

In my End is my Beginning. Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis



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PhD Programme in
the History of Arts

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CHIARA FUMAI
THE PRODIGY OF NATURE, 2010-12
INSTALLATION (FLYING CABINET), VARIABLE DIMENSIONS,
INSTALLATION VIEW
DOCUMENTA(13), KARLSAUE PARK, KASSEL, 2012
COURTESY: NICOLETTA FIORUCCI FOUNDATION

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I. Call for Proposals

Time frames the evolution and the progress human beings have achieved so far through the medium of culture. Both in the past and the present, humanity has been witnessing the collapse of its own identity, sociopolitical system and cultural order, as well as their resulting restoration. Within the assumption of progress, indeed, lies the notion of failure, which can although be perceived also as a positive value, aiming towards self-improvement and the reconfiguration of a collective existence. We, as humans, remain in the midst, dwelling on a permanent desire for finitude and, at the same time, the hunger for existence.

It is right in this imbalance that Ernesto De Martino acknowledges the roots of crisis, which is intrinsic to mankind. In his unfinished research on the role of cultural apocalypses, the anthropologist elaborates how the end of the world represents the culmination of the issue of existence (*Dasein*), caught between the risk of definitive downfall and the quest for redemption. At that moment, an apocalypse happens to reveal (*apokalyptein*) when a specific order, decayed for historical and social reasons, needs to be replaced by new symbolic formations that correspond to the changed *Zeitgeist*. It therefore broadens the horizon of cultural domains and generates a dynamic process that implies annihilation and rebirth, loss and triumph.

The 6th Postgraduate International Conference intends to analyze the liminal space between different meanings of 'crisis' and their translation into images, exploring through visual outlooks the twilight moment when a familiar world sets and an alien one begins to dawn.

The vitality of an apocalyptic thinking, which continually transforms and produces new images of the crisis, leads us to consider a dimension in which the clash between the past and the future creates a generative power. According to Jurij M. Lotman (1994), an explosion is the moment which interrupts the chain of cause and effect, creating not only new possibilities but also other realities, a dislocation and resemantization of memory. It depends on the strength of the explosion and the extent of the cultural space invested: sometimes it will be isolated, while other times entire eras will be affected. The unpredictable nature of the explosion opens an additional dialogical scenario on the topic of the ending as both a historical and personal significant beginning.

Topics of interest would be developed through what philosopher Walter Benjamin conceptualizes as a **dialectical image**, a fragment wherein «what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation» (1999: 462). In these terms, papers will have to rely on images of any sort of media which can embody a turning point to allow a comprehensive narration of a specific rupture in history. Indeed, the dialectical image is intended to provoke an explosion, for the one who beholds it: reconfiguring the event itself, it becomes a symptom and knowledge of the past, and an icon of renewal.

We will consider contributions that can explore the different expressions in which the use of 'apocalypse' and 'crisis' does not configure as a mere description of the ending, but rather falls under

a wider narrative structure. So, while it is true that *cotidie morimur*, is equally true that 'in *our* end, is *our* beginning'. The purpose is to describe and discuss different aspects of dialectical images and their connection with both the end and what happens after, whether through the philosophical, artistic, historical, scientific, or sociopolitical lens.

Proposals will not be subjected to any chronological or geographical limit. The conference addresses, but is not limited to, the questions below:

- What forms do practices of resemantization assume in apocalyptic times?
- What role do images play within the dichotomy between our sense of finitude and the hunger for existence?
- Can images crystallize a moment of crisis as well as act as icons for redemption?
- How did minor and major apocalypses, respectively private and political, manage to curve history? How do their representations overlook both horror and curiosity on a particular existential abyss?
- How do cultural institutions, which usually represent the constitutive order, cope with artistic and political expressions in times of crisis, their disobedient counterpart?

II. How to participate

The 6th Postgraduate International Conference is open to all Ph.D. students. If you are interested in attending, please send a proposal for a 20-min presentation in English to infoveniceconference@gmail.com

Deadline: **May 6th, 2024.**

Successful applicants will be notified by **May 13th, 2024.**

The applicant's proposal should include the following details:

- Name and Surname
- Contact details (including email address and telephone number)
- Academic affiliation
- Provisional title
- Abstract (maximum 400 words)
- Curriculum vitae (maximum 150 words)

Combine all information into a single PDF file with **Surname_Name_Title** (example: Kermode_Frank_The Sense of an Ending).

The conference will be both on-site and online. Attendance is recommended for each day. There will be no conference fees, but participants must secure their own transportation and lodging.

We will provide further information about the program upon selection.

As a result of the conference, a selection of papers will be published as proceedings. Successful candidates will be provided with detailed information.