

# Publicity and the Political in the 20th Century

June 5-7, 2024

INSTITUTIONS – DISCOURSES – MEDIA



# Publicity and the Political in the Long 20th Century



International Conference  
Research Center Normative Orders  
Frankfurt am Main

June 5–7, 2024  
Goethe University

How does publicity shape and transform politics, cultural experience and governance in the Long 20th Century? How have the institutions and practices of publicity evolved through changing media environments, governmental forms and commodity worlds to configure the political in a broad and multi-sited way? This international conference has a twin focus on India, often celebrated as the largest democracy in the world and currently on the brink of a historic election, and on the generative impact of digital media in a global perspective. We study how key agents of publicity, ranging from advertisers to influencers, commercial artists to filmmakers and digital PR companies, and practices ranging from film, auditory and print propaganda to digital forensics and AI, cultivate desire, create trust and manage conflicts in complex societies in the long 20th century.

Conference Venue: Research Center Normative Orders, Goethe Universität Frankfurt, Max-Horkheimer-Straße 2, 60323 Frankfurt am Main, Room EG 01

Conference Organizers: Ravi Vasudevan (ICAS:MP, Sarai programme, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi), Ritika Kaushik (Research Training Program "Konfigurationen des Films", Goethe Universität Frankfurt), Vinzenz Hediger (professor of cinema studies, PI ConTrust/Normative Orders, Goethe Universität Frankfurt)

A cooperation of ICAS:MP, ConTrust, and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

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Conference coordinator: Alo Paistik (GU) with support from Sophie Moktadir.

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June 5, 2024

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6pm

## Conference opening: Ravi Vasudevan, Ritika Kaushik, Vinzenz Hediger

Opening Keynote and Reception

Kajri Jain (Toronto)

**HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GLOW: MEDIA ECOLOGY AND POLITICAL COSMOLOGY  
IN INDIA'S LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY**

In the wake of the largest ever national elections in world history, this talk asks what politics in India's Long Twentieth Century might tell us about the interface between media technologies and the choreographies of space that constitute embodied publics.

Kajri Jain is Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Toronto.

Chair: Ravi Vasudevan

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9:30–11am

## Panel 1: Advertising India: Publicity and the Nation State

Ravi Vasudevan (Delhi)

**THE SHORT INFORMATION FILM IN EDUCATION, PUBLICITY, ADVERTISING AND  
PROPAGANDA: INDIA C. 1940–1960**

This presentation explores short film use in the overlapping spheres of education, publicity, advertising and propaganda in India, c.1940–60, transiting from the colonial era to the epoch of the nation-state and Cold War.

Ravi Vasudevan is Co-Director of Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

William Mazzarella (Chicago)

**DECOLONIZING INDIAN ADVERTISING? NOT SO FAST!**

Can we re-cognize Indian advertising of the 1950s–1960s free of the retrospective distortions of the consumerist ideology that consign it to a flawed preamble to liberalization? Could this also, by the same token, help us to 'provincialize' the redemptive populist narrative with which the liberalizers justified mass consumerism as a decolonizing practice from the 1980s onward?

William Mazzarella is the Neukom Family Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago.

Chair: Vinzenz Hediger

11:30am–1pm

## Panel 2: Infrastructures and/of Citizenship

Ritika Kaushik (Frankfurt)

**"NOT BY QUICKIES": INFRASTRUCTURAL ENTANGLEMENTS BETWEEN STATE-SPONSORED PUBLICITY AND HINDI CINEMA DURING MOMENTS OF CONFLICT IN INDIA**

This talk examines state publicity films made as part of a campaign against violence at a time when the Indian state grappled with the prevailing violence and unrest in the country during the early 1970s. Ritika Kaushik is a postdoctoral researcher at the graduate research training group „Configurations of Film“ at Goethe University, Frankfurt.

Ying Qian (New York)

**CROSSING THE RIVER BY TOUCHING THE STONES: DOCUMENTARY AND THE UNFOLDING OF CHINA'S REFORM AND OPENING**

This talk discusses media's constitutive role in the unfolding of China's contested reform process from the Cultural Revolution to the post-Mao era, as the society left old hegemonies but soon to enter new ones. Ying Qian is an associate professor in Chinese Cinema and Media at the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University.

Chair: Pallavi Paul

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1pm–2pm

## Lunch break with project presentation

Sagorika Singha (Delhi/Frankfurt)

**ON ASSAMESE YOUTUBERS**

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2pm–3:30pm

## Keynote 2

Lucie Česálková (Prague)

**TRUST THROUGH DAMAGE. CAR CRASH TESTS AND ŠKODA'S SAFETY PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN**

In 1972, the well-known Czech car manufacturer Škoda established its car crash laboratory and started safety testing of its vehicles. I will discuss the different layers of the contradictory image of the car crash test as part of the company's publicity based on the dynamic between destruction, safety, and trust.

Lucie Česálková is Associate Professor in the Department of Film Studies, Charles University.

Chair: Yvonne Zimmermann

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4pm–5:30pm

## Panel 3: Distributing Publicity: Creating Outreach in Colonial and Postcolonial India

Vebhuti Duggal

### **PUBLICITY IN LATE COLONIAL INDIA: AURAL INFRASTRUCTURES, LISTENING AND THE SENSORY**

This talk focuses on radios and loudspeakers as aural infrastructures of publicity in the late colonial period and discusses how listening emerges, capaciously, as distributed, and what this implies for the colonial subject.

Vebhuti Duggal teaches Film Studies at the School of Culture and Creative Expressions, Dr BR Ambedkar University Delhi.

Ravikant (Delhi)

### **PRINT AS PUBLICITY INTERFACE FOR BROADCASTING IN SOUTH ASIA**

Being an older medium that was already stable, tangible and ownable, print naturally exudes trust in users and consumers of non-print media as well. The presentation will look at diverse ways in which radio establishment and listeners used print space as an extension for itself.

Dr. Ravikant is Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

Chair: Sagorika Singha

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## Evening event, Kino im Filmmuseum, Schaumainkai 41

### **Screening at 6pm**

MEGHE DHAKA TARA (THE CLOUD-CAPPED STAR), Ritwik Ghatak, India 1960, 127 min.

### **Lecture at 8pm**

Ruchir Joshi (Kolkata)

### **TWO VIEWS OF THE CITY: RAY AND GHATAK**

### **Screening at 9pm**

MAHANAGAR (THE BIG CITY), Satyajit Ray, India 1963, 128 min.

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9:30am–11am

## Panel 4: Governance through film, global to local: the cases of the US and East Pakistan

Mark J. Williams (Hanover)

**LEGACIES OF USIA MOVING IMAGES THROUGH INTERNATIONAL LENSES:  
NEH COLLABORATIVE DH STUDIES VIA THE MEDIA ECOLOGY PROJECT**

This presentation will introduce The Media Ecology Project (MEP) at Dartmouth and focuses on the moving image history of the US Information Agency, which internationally produced or distributed over 20,000 films of information and persuasion during the Cold War: a form of mediated diplomacy.

Mark Williams is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at Dartmouth College.

Lotte Hoek (Edinburgh)

**A BATTLE AT THE FISH MARKET: PUBLICITY ORGANISERS AND FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION AT THE EAST PAKISTAN PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT**

This paper explores the ways in which international aesthetic exchanges among intellectuals and artists were refracted by the practical challenges and the political imperatives of decolonisation and the Cold War in the Public Relations department of the government of East Pakistan.

Lotte Hoek is professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Edinburgh.

Chair: Florian Hoof

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11:30am–1pm

## Panel 5: Influencer Politics

Osakue Omoera (Otuoke)

**INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PUBLICITY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PETER OBI IN  
THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA**

This talk focuses on the influence of social media publicity on the performance of Peter Obi in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The voters' choice of Peter Obi was to a large extent influenced by his use of social media, which has significant implications for Nigerian presidential politics going forward.

Osakue Stevenson Omoera, PhD, is Chair in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Marc Tuters (Amsterdam)

**AMBIENT PROPAGANDA ON PRO-KREMLIN "WARTOK": FROM UNIDIRECTIONAL  
INFLUENCE TO MULTIDIRECTIONAL IMITATION**

How does the concept of propaganda, with its roots in twentieth-century broadcast media, adapt to the more decentralised environments of twenty-first-century social media? To address this question, the talk considers the phenomenon of (apparently grassroots) Kremlin-supporting TikTokers during the first days after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Marc Tuters is a senior lecturer in the New Media and Digital Culture Division of Media Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam.

Chair: Jana Zündel

→ June 7

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1pm–2pm

## **lunch break with project presentation**

Kanika Makhija (Amsterdam)  
**THE COMMERCIAL ARTISTS GUILD OF INDIA**

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2pm–3:30pm

## **Panel 6: Generating the Digital Public Sphere**

Laliv Melamed (Groningen/Frankfurt)  
**IS EVIDENCE A STATE INSTITUTION? FORENSICS/COUNTER FORENSICS AND THE ACT OF REPUDIATION**

This talk focuses on counter forensics as a means to counter state produced evidence by constituting alternative modes of investigation. It goes back to some of Walter Lipmann's basic ideas about the notion of public information in order to annotate some of the loopholes in the current public discourse around evidence and counter evidence.

Laliv Melamed is an Assistant Professor at the department of Art, Culture and Media at Groningen University.

Felix Simon (Oxford)  
**AI, NEWS, AND THE DYNAMICS OF CONTROL IN THE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM**

This talk will explore the impact of artificial intelligence on the dynamics of control within the media ecosystem. Through a critical analysis of both historical trends and recent developments around AI and news, it discusses the shift from traditional publishers to tech giants in shaping the structural conditions of the public arena.

Felix Simon, PhD, is a communication researcher at the University of Oxford.

Chair: Usaku Wammanda

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4pm–5:30pm

## **Panel 7: Extending the Surveillance State**

Florian Hoof (Frankfurt)  
**FROM CYBERSECURITY TO CYBERAWARENESS: SHIFTING DISCOURSES OF DIGITAL TRUSTWORTHINESS IN THE LONG 20TH CENTURY.**

This talk focuses on shifts in the public discourse on cybersecurity. It contrasts concepts of IT security that developed in the second half of the 20th century with contemporary cyberawareness strategies.

Florian Hoof is a Research Associate at the research center Normative Orders, and Associate Lecturer in Film and Media Studies, both at Goethe University Frankfurt.

Anirban Baishya (Madison)  
**INFRASTRUCTURAL CITIZENSHIP: COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY IN THE PLATFORM STATE**

Focusing on the Digital India Initiative this talk examines emergent forms of infrastructural citizenship that demands, more and more, the embedding of private data within the “public” (and potentially surveillant) machinery of the platform state.

Anirban Baishya is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Chair: Ritika Kaushik

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5:30pm–6pm

## Concluding responses:

Yvonne Zimmermann (Marburg)

Yvonne Zimmermann is Professor of Media Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany).

Pallavi Paul (Berlin/Delhi)

Pallavi Paul is an artist, filmmaker and film theorist based in Delhi and Berlin and a ConTrust research fellow in the summer term of 2024.

