INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

VIENNA · NOVEMBER 12–13, 2026

Who is ‘everyone’?

Analyzing media practices of (national) belonging

WHEN

Thursday, November 12
Friday, November 13, 2026

WHERE

Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien
Vordere Zollamtsstraße 7
1030 Vienna · Room Flux 2

INSIDE

Program
Abstracts & Short Bios

Day 1 — Thursday, November 12, 2026

08:45–09:00	Registration & Welcome
09:00–09:30	**Introduction & Framing** *“Who is ‘everyone’?” – Questions, Concept, Aims*
09:30–11:30	PANEL 1 · Chaired by Sabina Mihelj **Everyday & Digital Practices of National Belonging** How everyday digital media practices and platforms shape national belonging. *(K)Einheit verhandeln? The (de)construction of German unity as a building block of the modern German nation-state* — Annika Werner *“That’s exactly how we do it, too”: Digital-ethnographic approaches to the performance of community through consumption among Germans from Romania* — Jana Stöxen *Who Counts as “Us”? DeepSeek, AI Nationalism, and the Communication of National Belonging in China* — Dechun Zhang & Yuxi Huang *Indian Elections in the gaze of Google: On what search engines tell us about national ideas* — Vihang Jumle
11:30–11:45	Coffee Break
11:45–13:15	PANEL 2 · Chaired by Birgit Haberpeuntner **Archives, Infrastructures, Networks** Archival and infrastructural analysis of belonging that exceeds the national frame. *Paratactics Against “Methodological Nationalism”* — Philip Widmann *Internationality through Categorization: Media Practices of Belonging in the Video-Cassette Magazine* Infermental *(1982–1991)* — András Keskeny ★ *From ‘all’ to ‘us’: Alternative News Agencies and the Shift in Global Narratives* — Leonie Wolters
13:15–14:30	Lunch
14:30–16:00	PANEL 3 · Chaired by Stefan Benedik **Imaging Unity: Gender, Authoritarian Visual Orders, and Their Afterlives** How visual media construct exclusive “we”s, often through gender as a structuring category. *The Iconization of a ‘We’: National Public Sphere and the Female Body as an Image of Pseudo-Unity* — Sahar Daryab ★ *Staged Belonging:* Heimat*, Gender, and National Community in Austrofascist Media Policy* — Christina Wieder All’armi, siam fascisti – *The Question of Community in Antifascist Italian Film* — Naemi Haar
16:00–16:15	Coffee Break
16:15–17:15	**Method Café** Three small groups, mixed across panels, work through three guiding questions. Brief summaries by the group hosts, leading up to the “Response” and the open room discussion.
17:15–18:00	**Day 1 Response** Sabina Mihelj and Michael Skey follow up on all three panels and the Method Café in a 15-minute synthesizing response before the room opens up—an initial take on the day’s cross-cutting questions.
from 19:00	**Guided Tour: House of Austrian History (hdgö)** By Stefan Benedik, Head of Public History and Deputy Director. Please register!

★ Talk given in German; English slides and an English abstract are provided.

Day 2 — Friday, November 13, 2026

09:30–11:00

PANEL 4 · Chaired by Elias Berner

Felt Belonging: Frontal Images, Pop Music, and Ancient Landscapes

How image, sound, and landscape produce belonging as a felt experience.

All in the Face: Frontality, Belonging and the Control Image in The Truman Show, The Young Pope *and* France — Sebastian Lederle

Russia’s Pop Music Propaganda Since the Beginning of the War in Ukraine and Its Pro- vs. Anti-War Audiences — Johann Pibert

Driving the ancient landscape. Encountering the homeland’s roots in West Germany and the UK in new media and technology (1950-1975) — Hilbrand Wouters

11:00–11:30 Coffee Break

11:30–13:00

PANEL 5 · Chaired by Michael Skey

Nationhood in Emergent Media: Generated, Played, Lived

How the nation persists and changes form in generative AI, online games, and nationalized platforms.

Life in Platform Nations: Exploring Citizen Engagement with Digital Sovereignty in Brazil, Ukraine and the UK — César Jiménez-Martínez (with Sabina Mihelj)

Hallucinating the nation: A comparative multi-modal analysis of genAI’s visual regimes of representation — Delia Dumitrica (with Maria Avraamidou)

Gaming the Nation: Video Games as Possibility Spaces for National Identity Formation — Rachel van der Merwe

13:00–14:30 Lunch

14:30–15:30

Blind Spot: Nation?

Sabina Mihelj, Michael Skey, Maja Figge & Leonie Kapfer in conversation.
Short position statements on the role of “nation” as an analytic category in the respective fields of media research, then open debate.

15:30–16:00

Who is ‘everyone’? Revisited

Open closing discussion, informed by two days of case studies.

16:00–16:30

Wrap-Up, Publication Opportunity, Next Steps

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

VENUE

Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien
Vordere Zollamtsstraße 7
1030 Vienna
Room Flux 2 (2nd floor)

LANGUAGE

Primarily English. Two talks (★) are given in German, with English slides and an English abstract.

CONTACT

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PANEL 1 · THURSDAY, 09:30–11:30 · CHAIRED BY SABINA MIHELJ

Everyday & Digital Practices of National Belonging

How everyday digital media practices and platforms shape national belonging.

(K)Einheit verhandeln? The (de)construction of German unity as a building block of the modern German nation-state

Annika Werner

Historical narratives and acts of remembrance contribute to the emergence of shared knowledge and shared identities by preserving and disseminating particular historical experiences. Research into collective memory thus sheds light on processes of nationalization and the standardization of social knowledge, as well as collective norms and values.

With the reunification of the two German states, the young, unified German nation faced both a challenge and an opportunity: on the one hand, the need to reorient established West German narratives, which had long constructed the identity of the Federal Republic in direct contrast to that of its East German neighbor (Boyer 2005); on the other hand, the powerful image of unity as a fundamental building block for the young nation. The latter was utilized, among others, by the stakeholders behind the "Monument to Freedom and Unity" currently under construction in Berlin, who, by referring to German reunification, explicitly sought to contribute to national unification ambitions (as described, for example, by Luhmann 1997, 1053) (Saunders 2013; Girßmann 2020).

In contrast to this, the proposed case study, drawing on interview data and participant observation, examines current counter-trends that challenge and question the belief in German reunification as the doxa (Bourdieu 2017, 326) of national discourse. Through media practices (such as a documentary series or an Instagram channel with over 9,000 followers), the young initiative k_einheit, comprising members of the post-Reunification generation, purposefully addresses questions regarding internal unity and existing inequalities to a pan-German audience. At the heart of their work lies the demand for the visibility of East German experiences and the questioning of uniformity. For example, one member of the initiative asks in an interview: "Do people even want German unity? Under what conditions do they want it?" It is particularly through specific East German experiences that tensions between assimilation and openness to diversity, equal belonging and the protection of local identity are addressed. With a view to this renegotiation of (pan-)German identity by young, democratically-oriented actors, this paper examines the dynamic processes of negotiation surrounding national belonging.

SHORT BIO

Having studied law (first state exam, HU Berlin) as well as sociology and anthropology (MA, Central European University), Annika Werner has been pursuing a PhD in German Studies and Empirical Cultural Studies at Aix-Marseille Université and the University of Tübingen since 2025. Her research focuses on the idea of the "fiction of unity" and the post-reunification period as subjects of political negotiations concerning memory. Previously, her Master's thesis examined the impact of the transformation experiences of the 1990s in the Lusatian coal-mining region. She has worked as a research assistant at the Bundestag as well as the law firm Hengeler Müller and is a doctoral fellow of the German National Academic Foundation.

“That’s exactly how we do it, too”: Digital-ethnographic approaches to the performance of community through consumption among Germans from Romania

Jana Stöxen

A photo of layered sauerkraut, coarse bratwurst, and *speck* (bacon), posted without further explanation, garners 28 likes and seven positive comments, including one that highlights *what is ours*. A normal, everyday post in one of the Transylvanian online groups.

Current media representations of a historical “Saxon Nation”—which was put to the test by (violent) nationalizations and emigration from Romania to Germany—can perhaps be found today in (Facebook) groups, some of which have tens of thousands of members: “Siebenbürgen bunte Heimat” (“Transylvania: A Colorful Homeland”) and “Soxen kochen uch backen” (“Saxons: Cooking and Baking”) are examples of a vibrant community that defines itself through its shared heritage and manifests this in its posts. A sense of belonging is created here through shared experiences and the social proximity derived from them (Anderson 1988).

Food culture, in particular, is almost canonical in this context: The question of *who* prepares *what* and *how* is not merely a low-threshold topic that occasionally reveals a conservatism of taste (Tolksdorf 1978; Flack 2020). It is also the arena for lively debates about authenticity and the “right” *taste of home*—and thus what it means to “truly be Saxon.”

Drawing on the concept of “Consuming the Nation” (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008), the posts show that “[c]onsumption constitutes, reinforces, and communicates social membership” (p. 550). Thus, this case study opens up the possibility of an analytical examination of the production of both unity and difference through the medium of consumption. It also highlights how this takes on greater significance in the context of (Romanian-German) transnationality.

This article is a work-in-progress from the ongoing project “Heimat-Netz-Gemeinschaft. Digital Platforms and Groups as Spaces of Communication and Knowledge-Production for Germans from Romania” and, through the lens of digital ethnography, examines both cohesive and divisive practices of community-building and their cultural performances in order to shed light on intermediate positions and the negotiation of a nuanced “we.”

SHORT BIO

Jana Stöxen is a cultural studies researcher specializing in mobility and migration. She defended her ethnographic PhD-thesis on contemporary Moldovan migrant society in 2026 at the University of Regensburg. As a research associate at the *Institute for Cultural Analysis of the Germans of Eastern Europe* (IKDE, Freiburg im Breisgau), she focuses primarily on Germans in and from Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Who Counts as “Us”? DeepSeek, AI Nationalism, and the Communication of National Belonging in China

Dechun Zhang & Yuxi Huang

Digital media infrastructures increasingly shape how collective identities are imagined, negotiated, and contested (Zhang, 2026; Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2020). In contemporary platform societies, social media, participatory governance systems, and AI-driven recommendation algorithms influence not only the circulation of information but also who is recognized as part of a collective “we,” making national belonging, civic participation, and public expression deeply intertwined with infrastructures of visibility that determine whose voices are amplified, marginalized, or rendered politically meaningful (Brighenti, 2007; McCosker, 2015). This study examines online discussions surrounding DeepSeek, China’s domestically developed large language model, following its release in early 2025, to explore how state media narratives and user-generated discussions constructed DeepSeek as a symbol of national achievement, technological sovereignty, and China’s position in global AI competition. Official media framed DeepSeek as evidence of scientific modernization and national rejuvenation, linking AI innovation to broader state-led development goals, while social media users mobilized the technology to express national pride, debate China’s technological future, and negotiate the social and political implications of AI-driven governance. These interactions transformed DeepSeek from a technological artifact into a site through which competing understandings of citizenship, participation, and national identity were articulated. The study argues that national belonging is not only discursively represented but also infrastructurally produced through systems that organize visibility, participation, and recognition, with digital nationalism operating both as structure, providing the emotional and symbolic architecture of China’s digital public sphere by defining what is speakable, visible, and legitimate, and as strategy, offering both the state and citizens a flexible repertoire for persuasion, critique, identity formation, and moral positioning.

SHORT BIOS

Dechun Zhang (PhD, Leiden University) is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. His research focuses on political communication, digital politics, digital nationalism, and media and politics. He is the author of *Digital Nationalism and Affective Governance: Propaganda, Public Sentiment, and Soft Authoritarianism in China* (Routledge, 2026). Email: dezh@hum.ku.dk

Yuxi Huang is a PhD student in Information and Communication Sciences at GRESEC, Université Grenoble Alpes, France. Drawing on political communication, her research examines how digital platforms shape institutional communication, public visibility, and legitimacy in contemporary China.

Indian Elections in the gaze of Google: On what search engines tell us about national ideas

Vihang Jumle

Research on digital nationalism suggests that Internet platforms are increasingly instrumentalized by various actors to manipulate national public spheres. In state-controlled media environments like China, political actors use domestic platforms like Baidu to implicitly nurture and reproduce national ideas that align with state discourse. Western commercial search engines have yet to feature in this debate, since they operate in relatively independent regulatory environments, address commercial interests and personalize results based on global internet sources. These conditions theoretically create conditions for users to be exposed to a variety of information on any given topic. We test this expectation by analyzing the visual representation of the 2024 Indian elections on Google Images, in the context of studies that have instead pointed at the potential of Western commercial search engines to propagate dominant political stereotypes. We observe that, despite results personalization (by language and location), Google presents the Indian elections uniformly to all users, particularly prioritizing the incumbent. Arguably, even Western commercial search engines can be prone to, if not explicit, an indirect instrumentalization, turning them into channels of political intervention.

SHORT BIO

Dr. Vihang Jumle is a post-doctoral researcher at Saarland University, Germany. He specializes in mixed-methods research, with a focus on computational approaches, on new media technologies. He holds a doctorate in social sciences from the University of Bern.

PANEL 2 · THURSDAY, 11:45–13:15 · CHAIRED BY BIRGIT HABERPEUNTNER

Archives, Infrastructures, Networks

Archival and infrastructural analysis of belonging that exceeds the national frame.

Paratactics Against "Methodological Nationalism"

Philip Widmann

The popularization and institutionalization of cinema since the late 19th century took place in a co-evolution with the modern nation-state. Film was instrumental in shaping national industries, taste profiles, and a viewership, which from the introduction of sound film in the late 1920s increasingly matched ideas of a linguistically—and thus culturally—homogeneous public sphere of the nation. As a global phenomenon, cinema contributed to the naturalization of the nation (state) through its infrastructures and institutions, defining the nation's boundaries within an international setting as well as the level of their permeability through subtitling and dubbing, distribution quotas, coproduction agreements, international festivals, congresses or treaties. With the nation structurally manifesting itself in film production, distribution, reception, and archiving, histories of film and cinema have largely tended to confirm the national character of cinema, transforming a supposedly descriptive into an epistemic category. The numerous critiques of "national cinema" and the identification of transnational, diasporic or accented cinemas notwithstanding, this "zombie category" (Beck 2007) continues to shape the formation of the objects, subjects and methods of film-related scholarship.

Drawing on my research on *Dans les ruines de Baalbeck* (1937), the first sound film entirely produced in Lebanon, advertised as the "first national film" several years before independence from French mandate rule and considered to be lost today, I will propose paratactical approaches against "methodological nationalism." One of them consists in actively tending to the paranational aspects of making, watching, preserving, and researching film. As a heuristic lens for discerning fragmentary relations before, below, and beyond those established within and between nation states, Paranational Cinema does not form its own coherent category or methodology, but rather informs the development of situated methods that can account for what has been obliterated in nationalized frameworks.

SHORT BIO

Philip Widmann is a researcher, programmer and filmmaker, currently working as a postdoc in the SNSF-funded project *Paranational Cinema – Legacies and Practices* at the Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich. His research is dedicated to methods of intervention into absences in and of the film archive. In 2023, he initiated *Film Undone – Elements of a Latent Cinema*, a collective examination of unmade and unfinished film projects. A book by the same title was published in 2024.

Internationality through Categorization: Media Practices of Belonging in the Video-Cassette Magazine *Infermental* (1982–1991)

András Keskeny ★

During the final decade of the Cold War, the international video-cassette magazine *Infermental* (1982–1991) conceived of itself as a periodical for collecting, archiving, and disseminating alternative audio-visual productions from around the world. Its eleven editions were compiled by successive ad hoc editorial teams in different cities—from Vancouver to Vienna, and from Tokyo to Osnabrück/Skopje—and presented at festivals, cultural institutions, and art schools through a transnational network. *Infermental* thus offers a revealing case study of how forms of belonging were organized through media practices within an increasingly international alternative media culture.

The paper examines how national, local, and (sub)cultural forms of belonging were produced and mediated within a project whose stated aim was to foster internationality and connect alternative media cultures. At its center is the paradox that this transnational orientation did not emerge through the dissolution of geographical and cultural distinctions, but by mobilizing them as organizing categories. Contributions were situated within individual editions through references to countries, places, and other geographical markers; editorial teams were embedded in specific local media scenes and infrastructures; and the international presentation of the cassette editions was likewise shaped by unevenly distributed institutional resources and geopolitical conditions. National and local categories thus appear less as opposites of internationality than as organizational forms through which it was produced.

Drawing on archival materials, the paper combines a praxeological analysis of collecting, classifying, editing, and presenting with the concept of the "small archive" developed by Gustav Frank, Madleen Podewski, and Stefan Scherer within the framework of an archaeology of knowledge. Geographical designations are not taken at face value as expressions of national identity, but examined as historically specific media and editorial practices of attribution whose functions must themselves be reconstructed. The analysis shows how processes of access, selection, classification, and presentation produced different forms of visibility and participation—and, at the same time, defined the boundaries of the imagined "everyone" invoked by the project's international ambitions.

SHORT BIO

András Keskeny is a media culture scholar and photographer, and a doctoral candidate at the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Szeged in Hungary. He studied film studies at Eötvös Loránd University, photography at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, and *Kulturwissenschaft* at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His research focuses on media epistemology and media archaeology, particularly in relation to alternative media cultures, media technologies, and practices of knowledge production in the 1970s and 1980s. He has worked in the archive at ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and has taught at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe (HfG Karlsruhe).

From ‘all’ to ‘us’: Alternative News Agencies and the Shift in Global Narratives

Leonie Wolters

In this contribution, I examine two so-called alternative news agencies: the Christian Democrat-oriented Inter Press Service (Rome, 1964–present) and the Commonwealth-oriented Gemini (1967–2002). These organizations aimed to supply global news media with foreign reporting, much like Reuters, AFP, and AP, but with a decolonial approach. Their unique selling point was the local origin of their correspondents, a feature that carried particular postcolonial significance when reporting from countries often referred to as the Third World.

In my analysis, I contrast the emphasis on national belonging as a unique selling point with the idea of a global imagined community of alternative news. What constituted a valid national perspective was largely negotiated by editors in Western Europe. Moreover, the practices used to authenticate new kinds of “local” voices (especially those of African journalists) were strikingly similar to the methods employed by the British Foreign Office in its covert creation of Cold War-era propaganda for Sub-Saharan African readers in newly independent countries.

Additionally, I explore how and when the imagined global community of alternative news began to be replaced by a more clearly defined audience: the development community of NGOs and UN-related institutions. By tracing these shifts, I chart how alternative international news agencies moved from addressing a hierarchical yet transformative and supposedly universal “we” to conceiving and shaping a professionalized and privileged in-group.

SHORT BIO

Leonie Wolters is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam, where she conducts the project “Good News from the Third World: The Rise and Fall of Alternatives in Global Journalism, 1960s–1990s.” She holds a PhD in Global Intellectual History (Free University Berlin) and is the author of *Cosmopolitan Elites and the Making of Globality. M. N. Roy and Fellow Anti-Colonial, Communist and Humanist Intellectuals, c. 1915–1960* (Bloomsbury, 2024). Her work explores the history of information, and the connections between PR, decolonization and information overload. She has also produced documentaries for Dutch Public Radio and taught workshops on media history and journalistic writing.

PANEL 3 · THURSDAY, 14:30–16:00 · CHAIRED BY STEFAN BENEDIK

Imaging Unity: Gender, Authoritarian Visual Orders, and Their Afterlives

How visual media construct exclusive "we"s, often through gender as a structuring category.

The Iconization of a 'We': National Public Sphere and the Female Body as an Image of Pseudo-Unity

Sahar Daryab ★

The contribution advances the thesis that nationalist imaginaries of unity are condensed with particular force in the visual coding of the female body. Through a diachronic comparison, it examines two historical processes of transformation: the transition from the Weimar Republic to the visual order of the Nazi regime, and the transition from the Pahlavi regime to the Islamic Republic in the course of the 1979 Revolution. The comparison does not seek to equate the two political orders, but rather to identify structural isomorphisms within their respective visual regimes. In both cases, heterogeneous forms of female visibility are curtailed and replaced by normative representations in which the female body becomes the bearer of a nationally or ideologically constituted "we." Drawing on the theoretical framework of the iconic turn, the contribution demonstrates that the notion of "unity" is not merely asserted discursively but produced iconically. It is precisely in the image of woman that the mechanisms, exclusions, and contradictions of this propagandistic pseudo-unity become most clearly legible.

SHORT BIO

Dr. phil. Sahar Daryab is an Akademische Rätin (Senior Lecturer) at the Chair of Literature and Media at the University of Bamberg. Her research is situated in cultural and media studies and focuses on the socio-political implications of technical media, particularly (moving) images, film and image-based social media. Alongside two monographs on the socio-political impact of Iranian cinema and a publication on our relationship to desires amid media change, her habilitation project examines visual culture and the public sphere during the epochal media shift of the early twentieth century (1900–1933), with a particular focus on the media representation of femininity.

Staged Belonging: *Heimat*, Gender, and National Community in Austrofascist Media Policy

Christina Wieder

Austrofascism promoted a vision of the nation as a corporatist community encompassing “all” Austrians. Yet the media representations of this ostensibly inclusive community depended on specific practices of visibility and invisibility, which both created and limited social belonging. Central to this project was the claim that tradition and modernity could be reconciled through folk culture (Volkskultur), presented as a moderate, distinctly Austrian alternative to radical models of modernity. This idea found its clearest expression in harmonizing images of rural Austria. Although such imagery relied less on explicit enemy images than National Socialist or Italian Fascist propaganda, it nonetheless established homogenizing and exclusionary notions of society within the regime’s visual communication.

This paper examines how Austrofascist media visually produced belonging to the Christian-German nation, and which subjects were addressed as members of the imagined community and which were excluded from it. Particular attention is given to gendered representations, where the limits of the promised inclusion become especially apparent. Gender is treated here not as an additional category of analysis but as a constitutive structuring principle of Austrofascist community-building: the regime conceived the nation through gender-coded roles and thereby reproduced a hierarchical model of social participation.

Drawing on selected case studies from popular media, the paper analyzes mechanisms of exclusion as well as the media representations of a supposedly inclusive national community.

SHORT BIO

Christina Wieder is a historian and cultural scholar specializing in visual cultures in transnational contexts, twentieth-century women’s and gender history, exile and migration, as well as intermediality and intervisuality. In 2022, she received her PhD from the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Vienna with a dissertation entitled *Visual Transformations of Exile: The Jewish Women Artists Grete Stern, Hedy Crilla, and Irena Dodal in Argentina*. She has conducted research at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Humboldt University Berlin, the University of Buenos Aires, and the Cinémathèque française, and has taught at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Paris Lodron University Salzburg, the University of Klagenfurt, and several institutes of the University of Vienna. Currently she is a Postdoctoral University Assistant at the Institute of Contemporary History, University of Vienna.

All'armi, siam fascisti – The Question of Community in Antifascist Italian Film

Naemi Haar

All'armi, siam fascisti (1962, L. Del Fra, C. Mangini, L. Micciché) is a compilation film produced in the tense political climate of Italy in the early 1960s. The rise of neofascism led to violent clashes and a renewed interest in Italy's ambivalent past. Italy was the first fascist country in Europe and Nazi Germany's closest ally until Mussolini was overthrown in 1943. The country was then divided: Germany, its former ally, invaded the north and reinstalled Mussolini as the head of the Italian Social Republic while Badoglio in the South declared war on Germany. After the war, Italians mostly repressed the fascist past and the narrative of Italians as "good people" became dominant.

The violent clashes in the summer of 1960 laid bare the country's deep division, which is also evident in *All'armi, siam fascisti*. As a film about war and fascism made by three left-wing filmmakers, it has a strong antifascist message and appears to be one of the most provocative and confrontational films of the period. It was widely discussed and divided its audience, receiving praise for its courageous and important message, while some critics objected to its one-sidedness and right-wing activists responded with acts of violence. In my contribution, I argue through a close examination of the film that despite its overtly accusatory tone, it actually undermines its own message by constructing a very ambiguous "we," seeking to unite a divided nation.

SHORT BIO

Naemi Haar is a research assistant and doctoral candidate in the DFG research project "Memory or reappraisal? Experience- and knowledge production in Holocaust films of the FRG, GDR and Italy 1945–1990" at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. Her research interests include genre theory, cinematic engagements with history, and the history of Italian cinema.

Felt Belonging: Frontal Images, Pop Music, and Ancient Landscapes

How image, sound, and landscape produce belonging as a felt experience.

All in the Face: Frontality, Belonging and the Control Image in *The Truman Show*, *The Young Pope* and *France*

Sebastian Lederle

How do modern mass media address everyone and each individual simultaneously? This paper examines the frontal face as a medial practice of producing affective belonging in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*, Paolo Sorrentino's *The Young Pope* and Bruno Dumont's *France*. Frontal faces do more than display interiority: they open political fields, organize distance and assign each viewing body a place within an order of visibility. Staging becomes a scene of subjectivation through which approachability, emotionality and recognition position everyone "in the picture" by placing them "in the face."

The frontal shot generates a liberal phantasm linking Everyone-Is-Addressed with It-Is-All-about-You. Truman Burbank, Pius XIII and France de Meurs become universal figures precisely through faces that are both unmistakable and interchangeable. Identification with them mediates immediacy, presenting politically contingent arrangements as natural. Truman embodies an intimate televisual community; Pius, the Catholic universalization of the vicar; France, a mediated nation contemplating itself through her continuously transmitted persona. Belonging emerges as an American television family, a Catholic-political imaginary and the French public of the Macron-era pandemic. Universality thus precedes deliberation: embodied, affective address makes belonging felt before it is justified, directing assent while appearing apolitical. The media's contribution becomes most effective where it recedes from view: the face promises immediate interpersonal recognition while its framing silently distributes positions, possibilities of appearance and forms of political assent. The paper connects Arendt's public realm as a space of appearance with Foucault's pastoral power and neoliberal governmentality, Deleuze's society of control and Mouffe's liberal hegemony. Against Arendt, it argues that appearance has no anthropological foundation: framing, frontality, seriality and repetition produce it. The face becomes a control image, leading from seeing and being seen to making oneself visible and controllable. Individualization sustains self-government and naturalizes mutual self-observation.

This also exposes the gendering of the "All": universal address is predominantly coded as masculine, while women appear as Others, mirrors or desired images. France both embodies and sabotages this arrangement. Ultimately, all three figures withdraw from hegemonic visibility: Truman enters the studio's dark off-screen space; France persists as an unrepresentable *singulare tantum* until the film ends; Pius collapses when the demand to love one's neighbor renders his representative authority inoperative. Their departures expose the Not-All produced by every "All": unintelligible Others whose exclusion limits participation. Participation nevertheless requires interrupting the apparently natural hegemonic order. These liminal scenes disclose politicization beyond established politics, for which no representative face can stand.

SHORT BIO

Sebastian Lederle is a research associate at the Chair of Philosophy and Aesthetics in the Department of Media Studies at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. He received his doctorate in Vienna in 2016 for a thesis on the relationship between phenomenological anthropology and metaphorology in Hans Blumenberg, for which he was awarded the 2016/17 Dissertation Prize of the University of Vienna's Faculty of Philosophy and Education. His research focuses on phenomenology, anthropology, and the philosophy of film, media and technology. Major publications: *Endlichkeit und Metapher. Studien zu Eugen Fink und Hans Blumenberg* (2021), *Hollywood in Zeiten des Postcinema* (co-edited with Lisa Gotto, 2020), *Grundbegriffe der Medienphilosophie* (co-edited with Johanna Seifert and Martin Siegler, 2024).

Russia's Pop Music Propaganda Since the Beginning of the War in Ukraine and Its Pro- vs. Anti-War Audiences

Johann Pibert

Russia's so-called military special operation has long since arrived in Russian popular culture. Above all, Shaman—a singer systematically built up as a superstar by the propaganda apparatus—embodies Russia's major media strategy of aestheticizing the broad civilian population and thus recruiting them, actually and symbolically, for the war. But even established folk singers such as Oleg Gazmanov allow themselves to be instrumentalized by the regime. In contrast to the obvious propaganda mission, the exciting questions concern the detailed effects of the circulating—primarily audiovisual—works on their audiences, both in Russia and beyond its borders.

The aim of this paper is to examine the music video oeuvre of Shaman to reveal the audiovisual propaganda strategies employed by Russia in popular music. The method used is descriptive music- and film-psychological analysis. The findings show how Shaman's oeuvre has undergone three phases of radicalization as a result of its instrumentalization; what homogenizing offers of identification—amid a paradoxical mixture of individualism and collectivism—the Russian propaganda machine thereby provides; and what effects this has on pro- vs. anti-war audiences. Furthermore, the paper argues that, through mass indoctrination, Russia is becoming a fascist state that is returning from a network society to a mass society.

Since the descriptive music- and film-psychological analysis investigates the most probable experiences and behaviors of the recipients, different statements can be made depending on the specific audiovisual culture in question. Comparing the effects of Shaman's audiovisual propaganda in Russia (where the audiences are now largely pro-war) and in the "West" (where the audiences are mainly anti-war), a pop-cultural border can be drawn: the aesthetic experiences with the same material could not be more different. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is also to look across the border in our divided world and empathize with the others.

SHORT BIO

Dipl.-Psych. Johann Pibert is the president of German Society for Popular Music Studies and doctoral candidate in media studies at the University of Bonn. He was previously a personal assistant to the president of the Ernst Busch University of Theatre Arts in Berlin and research assistant at the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in Potsdam. He studied psychology and business administration at the University of Mannheim and film studies as well as journalism and communication studies at the Free University of Berlin.

Driving the ancient landscape. Encountering the homeland's roots in West Germany and the UK in new media and technology (1950-1975)

Hilbrand Wouters

The heritage of cultural landscapes have long bridged territorial patriotism with individual affective attachments to place. In particular, archaeological views of the land offered a timeless mental escape, but also suggested a strict and continuous rootedness of some imagined collective—often a very national one in the pre-WWII years. After the war, beside an advance in scholarly knowledge itself, the loss of empire, socio-economic transformations, and new media technologies offered new means and an urgency to redefine this relation.

This paper explores this theme through the broadcasting (and some publishing) of two publicity-savvy UK archaeologists, Glyn Daniel and Jacquetta Hawkes. They took a key role in an unexpected boom of radio and television broadcasting on archaeology. The self-proclaimed humanists were highly skeptical of the nation and nationalism in archaeology, but still their initial postwar work did implicitly fixate upon the island, though in a highly affective manner. Gradually, that imaginative orientation would become central to their archaeological publicity.

Along their different personal trajectories, Daniel and Hawkes thus assisted in reattaching British prehistory to a wider European antiquity while giving it a new intellectual significance. New media technologies were crucial for that process, as archaeology had previously sought legitimacy within antiquarian typologies of treasure, or alternatively in impermeable military and ethnic-historical storytelling. Visual and auditive media now offered diverse aesthetic formats and storytelling could be more experimental and imaginative while retaining archaeological consistency. The heritage of landscape that emerged from this publicity, instead of being a bounded national domain, increasingly harbored traces of wider networks and dynamic change, in which the region was constitutive of the nation and larger geographic realms, like Europe—a historically "glocalized" gaze thus negotiated the loss of ancient landscape with modern progress.

Covering the periphery of the national view and resistance to nationalist perspectives, this paper ultimately debates how heritage publicity navigates imagined collective histories and attachments of place on the one hand, with personal and regional perceptions on the other hand, and weighs in the significance of new and old media in that process.

SHORT BIO

Hilbrand Wouters is a doctoral researcher in the research training group *Post-Eurocentric Europe* at the University of Konstanz. He is interested in public history-writing and heritage practices concerning socio-economic and intellectual history. Following a master in History and Philosophy of Science in Utrecht, he worked as assistant curator at *Rijksmuseum Boerhaave* on memory and heritage practices of academic heritage. Since autumn 2024 his doctoral project, *A new ancient world? Linking land to people in exhibition, print, and film in West-Germany and the UK (1949–1975)*, interrogates the reorientation of origin narratives through prehistory in popular media in the light of European integration.

PANEL 5 · FRIDAY, 11:30–13:00 · CHAIRED BY MICHAEL SKEY

Nationhood in Emergent Media: Generated, Played, Lived

How the nation persists and changes form in generative AI, online games, and nationalized platforms.

Life in Platform Nations: Exploring Citizen Engagement with Digital Sovereignty in Brazil, Ukraine and the UK

César Jiménez-Martínez (prepared together with Sabina Mihelj)

Faced with the growing power of digital platforms, and driven by concerns over online harms, foreign election interference and privacy protection, governments world-wide are seeking to claw back control over digital technologies. Amidst these developments, the language of nations and nationalism is seeing a comeback, offering a tool for legitimating both authoritarian and democratic forms of state control over the digital world. As a result, the digital infrastructures we live in are becoming increasingly nationalized. Yet, while literature examining the rise of digital sovereignty from top-down, policy and infrastructural perspectives has grown, little is known about how ordinary citizens react to an increasingly nationalized digital environment they live in.

Our paper seeks to advance these debates both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, it links debates on digital sovereignty with debates on digital and platform nationalism. Empirically, we draw on interviews and digital diaries with 30 participants from Ukraine, Brazil and the UK to examine how ordinary people experience the manifestations of digital sovereignty—ranging from geo-blocking to the proliferation of domestically owned digital platforms—in their everyday life. We address both discursive and routine dimensions, examining what people say about their national identity and the way it relates to their digital media use, as well as the way they use (and choose between) different digital platforms and devices. Our approach throws into sharp relief the tensions between the imagined placelessness of digital media promoted by the digital tech industry and embraced by many of our participants, and the increasingly nationalized reality of life in a world of platform nations. To put it differently, our study connects macro-level discussions on digital sovereignty and nationalism with the enactment and reproduction of national identities and routines on a micro-level. We emphasize that platform nations should be understood as lived environments rather than abstract architectures or symbolic representations, thus opening new paths to understanding how nationalism persists and is reconfigured through engagement with digital technologies.

SHORT BIO

César Jiménez-Martínez is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His research examines the mediation of nationhood, with a special focus on nation branding, digital nationalism, and protests at the nation-state level. He is author of *Nation Branding in the Americas: Contested Politics and Identities* (with Efe Sevin and Pablo Miño, Routledge 2025), and *Media and the Image of the Nation during Brazil's 2013 Protests* (Palgrave, 2020). He has received several awards, including the 2026 and 2023 ICA Award for Top Faculty Paper in Public Diplomacy, and the 2021 Anthony D. Smith Award in Nations and Nationalism (with Sabina Mihelj).

Hallucinating the nation: A comparative multi-modal analysis of genAI's visual regimes of representation

Delia Dumitrica (prepared together with Maria Avraamidou)

The increased reliance on genAI such as ChatGPT or Copilot to search and generate cultural content renews the urgency of understanding how such forms of mediation participate in ideological reproduction. While scholarship has examined race, class and gender biases in genAI output (Gengler, 2024), less attention has been paid to the nation (Goode, 2021). This matters all the more as far-right actors already use genAI to develop exclusionary and gendered representations of the nation (Sengul et al. 2026). This line of research, however, leaves aside more banal, everyday representations of the nation. We therefore take an exploratory approach to genAI's tacit visual regimes of representing "the nation."

Text-to-image genAIs rely on training datasets in which small image elements have been textually labeled. Generating new images thus starts from culturally shared assumptions and taken-for-granted social categorizations (Sobey, 2025). GenAI output is moreover a sociotechnical product: worldviews and biases are embedded in training datasets, and the output blends a seemingly technological generation process with user prompts. Approaching genAIs as political, sociotechnical agents (Hurley, 2024), we ask: What markers do genAIs reify as national symbols? What imagined features of the nation are drawn upon and perpetuated? And what is the ideological role of the sociotechnical dimension of these representations?

We examine 200–250 images generated by identical prompts across popular genAIs (e.g., ChatGPT, Stable Diffusion, Gemini, NightCafe) (Gengler, 2024; Hurley, 2024; Putland et al., 2025; Sobey, 2025). Combining prompts in local languages on historical accomplishments and national celebrations with requests to visualize families and landscapes, the dataset captures both explicit and banal representations of the nation. To compare "national" markers and features, we focus on two sets of neighboring Eastern European countries (set 1: Romania, Republic of Moldova, Hungary; set 2: Cyprus, Greece, Turkey). Marked by the enduring popularity of ethnocultural nationalism, interwoven histories with competing territorial claims, and shared cultural practices, these countries are well suited for comparison. The images and accompanying textual explanations are analyzed qualitatively, informed by multimodal discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023; Putland et al. 2025).

Preliminary results show that architecture, landscape, clothing, and cultural stereotypes mark everyday life as "national," whereas flags, history, scientific achievements, and folk traditions signify the nation. Cross-country and cross-genAI comparisons reveal a seemingly universal interchangeability of local contents, conveying the universality of the nation as a social category. The consistency with visual regimes of the nation in Western digital culture (Dumitrica & Frijns, 2025) points to discursive logics preferring "stylized and commodified images of nations, rather than realistic interpretations" (Kaneva, 2024, p. 68). Such ideological work, we argue, perpetuates post-national visions of nations as uncontested, beautified and depoliticized objects for aesthetic consumption.

SHORT BIO

Dr. Delia Dumitrica is an Associate Professor in Political Communication and Digital Activism at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research includes everyday and banal forms of nationalism, digital activism, and protest communication. She has published on these topics in journals such as *Nations & Nationalism*; *New Media & Society*; *Information, Communication & Society*; the *International Journal of Communication*, etc.

Gaming the Nation: Video Games as Possibility Spaces for National Identity Formation

Rachel van der Merwe

As part of my current project "Gaming the Nation," I am building a theoretical framework and methodological toolkit to support researchers studying video games as possibility spaces for national and cultural identity *formation*—not just national identity representation. This aspect of my project builds from the understanding that identity is dynamic and relational, not fixed. I investigate how games, which are interactive, simulative, and playful, allow possibility spaces (Bogost, 2008) within which identities can evolve and be experimented with. My (ambitious!) objective is to identify strategies for how researchers can recognize and study the *emergent* properties of identities in games—not just the residual and recognizable elements.

In this work, I argue that we have to begin by studying games not as singular texts but as textual assemblages that function seamlessly alongside what have been described as para or peritexts. For example, I consider how gameplay occurs in conjunction with Discord servers, wikis, and subreddits, and how collective and cultural identities form not in one of these locations but across all nodes. This indeed isn't actually that different, I argue, to how national identities have always formed through mediated social networks. For example, the idea of Britishness depended not only on novels like Austen's but also on mediated networks that connected reading publics. Nevertheless, digital games are a unique medium with unique implications. Interweaving many disparate game and identity studies scholarship, this research aims to give researchers better, integrated resources to study the dynamic aspects of both games and identity.

SHORT BIO

Rachel Lara van der Merwe is an assistant professor at the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen and a Research Fellow at the University of the Free State. Her research explores the intersection of media, national identity, and coloniality within South Africa. Her recent monograph, *We are not South African: Mediating National Identity in a Postcolonial and Post-Apartheid State* (Rutgers University Press, 2026), is a critique of national identity as a medium of coloniality. Rachel's current project, *Gaming the Nation*, is an investigation of the South African videogame industry and the role games play in facilitating national and cultural identities.

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