

**Seminar Call for Papers:
Crises of Capital and Aesthetic Form**

Nearly a decade after the global Financial Crisis of 2007-08, a lingering economic crisis and its social fallout continue to shape our present. Ongoing debt restructuring policies and austerity measures, unemployment and growing precarity (also in the Humanities), and new political protest movements indicate a deep structural crisis of modernity's predominant form of social life: capitalism. Scholars in German Studies have addressed this crisis via critical concepts such as globalization, financialization, and neoliberalism; yet structural links between these seemingly disparate phenomena have remained largely unexplored. This seminar seeks to connect existing strands of scholarship by investigating economic crises as epistemological key moments for understanding capital as one systemic whole: "The underlying unity, the totality, all of whose parts are objectively interrelated, manifests itself most strikingly in the fact of crisis." (Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance") In approaching this elusive social whole as represented in works of art, particularly those produced in moments of crisis, we aspire to reclaim for the current moment Critical Theory's concept of mediation: to grasp aesthetic form against the backdrop of social reality, and social reality against the backdrop of aesthetic form. We propose to analyze form as crystallized historical content, and to read works of art as dreams of a collective unconscious that provide deeper access to a period's (oftentimes unspoken) socio-economic and political realities—but also to a period's unrealized utopian possibilities.

We welcome proposals offering historically specific readings of artworks in relation to capitalist crises and periods of rapid transformation over the last 500 years, beginning with capital's early stages around 1500 to the late 19th-century *Gründerkrise* up to the 2007-08 financial crisis and its current aftermath. We ask participants to contribute pre-circulated five-page papers that also consider the specificity of the medium they choose to analyze (e.g., literature, film, other visual and/or sound art). Modes of representation are not limited to realism and the documentary, but include, for example, science fiction, horror, and the fantastic. Rather than privileging immediate thematic treatments of socio-economic crises, we are especially interested in scholarship that aims to mediate socio-economic content and aesthetic form in the spirit of the critical tradition reaching from Adorno, Kracauer, and Brecht to Fredric Jameson, Roberto Schwarz, and contemporary New Marxists, such as Sianne Ngai, Chris Chen, and Amy De'Ath, who analyze capital's articulations with race, gender, and other forms of domination. We ask that prior to the seminar, participants read a selection of excerpts from these theorists' works no longer than thirty pages altogether to establish a common foundation for our discussion.

Considering works of art in relation to capitalist crises since 1500, this seminar is cross-historical in scope, and it examines the category of aesthetic form across the arts. Our method of inquiry is transdisciplinary in that it integrates economic and social theory with aesthetics. Ultimately we hope to shed light on the ways in which works of art render visible and contest the social totality created by global capital, including its racialized and gendered forms.

In order to apply for enrollment in the seminar, please submit a statement of purpose (no longer than 300 words) and a mini-vita at the GSA conference website: <https://www.thegsa.org/members/login>. The deadline for enrollment is **January 28**. If you have questions about the seminar, please contact the seminars conveners, Jette Gindner (jg828@cornell.edu) and Ulrich Plass (uplass@wesleyan.edu).