

The Counter-University. Histories, Movements, and Ambitions

International Conference

University of Copenhagen, February 12–14, 2025

Creating autonomous and self-organised 'counter-universities' is a powerful tool for developing critique of higher education and imagining potentially more fulfilling approaches to knowledge production. Historically, 'counter universities' gained popularity with student protests against the Vietnam War and for 'free speech' in the US in the mid-1960s. The transnational protest events of the late 1960s and the emerging alternative culture of the 1970s also made the declaration of 'free', 'critical', 'political' or 'autonomous' universities common practice in many Western European countries.

Since then, social movements and educational activists have declared counter-universities to cover a wide range of issues and ambitions. These have encompassed anti-capitalist, socialist, green and ecological initiatives, feminist projects as well as gay and queer initiatives. In the 1970s and 1980s, dissident groups in many Eastern European countries also organised clandestine 'flying universities' to explore educational alternatives to state-controlled higher education. To this day, counter-universities continue to play an important role in opening up spaces for dissent and opposition, and in creating spaces for experimenting with new subjects and learning methods, both in democratic countries and in dictatorial regimes.

Bringing together scholars from history, art (history), cultural studies, sociology and other disciplines interested in the history and present of the counter-university, this conference serves to share research and perspectives on this significant but under-researched transnational phenomenon.

The conference takes place at University of Copenhagen's Søndre Campus (= Metro Station Islands Brygge), Building/Room 4A.1.68. All are welcome to participate for individual panels or the whole conference. Please register by February 5, 2025, to assure there is enough space and plenty of coffee, by sending an e-mail to susanneschregel@hum.ku.dk.

Programme

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

14.00–14.30 Susanne Schregel, Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen), *Welcome and Introduction: The Counter-University. Histories, Movements, and Ambitions*

Forms and Practices, I: Imagining and Building the Counter-University (Chair: Friedrich Cain, Vienna)

14.30–15.15 Tobias Dias (Aarhus), *The Inside is the Outside: The Political Aesthetics of Artist-led Universities*

15.15–16.00 Nadiia Chervinska (Vienna), *Counter-Universities in Times of Crisis: A Case Study of the Invisible University for Ukraine*

Histories of the Counter-University, I: The 1960s and early 1970s (Chair Nikolaj Bjerregaard Olesen, Copenhagen)

16.30–17.15 Benjamin Serby (Garden City, NY), *Gay Liberation and the Free University Movement in the United States, 1965–1974*

17.15–18.00 Lukas Biehler (Duisburg-Essen), *Kritische Universität Berlin 1967/68: Democratising Society through Democratising University?*

Thursday, February 13, 2025

Forms and Practices, II: The 1960s and early 1970s (Chair: Kasper Opstrup Frederiksen, Copenhagen)

9.30–10.15 Lara Track (Heidelberg), *Teach-Ins in the Context of the Counter-University. The Ann Arbor Teach-In of 1965*

10.15–11.00 Sina Brückner-Amin (Karlsruhe), *Radicalism's Frontier: UC Irvine, The Farm, and the Quest for Institutionalised Dissidence*

11.00–11.45 Barbara Hof, Loic Jeanson (Lausanne), *Parallel Universes at the University: Science and the Controversy over the Vietnam War*

Histories of the Counter-University, II: Art / Histories (Chair: Tobias de Fønss Wung-Sung, Copenhagen)

13.00–13.45 Eszter Lázár (Budapest), *Student Affairs During Art School Occupations (London 1968/Hungary 1990)*

13.45–14.30 Susanne Schregel (Copenhagen), *The "Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research" (FIU). Or: Beuys in Context*

14.30–15.15 Deborah Laks (Paris), *Learning with Christian Boltanski*

Histories of the Counter-University, III: The 1970s and 1980s (Chair: Jes Fabricius Møller, Copenhagen)

15.30–16.15 Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield (Prague), *Secret Universities under Communism as Counter-Institutions*

16.15–17.00 Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen), *Against Theory. Experiencing the World in Danish and West German Travelling Universities to Africa and Asia, 1969–1985*

Friday, February 14, 2025

Forms and Practices, III: Ecology and Space-Building Between the 1960s and Today (Chair: Amy Hart, Davis)

9.00–9.45 Gregor Kanitz, David Sittler (Düsseldorf), *Bio-Diversity of the Institution*

9.45–10.30 Sarah Pogoda (Bangor, Wales), *Treesense Experimental School – Treefysgol or Trivial?*

10.30–11.15 Gerko Egert (Bochum), *Building Learning Spaces – Learning Building Spaces*

Counter-Universities Today: Social Conflicts of the Present (Chairs: Susanne Schregel and Detlef Siegfried, Copenhagen)

11.30–12.15 Olga Schubert (Vienna), *Monstrous Complicities – Self Organized Anti-Academies in the Arts around 2000*

12.15–13.00 Ton Matton (Rotterdam), *the potemkin academy lecturetour*

14.00–14.45 Ella Rossman (London), Jan Surman (Prague), *Antiuniversity Moscow – Possibilities of Innovation under Putinism*

14.45–15.30 *Final Discussion and Conclusion*

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