Frequencies and Materialities of Imagining Crisis (Jena, 15-16 Apr 27)

Friedrich-Schiller-University, Jena, Apr 15–16, 2027
Deadline: Nov 1, 2026

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Printing, Publishing, Posting: Frequencies and Materialities of Imagining Crisis.

Deadline for 300-word abstract: November 1st, 2026.

This workshop examines how material formats shape the way crises are imagined. The aim is to put the perception and mediation of crisis in 19th-century publishing practices and print formats—with their extensive use of wood-engraving and lithography, identified by Walter Benjamin as the first art form capable of communicating with its acute present— in dialogue with contemporary formats marked by digital technologies and the frantic pace of polycrises. The guiding question is how frequencies and materialities of the medium—speed of production, cost, intended audience, aesthetic conventions, and visual design (e.g., the paratext of a political caricature or the cover of a dystopian novel)—influences the practice of imagining and narrating crisis. This workshop addresses the formal and imaginary aspects of foreboding the future, of advocating for and invoking action and resistance in print and digital publication practices. We argue that the temporal form of published medium—such as the seriality of periodicals, the disruptive exaggeration of caricature, the polycritical urgency of the dystopian novel, or the never-ending feed of digital social media—is not a neutral container but a crucial part of the social imaginary. As the already imagined, the form itself structures the creative practice of imagining, and, during periods of social upheaval and short-circuit, shapes the perception of crisis, the array of conceivable future outcomes (from revolutionary hope to terminal collapse), and thus the legitimization of collective response.

The workshop's historical arc begins in the 19th century, a period marked by revolutions, the rise of serial printing practices and forms (Pettitt, 2020, 2022) that shaped new temporal regimes and imaginaries (Anderson, 1983), which extends into the 20th and modern polycrises of today (Clark, 2024, 754). It addresses key historical formats and their temporal characteristics, such as the periodicity of newspapers and illustrated weeklies, the serial rhythm of novels, the urgency of the revolutionary pamphlet, the political sticker, or the 280-character post formerly known as a tweet. We trace how different publishing practices have enabled, constrained, or transformed the ways collectives visualize, narrate, criticize and ultimately imagine their way through crisis. What unites the visual and textual forms that we are interested in is that they reveal social practices of imagining, which is not to say that they reflect perceptions or reflections of things, but that they unceasingly create the images and figures which serve as the constitution for 'reality' (Castoriadis, 1975).

Print practices do more than narrate and depict crises; they actively contribute to the imaginary foundation of crises. Images of barricades, for example, appeared in visual and textual print in 19th-century periodicals and imagined urban crisis in a way which made transnational and transhistorical ripples, which not only reflect the seriality of the print medium they appeared in; the impact of these barricade images rippled in 1917, 1956, 1968, ripples that are still felt today (Traverso, 2021, p. 193f). Rather than viewing the crisis as a historical turning point in a linear progression, this workshop, in the tradition of modern historical philosophy, approaches the temporality of crisis as intrinsically fragmented, stratified, and desynchronized. We therefore draw on the hauntology of unresolved pasts (Derrida, 1994; Fisher, 2014), and ask how editorial formats not only represent the time of crisis, but actively produce competing and non-contemporary temporal experiences, accelerating some futures, suppressing others and allowing others to return as spectres.

Where the barricade image returned as a spectre, haunting later crises and showing the unresolved aspects of 1848, the contemporary dystopian novel operates through a different temporal logic: the production of novelty. Paratextual elements (Genette, 1987), including cover design, series formatting, and catalogue rhetoric, serve to frame each new wave of dystopian publishing as a distinct critical moment, generating imaginaries of crisis as unprecedented, urgent, or historically specific. This aspect is particularly visible in publishing phenomena such as cli-fi or the marketed 'Latin American boom,' where paratextual framing produces not a return of the past but a sense of arrival: a crisis that finally receives recognition. We ask how this logic of novelty operates differently in publishing contexts shaped by colonial modernity, where the recently identified crisis has never been new.

We welcome contributions from literary, media, cultural, social, historical, anthropological and art studies, dealing with the following topics:
- Publishing Imaginaries: Visual/textual print or digital practices of imagining revolution, industrial change, and social collapse.
- Crisis and Community: How do visual and textual publishing practices within a given format or space (e.g., illustrated periodicals, cover design, self-made political stickers, the Litfaßsäule) work to "institute" a shared sense of time, community, and opportunity within a given crisis?
- Formating Time: How material periodicity and seriality (weekly, monthly, “booming”) affect perception, making crises to be imagined as iterative, accelerated or never-ending?
- Crisis and Making: How do we identify crises across these formats; short-circuits in the serial where the social imaginary is being contested or "broken open," allowing for new forms to emerge?
- Crisis in colonial and postcolonial contexts: What crisis imaginaries are produced in colonial and postcolonial publishing contexts that cannot be derived from or reduced to European traditions, and how do non-serial, cyclical, or fragmented publishing forms generate alternative temporalities of crisis that contest the linear, progressive temporal regime of Western modernity?

We welcome abstract submissions of approximately 300 words by November 1, 2026, to carmen.pereyra@uni-jena.de or john.norrman@uni-jena.de

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