

Call for Papers

Generating Counter-Publics? – Art, AI, and Right-Wing Dynamics

Keywords: Counter-publics, sloppaganda, flooding, digital fascism, art, activism

Location: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt & Institute for Social Research (IfS), Frankfurt

Format: Interdisciplinary workshop (academia and art)

Date: July 20–21, 2026

Deadline for abstracts: April 17, 2026

AI-generated images disseminated millions of times – such as the alleged arrest of Donald Trump or the Pope wearing a designer jacket – illustrate how the conditions of publicity are currently shifting. Digital publics are increasingly shaped by mass-produced content that amplifies moods, fosters disorientation, or captures attention – practices discussed under terms such as “sloppaganda” or “AI flooding.” Digital media, platforms, and artificial intelligence now determine what becomes visible, what circulates, and which interpretations prevail. Within privately organized, algorithmically structured publics, the possibilities for forming counter-publics and publicly articulating political conflicts are consequently being transformed.

As early as 2008, the renowned media artist Hito Steyerl pointed out in her essay collection *The Color of Truth* that power relations in digital societies are expressed not only at the level of content but also within the technical and economic structures of image production and distribution. At the same time, key decisions regarding the development and deployment of AI are increasingly made by private actors and thus often evade democratic control (as Steyerl argues in her most recent book *Medium Hot*, 2025). Jürgen Habermas likewise describes in *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (2022) how these developments raise fundamental questions concerning democratic will-formation and political participation.

If the public sphere itself is increasingly privatized, automated, and affectively steered, the possibilities for criticizing dominant narratives, rendering alternative perspectives visible, and publicly negotiating political conflicts are profoundly altered. Following Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, and with reference to *Public Sphere and Experience* (1974), it must therefore be asked whether and how counter-publics can emerge at all today within the context of AI technologies and informational capitalism, and what role art and media might play in this regard. Do counter-publics still retain the radical, transformative, and emancipatory character described by Negt and Kluge? Or does the privatization of the public sphere primarily generate regressive counter-publics?

Building on these questions, the workshop examines the political, aesthetic, and technical conditions of critical counter-publics in times of AI and informational capitalism. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of resistant artistic and media practices. The relevance of art for the production of counter-publics becomes evident, among other things, in the fact that political performances, critical actions, or conceptual interventions are often sanctioned precisely when they reach broad media visibility. In certain state contexts, they are even classified as security-relevant issues and subject to criminal prosecution, as illustrated by the cases of Pussy Riot, the Peng! Collective, and the Center for Political Beauty. This suggests that the efficacy of political art is closely tied to its capacity to generate counter-publics.

What possibilities for resistance and for the production of counter-publics does art have in an age marked by the automation, technologization, and machinization of images, texts, and thought; by the privatization of the public sphere; by the transformation of cyberlibertarianism into cyberfascism; by the erosion and disempowerment of democratic institutions alongside the concentration of economic power in Big Tech corporations? How might these developments be addressed through artistic means? Are there artistic techniques or procedures that can be deployed against the very technologies that drive these transformations? Or does art find itself compelled to adopt similar means in order to counter them? How does this affect artistic practice? Can art enable critical counter-publics beyond privatized publics and their associated ideological bubbles? How should the criminalization of artists be assessed in this context, and how might it be confronted? These and related questions will be discussed at the workshop “Generating Counter-Publics? – Art, AI, and Right-Wing Dynamics,” to be held on July 20–21, 2026, in Frankfurt.

The workshop is organized as a collaborative event of the [research project *The Art of Counter-Investigation* at the Institute for Social Research \(IfS\)](#), the [Network for Terrorism Research \(NTF\)](#), and [Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt](#). The venue is Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt and Institute for Social Research (IfS), Frankfurt.

The workshop is addressed to scholars from all disciplines and artists from all fields. Early career researchers are particularly encouraged to present their projects, works, and theses. Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract (maximum 2,000 characters including spaces). Presentations should not exceed 20–30 minutes and will be followed by discussion. Selected contributions will be presented and discussed within an interdisciplinary framework. The languages of presentation are German and English. Proposals for panels or other group formats may also be submitted. In addition to conventional academic papers and discussion formats, artistic contributions – such as performance lectures, screenings, and similar formats – are expressly welcome.

- Please send your abstract together with a short biographical note by April 17, 2026 to: isabelle.holz@netzwerk-terrorismusforschung.de.
- All submissions will receive feedback by May 15, 2026.
- Binding registration (without presentation) is requested by June 22, 2026 via the email address above.
- For further inquiries, please also contact: isabelle.holz@netzwerk-terrorismusforschung.de.