

# **Contre\Enquête**

Political and Aesthetic Forms of  
Investigation — Historical and  
Contemporary Perspectives

## **Workshop**

Institute for Social Research

**Frankfurt am Main**

**May 15—16**

**2025**

3rd meeting of the DFG research  
network “Global Cultures of Enquête.  
Towards a Praxeology of Surveying  
(17th—21st Century)” in cooperation  
with the research project “Die Kunst  
der Gegenuntersuchung” at the  
Institute for Social Research,  
Frankfurt am Main.

The enquête has a long history as an instrument of political and moral rule, dating back to antiquity. In Europe, it is closely linked to the emergence of modern nation states and the attempt to create novel systems of regulatory control over processes of economic and social transformation. At the beginning of the 19th century, the enquête became a symbol of a new form of empirical knowledge production in the course of which society emerged as an independent, autonomous and essentially contested reality.

Using the concept of *contre*\enquête the workshop puts its focus on a particular lineage of antagonistic empirical knowledge practices that persist until the present day. It looks at projects of oppositional knowledge practices not just as mere reactions or somehow secondary forms of knowledge, but also as independent epistemic traditions and political initiatives. The framework of *contre*\enquête sheds light on the plural and antagonistic politics of description and the connection between knowledge struggles of social movements and the functions of modern statehood. While there is already a large body of research on the history of state enquiries, the historical as well as political dimension of the knowledge practice of social movements is only beginning to be explored.

Focusing on practices of counter\investigations the workshop also explores the complex relationship between political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of social knowledge production. In addition to surveys and investigations carried out by parliaments, courts or the police, we will look at investigative techniques

and procedures used by political actors, journalists and artists — who thus produce new evidence, which can in turn be used in legal struggles against state actors. However, it remains to be shown for specific historical contexts in what way politics of investigation and counter-investigation oppose or react to each other. If the history of empiricism is politically contested, shaped by antagonistic normativities and thus structured hegemonically, how do different descriptions of reality also correspond with different approaches to politics, may they be transformative or not. If enquête and *contre*\enquête cannot be grasped in terms of “from above” and “from below” or “paternalistic”, “repressive”, “critical” or “emancipatory” as such, how do we understand them as a historically dynamic relationship that encompasses different forms of systematization and organization of knowledge, “counter-knowledge”, and knowledge claims, as well as diverse aesthetic interventions? In the workshop, we wish to discuss this interplay of practices of inquiry, representation and intervention not only as a constitutive dimension of the production of social knowledge — and, not least, of persuasive knowledge — but also as a fundamental element of the practice of investigation itself.

**Thursday, May 15**

13:00—13:30:

**Welcome and Reception**

13:30—14:00:

Felix Trautmann (Frankfurt) & Martin Herrnstadt (Bremen):

**Introduction**

14:00—15:00:

Laure Piguet (Berlin/Fribourg): **“Enquête” or “Contre-enquête”? The quantitative surveys of Parisian workers in the 1840s**

15:00—16:00:

Christiane Schwab (München): **From Caricature to Reformist Reportage: The Evolution of Social Observation in the Periodical Press, 1820—1870**

Chair: Martin Herrnstadt (Bremen)

16:30—17:30:

Franziska Wildt (Frankfurt/Offenbach): **Peter Weiss and the Aesthetics of Counterinvestigation**

17:30—18:30:

Émeline Fourment (Rouen/Konstanz): **Between counter-expertise and French medical knowledge: vacuum aspiration and the movement against Paragraph 218 in West Germany (1973—1976)**

Chair: Léa Renard (Heidelberg)

18:45—19:45:

Maria Sitte (Hamburg/Frankfurt): **The Ambivalent Role of Visual Credibility: Forensic Architecture and the Concept of “Counter Forensics”**

Chair: Franziska Wildt (Frankfurt/Offenbach)

**Friday, May 16**

09:00—10:30:

**Network Session**

Dirk Braunstein (Frankfurt):

**Archives of Investigation. Revisiting the Political Research Practice of the early Frankfurt School**

Chair: Martin Herrnstadt (Bremen)

10:30—12:00:

**Network Meeting**

13:00—14:30:

Aluizio Marino (InfoCitizen, Antwerp), Catharina Dietrich (Data Politics, Frankfurt) Andreas Brück (K-Lab Berlin), Tobias Krauch (Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt), and Timotheus Kartmann (DAM/Uni Frankfurt):

**Urban Counter-Inquiries: Aesthetics and Politics of Investigation in the City**

Chair: Janine Hagemeister (Data Politics, Uni Frankfurt)

14:45—16:15

Christian Hammermann (Hamburg), NSU-Watch (tbc) and Max Pichl (Wiesbaden):

**Who investigates the investigators? The Case of Parliamentary Inquiries into the Right-Wing Terror of the NSU**

Chair: Felix Trautmann (Frankfurt)

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### **Registration and Practical Information**

Please register until May 10 by email:  
[info@enquete-cultures.org](mailto:info@enquete-cultures.org)

An online participation is also possible.

### **For further information on the workshop:**

[www.enquete-cultures.org](http://www.enquete-cultures.org)  
[www.ifs.uni-frankfurt.de/  
aktuell.html](http://www.ifs.uni-frankfurt.de/aktuell.html)

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