

Call for Papers: Imagining Control

1st Special Issue (1/2027)

Submission deadlines:

Article: December 31, 2026

Abstract (optional): September 30, 2026

While the *online* journal *Medien der Kontrolle* | *Media of Control** is intended as a constant seismograph for observing and reflecting on the interplay between control or loss of control and media use in current as well as historical and culturally diverse contexts, we aim to look toward the future in this first special issue. What may control look like at the end of the 21st century? How and by means of which media will it operate? What visions of control may shape it? We may consider that the present is more easily recognized, understood, and even changed by imagining the future. With an eye toward interplays of power structure and media use, this issue will reflect on shifts in surveillance within the broad field of observation, manifestations of propaganda and populism within the broad field of governance and direction, and forms of censorship and curation within the broad field of communicative intervention.

Perhaps we may assume that control will continue to spread and affect society as a whole (across lifestyles, labour, leisure, health, etc.). Following Deleuze's diagnosis of the expansion of control, one assumption may be that in the second half of the 21st century, control will operate even more ubiquitously, networked, and invisibly. Media would then continue to act as agents of control, with so-called autonomous algorithms and technologies playing an ever more dominant role. It is likely that sensor technology will pervade even the smallest technological components to collect data continuously. It is to be expected that data processing will be fundamentally supported by AI and will be distributed between centers and on-site partitions (i.e., as *edge* technology). And we may anticipate the development of parallel security and

encryption ecosystems for data. Intelligent systems will potentially recognize and even act to prevent problems before they arise.

From a perspective of media culture, it is also important to consider how future forms of media control may depend not only on technological devices but also on conventions and practices: What changes or constants in social structures, what post-digital conditions of subjectivation and collectivization may shape media control and control media in the late 21st century? Hopes and fears center, among other things, on transformations in public communication, on new boundaries to be drawn between human and technical actors, and on the precarious future of our political frameworks.

Conversely, one may also imagine utopias and counter-imaginings of a control-free space or at least of control-free 'islands.' Enclaves for autonomous communities, self-sufficient groups, variations on anarchy, and a departure from technologies are conceivable. They could also tie in with such hopes for egalitarian, emancipatory impacts of digital media technologies as dominated the discourse even a decade ago, just as they may shape new and innovative desires for, or calls to, action. This issue will also aim to explore aesthetic forms of resistance, as well as hybrid forms of control and control avoidance across conceivable scenarios.

Contributions may address these questions and topics, but are by no means limited to the following:

- What transformations for current concepts of surveillance, censorship, and propaganda may be imagined in possible futures?
- Can a distinction between a private and a public sphere be maintained in a future shaped by control, algorithmization, and sensor technology?
- Will there continue to be a state or higher-level controlling authority, or who else may appropriate responsibility for errors and abuse across communication systems?
- Will future control develop differently across cultures and political economies, depending not least on their post-authoritarian or colonial past?
- What utopian and dystopian visions of control in comics, film, photography, games, or other media do we imagine?
- How may we outline new models and alternative concepts to describe exercises of power?
- What emancipatory aspects of control may appear? For instance, what new shapes might functions of public control exerted by mass media as a 'fourth estate' take in the future?
- What scenarios may address relationships between sustainability and control (e.g., a sensor-controlled system that minimizes environmental impact)?
- Will control as a *tool* enforce or democratize issues of gender and discrimination, or contribute to inclusions or exclusions?
- What geopolitical and spatial aspects may shift in relevance? What new kinds of spaces will be occupied by and subjected to new planetary forms of control?
- What new mechanisms of control might rise in response to renationalization and reterritorialization?
- Are media techniques and technologies changing shifting respective roles in a post-digital condition in which digitality loses distinctive power but rather pervades potential dimensions of all communicative acts?
- As ubiquitous technology supports communication (including the implementation and use of generative AI), communication will turn generally traceable. But who has access to the resulting data archives, and how is such access distributed? Questions of availability and distribution must receive far more generalized consideration than they have before.

We believe that any substantial reflection on future media of control will require broad, interdisciplinary, and critical discussion. We invite contributions from the fields of cultural studies and the humanities as well as other related disciplines including political science, economics, social sciences, information science, and law, that are interested in formulating interdisciplinary connections while also addressing a broad interested public. We seek theoretical, historical, and aesthetic perspectives that establish spaces for imagination.

Submissions will undergo an internal and external peer review. Full-length articles (generally up to 70,000 characters or shorter) may be submitted by December 30, 2026; please feel free to send an optional short abstract for a possible contribution up front to clarify suitability with the editorial team by September 30, 2026. *Medien der Kontrolle* | *Media of Control* publishes contributions in German or English.

Please submit your contribution or optional abstract to mdk-team@uni-koeln.de, ensuring compliance with the style guide (<https://journals.ub.uni-koeln.de/index.php/mk/richtlinien>).

The special issue is edited by Stephan Packard and Silke Roesler-Keilholz.