Illustrated Magazines in Circulation (Nancy, 24-25 Jun 27)

Université de Lorraine, 34 cours Léopold, 54000 Nancy, Jun 24–25, 2027
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Images, forms, formats: Illustrated Magazines in Circulation (1850-1950)

Université de Lorraine (IDEA)
Co-organized with the Université de Picardie Jules Verne (CORPUS)

Keynotes:
Nora Ramtke (Universiteit Ghent)
Benoît Tadié (Université de Paris Nanterre)

The rise of the magazine, as a media format (Jancovic, Volmar & Schneider 2020) or as a publishing genre (Beetham 1990), is inextricably tied to that of capitalist modernity, as their conceptual kinship with magasins and department stores attests (e.g., Brake 2001, Harris 2016). Initially organized as lists (Franzel 2025), and soon featuring increasingly lavish illustrations, magazines played a central role in constructing cultural imaginaries around an ever-expanding array of consumer practices and in dissseminating those imaginaries across geographical borders.

This conference seeks to explore the media and cultural specificity of magazines across the medium's history, and to examine how practices of circulation have been integral to its emergence. We propose to examine how the successors to The Saturday Magazine, Le Magasin pittoresque, Das Pfennig-Magazin, El Museo de las familias, Il Mondo illustrato, and other early illustrated magazines consistently contributed to democratizing access to print culture within the dual context of the mass expansion of education and the globalization of cultural exchange. Illustrated magazines played a key role in the creation of local as well as transnational popular cultures, yet these cultures have not, we contend, received the scholarly attention they deserve; in fact, many have yet to be recognized as such. Through this conference, we therefore seek to contribute to identifying these visual editorial cultures and to mapping the circulations that gave shape to what might tentatively be termed a "magazine age" (Kalifa et al. 2011, Rannaud & Warren 2021).

We invite contributions exploring three main registers of visual circulations: the circulation of visual materials (drawings, engravings, prints, photographs, etc.) which soon came to represent a vital segment of press and periodical cultures; the circulation of magazine producers, whether through physical mobility or the formation of communities of practice; and the negotiations surrounding the emergence of a transnational visual culture, particularly through local adaptations of global magazine images, styles, and formats.

In highlighting the circulation of images, we do not intend to downplay the importance of the texts that also circulated in illustrated magazines, particularly – but not exclusively – the literary works these publications so often featured. Quite the contrary, these questions invite us to engage with the rich, complex, and polysemous notion of "illustration" itself (see Stead 2024b) and observe its many uses in magazines, in contrast with decorative images (Trenc 2008). Examining the circulation of illustrated magazines requires attention to the countless configurations of text and image, as well as to the tensions and even rivalries between these two modes of expression (Stead 2024b), which have also followed different historical trajectories. Images, for instance, circulated more slowly than texts for a long time, contributing to the persistence of older techniques of hand illustration and to a certain blurring of the boundaries between the worlds of art and journalism (Gretton 2013). Particular attention might be paid to instances in which images circulated independently of the texts with which they were originally associated, as well as to cases in which texts – and images themselves – were transformed as they travelled across different contexts. Conversely, if words and images enter into power relations on the magazine page (Gretton 2010), one might ask to what extent the presence of an image could facilitate the circulation of a text, and how the text itself might be understood as an image, from the perspective of a "grammar of visual design" (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) or a "visual materiality" (Baetens 2018).

Our understanding of 19th- and 20th-century "magazines" is similarly quite capacious, encompassing titles from all regions of the world, including penny magazines, late-19th-century illustrated magazines, illustrated supplements, special- or general-interest slicks and glossies, many titles from the women's press, gentlemen's magazines, satirical and risqué magazines, as well as the alternative and activist press, and pulps. As this list demonstrates already, these formats are themselves open and were constructed through ongoing negotiations that more often than not took place across borders and cultural traditions (Gervais 2015). These discussions around definitions unfolded in the context of the dynamic international circulations that defined a period extending from the mid-19th to mid-20th century period, and beyond.

Indeed, circulatory dynamics remain as crucial as ever today. Hence, we believe the theme of circulating images to be particularly topical, and hypothesize that the sort of historical analyses we aim to generate will contribute to historicizing the contemporary craze for image sharing. By working towards a long history of genres, formats, and practices, we also aim to produce useful insights to accompany the current – and multiplying – campaigns of magazine digitization and OCR-ization. While vast corpuses are being made available for free search, we advocate for a fine-grained and nuanced understanding of the original contexts of publication and dissemination of magazine images, both to inform their critical understanding and to counter the historically blind, cherry-picking approach (Leary 2005, Nicholson 2013, Joyeux-Prunel et al. 2023).

The questions we wish to discuss emerge in the wake of a renewed research interest, in recent years, in the concept of "circulation," from the perspectives of book and publishing history, print culture, visual history as well as art history and the history of photography – all fields that we aim to bring into dialogue with periodical studies and that have, of late, demonstrated a particular interest in transnational dynamics (Ernst et al. 2022). Relatedly, this conference will provide a platform for discussing the idea of transnational (visual) cultures. Following Benedict Anderson's foundational work on "imagined communities" (1991), the very notion of such a transnational culture has been subject to debate. In our view, it remains as compelling as it is potentially problematic, partic-

ularly in its universalist dimension. We finally also seek to foster discussions around the collective writing of transnational histories of illustrated magazines that would take into account the wide range of circulations that shaped the medium, from new production and reproduction technologies to the formation of worldwide audiences (Gretton 2013, Schwartz & Hill 2015).

1. Circulating images

A first line of analysis will unfold at the level of circulating images (and associated texts), particularly between magazines published in different countries. One approach to investigating image circulation consists in qualitatively reconstructing the trajectories or "careers" (Spoerhase 2018) of one or more images or, alternatively, tracing the republication of images within large-scale media flows using quantitative methods. In either case, we invite contributions that pay particular attention to the ways in which images are contextualized in and by the magazines that publish them, as well as to the ways in which they may be recontextualized when these "presentational contexts" shift (Morin & Ruchatz 2021). Contributions exploring variations in illustration as translational choices in the national and transnational circulation of magazines (Stead 2026) are also encouraged.

Case studies that follow a single image or a set of images furthermore raise the issue of the circulation of forms and styles within magazine cultures. Relatedly, the importance of the circulation of techniques should be underlined: quite often, the circulation of illustrations has been facilitated by the transnational development of adequate technology, and vice versa. Alongside images, layouting practices have similarly traveled and massified – to the point, perhaps, of yielding an elusive shared "international visual culture"?

Similarly, we expect special attention to be paid to the magazine as a media context. Magazine attributes such as periodicity, seriality, repetition and miscellaneity (Turner 2014, Mussell 2015, Fröhlich 2022) should be taken into consideration as structuring elements underlying the emergence and evolution of visual cultures in and through magazines (Hedley 2021, Friedrichs 2024). Other conventions and constraints may also come into focus, such as copyright for example, as infrastructural conditions that enable – or hinder – the circulation of images (Delamaire & Slauter 2021).

2. Mapping circulation: Networks, sociabilities, temporalities

We hypothesize that, by studying specific instances of images circulation – situated in time, as well as in space – we will be able to collectively start mapping larger patterns underpinning global visual fluxes and exchanges; and that many of these are likely to be uneven and non-reciprocal, for instance those taking place within colonial empires. Case studies focusing on the exchanges between magazine producers (magazine editors, illustrators, photographers, etc.), through mobility and/or correspondence, will provide embodied examples of what "circulation" entails, the routes through which it takes place, and the political and economic contexts in which it unfolds. Relatedly, theoretical concepts of "networks" and "sociability" may fruitfully come into play (Aslangul & Zunino 2022).

Circulation routes may also be considered temporally: which such routes are dominant at which point in time, and what might this indicate in terms of (creative, and even political) leadership? In

the 19th century, European periodicals circulated widely in the United States and met with great success (Peterson 1956). Until the beginning of the 20th century, American audiences seemed acutely fond of European styles of illustration. During the interwar years, however, this relationship seems to have shifted, notably with the launch of a new illustrated formula famously spearheaded by LIFE in 1936 – in collaboration with Eastern European émigrés and inspired by their previous professional experiences. Geographical mobilities and circulations are therefore tied to broader historical fluxes and events, and we aim to explore precisely how these relationships unfolded. In doing so, we hope to create opportunities to challenge and rethink traditional and/or dominant hierarchies and narratives as well.

Documenting the circulation of individuals also raises important methodological questions, such as the role of production studies in periodical and visual research. How might we proceed in cases in which archives are fragmentary or even missing? How can we unearth bibliographical data about actors in magazine history who have been invisibilized? To what extent should print material be supplemented by archival research, and what are the best practices for doing so?

3. Local variations on transnational cultures: Adaptation(s), negotiations, transfers

If "[m]edia, journalism and press historians still predominantly study events and developments in a nation state framework without structurally considering international developments and cross-border influences," (Broersma 2010) we call for the decompartmentalization of press and visual histories in order to give serious attention to the question of the existence of a (or several) transnational visual culture(s). Certainly, since at least the mid-19th century (Gretton 2010, Smits 2020), and with ever-increasing impetus, images together with texts, as well as press producers, have circulated dynamically across borders. So too have styles and formats, for instance through national or even local editions of certain titles – such as Vogue – or through local adaptations of magazine formulas that could diverge to varying degrees depending on place and context. This was the case, for example, with "confession magazines" in the early 20th century, when the US-launched True Story (1919) inspired the French Confidences (1938), among numerous other examples.

Another prism through which to examine adaptation phenomena is the idea of cultural transfer (Espagne 2009), which has been explored quite extensively in book history but less frequently so in relation to magazines. When not only images (or iconotexts), but also sections, rubrics, or indeed magazine formulas are transferred and resignified (Van Remoortel 2017), what does this reveal about the source and target cultures? What does it tell us about global and local magazine cultures?

Finally, we invite papers interrogating the potential communities created by, in, and through magazines as they circulate; as well as resistance to the transnational in local communities, through censorship, for instance. We will be particularly interested in cases that evidence the tensions and negotiations inherent in cultural transfers and the co-construction of transnational communities, whether imagined or real (Satterthwaite & Thacker 2023, Bachmann & Ramtke 2025).

We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers, followed by 10-minute discussions, from colleagues working in all disciplines, and engaging with all linguistic and cultural areas. The lines of enquiry listed above are far from exhaustive, and we would look forward to receiving submissions that

might take our collective discussions in new directions. With respect to chronology, we will also consider papers that engage with the questions raised in this call beyond the proposed time period.

Abstracts (max. 400 words) together with short bio-bibliographical notices, should be sent by November 23, 2026, to celine.mansanti@u-picardie.fr and alice.morin@univ-lorraine.fr.

Submission deadline: November 23, 2026

Decisions will be notified by: December 15, 2026

The conference will be held on June 24-25, 2027

This conference is part of a series of scientific events. A subsequent conference is scheduled to be held at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne in June 2028 to explore intermedia circulations in magazine cultures.

Organizers
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With Nathalie Collé, Diane Leblond for “Intermedia” (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)

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