideration might include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Explorations of cosmology, creation, or world views in relation to systems and/or chaos, entropy and/or negentropy, etc.
- Analyses of art and visualization that involve symmetry, asymmetry, or elements concerning order and/or disorder
- Explorations of musical compositions in terms of harmony and/or cacophony
- Examinations on issues of religious doctrines, spirituality, heresy, or moral values concerning unity and/or anarchy, moderation and/or excess, or other aspects in close relation to order and/or disorder
- Critical interpretations of specific works addressing issues of concord and/or discord, *discordia concors*, or other related aspects

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