

Call for Papers

(Extension of abstract submission: 31 December 2020)

Workshop and preparation for a special issue/edited volume

“Telecrisis”

**Co-producing crisis and (tele-)communication technologies.
Historical and STS perspectives on governance, design and use**

Workshop 30 June 2021 (web-based workshop)

Co-organizers:

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The current COVID 19 pandemic sheds light on the key role of telecommunication infrastructures in our societies. Now pervasive in all large sociotechnical systems, through digitalization, these technologies are deeply structured by and embedded in the norms of individual and social routines. Yet they are under strain, as they have to cope with extraordinary times. While they are instrumental for social and organizational purposes, shaping the experience, the memory and the actual governance of the pandemic – be it for the management of quarantine or the function of the public health system – the crisis also drives their transformation. Experts observe that the app economy has for instance been evolving in various ways: some well-established apps suffer from the lockdown; many new ones are

created to increase and facilitate accessibility to information for civilians or medical experts, to secure monitoring of deceased people, to facilitate social networking of social groups, neighborhoods, families and friends; some paying apps are turning free; platform are implementing new regulations for developers¹. What will be left from this situation when the pandemic has come to a halt? How in general critical infrastructures are shaping and are being shaped by a state of crisis?

This co-production has been attracted the attention of social scientists, digital analysts and activists who are arguing that the pandemic has normalized an emerging phenomenon, the “surveillance capitalism”², the commodification of data and the surveillance conducted by private actors and companies who are getting involved presumably for profit. While in the past a crisis like a pandemic or a global war or the ‘cold-war’ might have been a chance for the state to secure sovereignty through surveillance and control of information and new telecommunication networks (like the satellites in the ‘cold war’), since globalization the crisis became a window of opportunity for industrial actors in the communication technologies to secure the commodification of information. We try to historicize this transition and to contextualise the debates on why citizens tend to let private companies do what they do not allow public authorities to, when it comes to collecting and processing data for managing the pandemic. The whole issue of digital sovereignty and the making of the modern democratic “platform State”³ appears under new light. We aim to reflect on past and present technological transformations and through comparisons to understand the sociohistorical processes of the co-production of crises with communication and information technologies. The focus will be on the European scene, yet we aim to be as inclusive and representative as possible, thus cases from Asia, America (South and North) and Africa are most welcome along with cases that stress the global character of the sociotechnical transformations. We invite contributors to explore major political disruptions like wars (international and civil), environmental disasters, financial crisis and public health crisis.

The questions we ask are the following:

- I. **How were telecommunications infrastructure(s) transformed from such extraordinary times of crisis in the past and in the present?**
- II. **How in return they shaped the development, the experience, the management and the memory of crisis?**
- III. **What transformations have occurred in relation to the co-production of (tele)communications and major crises of the past two centuries?**
- IV. **How has “tele-crisis” re-produced social identities, social distinctions and divisions?**

The workshop aims to understand the impact of global crises and natural disasters and catastrophes in the making of telecommunications and information industries. Co-currently it aims to explore the way the telecommunication and information technologies shaped the experience and governance of global events both at individual and social level. It aims to understand how different classes and social groups of different income and professional

¹ See the call for further research in this area from Cornelius Heimstädt and Morgan Meyer, “Comment le Covid-19 bouleverse le paysage des applis”, CNRS Le Journal, 29/04/2020. URL: <https://lejournal.cnrs.fr/billets/comment-le-covid-19-bouleverse-le-paysage-des-applis>

² Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, PublicAffairs, 2019.

³ Marie Alauzen, « L’État plateforme et l’identification numérique des usagers. Le processus de conception de FranceConnect », *Réseaux*, 2019/1 (n° 213), p. 211-239. DOI : 10.3917/res.213.0211.

backgrounds experience(d) the events through the mediation of different communication technologies. How different cultures have developed different social practices and imaginaries in relation to communication technologies and how this impacted on the experience of the critical events.

Main research topics of the workshop and the subsequent publication:

- Telecommunications and information infrastructure(s) under sever global natural disasters;
- Wars, infrastructures and the making of telecommunications;
- Pandemics (coronaviruses, flu, cholera, typhoid, smallpox, polio) and the communication infrastructures;
- Telecommunication technologies and societal resilience in global crises and major disasters;
- Telecommunication and information technologies and the experience of illness, accidents, fear and drama at the time of global events;
- Speed, communication and the construction of crises and disasters;
- Disasters and surveillance regimes;
- Surveillance and activism in period(s) of crisis;
- Law/Regulations, telecommunication and information technologies and the governance of crisis;
- Data governance, capitalism and the experience of crises;
- Techno-diplomacy, communication networks and crisis

The workshop wants to attract participation and contributions by different fields like: history of technology, history and sociology of pandemics, sociology and anthropology of infrastructures, infrastructure studies, transition studies, risk management, governance studies, science and technology diplomacy, social psychology, media studies. The ultimate goal of the workshop is to attract a critical mass of high-quality papers that will be prepared for a SI in a peer-reviewed journal in the fields of history of technology; international history; history and social studies of infrastructures, history and social studies of crises. The option of an edited volume to an international publisher will be considered too as an alternative publication pathway. Final decisions will be announced in due course after the submission of abstract and the decisions of acceptance.

Timetable

Abstract submission Deadline 31 December 2020

Notification of acceptance 20 January 2020

10 June 2021 submission of draft papers and pre-circulation

30 June 2021 Online workshop

Abstract submission (max 300 words): telecrisis.committee@gmail.com

