

SFSIA 2026 Berlin | In the Fog of the Digital (Berlin, 29 Jun–4 Jul 26)

KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Jun 29–Jul 4, 2026

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Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art (SFSIA) 2026 Berlin | In the Fog of the Digital: AI and Neural-Digital Entanglement in Cognitive Capitalism .

“As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. . . . Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.” – Hito Steyerl, “In Free Fall” (2011)

For its sixteenth iteration (and fifth in Berlin), Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art 2026, “In the Fog of the Digital: AI and the Neural-Digital Entanglement in Cognitive Capitalism,” will focus on the effects of the acceleration of digital technologies (especially AI) on the process of individuation of the contemporary subject and its repercussions for thought and understanding, as well as artistic and aesthetic countermoves.

The phrase “fog of the digital” is reminiscent of the earlier concept of the “fog of war” (generally attributed to the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz), used to describe the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the theater of war. The term highlights the difficulty of gathering accurate and timely information in dynamic, unpredictable, and unstable immersive environments, and points to the visually obscuring effects of billowing clouds of smoke and the associated cacophony of discordant sounds emanating from surrounding bombardment, all of which affect the individual soldier’s corporal senses and clarity of thought.

Today, this concept serves as an apt metaphor to describe the fog of the digital (or digital fog) that results from the explosive transformation of industrial capitalism into cognitive capitalism, in which the proletariat physically working on the assembly line has been transformed into the cognitariat working in front of screens producing data. According to Byung-Chul Han in *Psychopolitics* (2017), we have become solitary, auto-exploiting laborers of our own enterprises, in which the individual becomes both master and slave at once. Bernard Stiegler similarly points to another insidious consequence of the externalization and outsourcing of cognitive abilities to artificial technics within digital immersion: “proletarianization – through which the hyperindustrial age becomes the era of systemic stupidity.”

The recent advent of Large Language Models has accentuated this situation. As curator Antonio

Somaini states in *The World Through AI (2025)*: “As AI models become more and more pervasive, and as internet contents keep growing exponentially, latent spaces become a way of ordering, processing, and activating a hypertrophic accumulation of cultural memory that has become unmanageable and disorienting.” The fog of the digital is further accentuated by information overload, fake news and deepfakes, the attention (and inattention) economy, deep surveillance, and the production of new forms of automation that have the potential to replace human agency entirely. As we enter this late phase of cognitive capitalism, the brain and its neural commons – its neural plasticity have become the focus of capitalist adventurism and exploitation. Under the banner of techno-optimism, a cornucopia of artificial intelligence (AI) and brain-computer technologies have produced neural-digital entanglements in the wild west of contemporary neoliberalism.

It is no coincidence that the structure of neural networks forms the basis for modeling deep-learning artificial neural networks. Such is the case with convolutional neural networks used in facial recognition, modeled on the ventral stream, or occipitotemporal pathway, responsible for object recognition. More ominous still are reports emerging in academic contexts. A recent article, “Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt When Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Tasks,” by Nathalie Kosmyna and others, shows how using large language models (LLMs) for essay writing results in cognitive offloading through excessive reliance on AI-driven solutions, potentially challenging our capacity to think freely and autonomously.

“In the Fog of the Digital” explores the aesthetic, philosophical, political, and social implications of our brave new world. Together, we seek to identify possibilities for new forms of emancipation within this minefield of psycho-neural despotism.

Faculty

Nora Al-Badri, Ruth Anderwald + Leonhard Grond, Kader Attia, David W. Bates, Grégory Chatonsky, Sergio Edelsztein, Claire Fontaine, Agnieszka Kurant, Liz Magic Laser, Yuk Hui, Anna Longo, David Joselit, Matteo Pasquinelli, Martha Schwendener, and Antonio Somaini.

Applications

Applications for SFSIA 2026 Berlin are open to students, practitioners and scholars from the fields of art (including video, photography, installation and multimedia), art history, science and technology studies, philosophy, design, architecture, critical theory, cultural studies, film and media studies, and beyond. Please see our application (<https://sfsia.art/2026-berlin/2026-berlin-application/>) for more information.

About SFSIA

Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art (SFSIA) is a nomadic, intensive summer academy with shifting programs in contemporary critical theory that stresses an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between art and politics. SFSIA originated in Saas-Fee, Switzerland in 2015 and then migrated to Berlin, Germany where it was hosted by Import Projects (2016) and Spike (2017-2019). Additional programs have been hosted by Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles; Performance Space New York, The Brooklyn Rail, Residency Unlimited, Creative Time HQ and Montez Press Radio in New York City; sonsbeek2024 in Arnhem, The Netherlands; and Maison Suger, Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’homme, Centre des Récollets, and Master in Arts & Vision (MAVI) of Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University in Paris. SFSIA was founded and is directed by Warren Neidich. Sarrita Hunn is the assistant director.

ArtHist.net

Please see our website (<https://sfsia.art>) or contact info@sfsia.art for more information.

Reference:

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