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Reclaiming the Interface Lab Open Call Led by Olia Lialina

Application deadline: June 7, 2026 (23:59 CEST)

transmediale 2027 invites applications for the Lattice Labs, a series of experimental working groups dedicated to rethinking and testing alternatives to technological monocultures of extraction and surveillance. Building towards the festival, the Lattice Labs introduce a process-based approach to collective learning and knowledge dissemination.

Each Lab is formed by about five participants and guided by an experienced artist or technologist. Together, participants develop a project that is presented and activated through public events during the festival week in Berlin.

Lab description

This lab proposes an intervention into the ongoing dissolution of the interface. This process is neither new nor inevitable, yet with the rise of AI-driven modes of interaction it has reached a critical threshold. Interfaces are increasingly rendered invisible, displaced by conversational systems that obscure their own structure while shaping user behavior. The rise of the "agentic web" undermines the idea that the WWW can belong to the people who make it.

The lab frames the interface not as a surface, but as a frontier: a site where users exercise agency, negotiate meaning, and encounter the limits of systems. Its disappearance is therefore not only aesthetic, but political. When interfaces dissolve, so does the user's awareness of how systems operate, shifting us from active participants to passive consumers.

Through historical inquiry and speculative making, the lab revisits the interface as a staged performance, from early graphical systems to conversational paradigms. Participants will critically examine how invisibility functions as control and explore alternatives that resist the reduction of interaction to mere "requests". The lab invites the development of prototypes, gestures, and fictions that reclaim the interface as a space of imagination, negotiation, and agency in relation to artificial systems.

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Research question

How can interfaces be reclaimed as spaces of agency, negotiation, and critical awareness in the age of AI-driven conversational systems?

Goals

- / to uncover the interface as a historical and performative construct, making visible its role in shaping user agency;
- / to educate the audience (and participants) about the notion and the history of the interface, the history of Conversational Users Interfaces, and interface as a staged performance;
- / to mentally step back from half a century of GUI, 30 years of "search field" and 3 years of "AI mode" and imagine the alternatives;
- / to resist redesign of the WWW into a pick up point;
- / to resist anthropomorphism and animism as obfuscating mechanisms;
- / to imagine and prototype alternative modes of interaction beyond the paradigm of the request;
- / to make interface prototypes that would give human users agency in conversation with the "artificial";
- / to fight for UNDO, as a concept and a button.

Candidates

The lab seeks HCI researchers, artists, activists, and developers who are drawn to looking at, rather than through, the interface. It welcomes performance makers and playwrights interested in scripting machine behaviour and staging artificial intelligence. Ideal candidates have an existing critical or creative engagement with digital systems and are motivated to question dominant interaction paradigms through practice, experimentation, and collaboration.

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Technologies involved

The technological scope of the lab remains deliberately open. The lab extends into broader fields of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Human Robot Interaction (HRI), with a special emphasis on Conversational Interfaces (CUI) and the WWW as a medium and the interface.

Participants may work across formats and media, including web-based projects, conversational systems, installations, performances, theatre, manifestos, and essays. The lab embraces both existing infrastructures and speculative constructions, treating technology not as a fixed toolset but as a field to be reconfigured, misused, and reimagined.

What to expect

After the first meeting in mid-July, which will be used to introduce ourselves, read, and discuss, we will move into biweekly meetings until mid-September. During this period, we should formulate the theses we are communicating, both as a group and individually. The medium(s), tools, and genres should also be defined by then.

From October onward, production work will begin, accompanied by weekly meetings for reporting, discussion, and documentation.

Location

Fully remote, with presence in Berlin during the festival (January 26 – February 1, 2027).

Support & participation conditions

/ transmediale covers travel costs for each participant to attend the festival in Berlin. Train travel is prioritised where possible; otherwise, round-trip economy flights will be provided.

/ Accommodation is provided for the duration of the festival.

/ Travel and accommodation arrangements are coordinated by transmediale.

/ transmediale supports visa applications by providing letters of invitation.

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Participant responsibilities

- / Participate in all meetings.
- / Commit to develop a collective project.
- / Availability to travel to Berlin during the festival (26–31 January 2027).

Leads

Olia Lialina is among the best-known participants in the 1990s net.art scene – an early-days, network-based art pioneer. Her early work had a great impact on recognizing the Internet as a medium for artistic expression and storytelling. This century, her continuous and close attention to user culture, “net.language” and no-interface paradigm, has made her an important voice in new media, post-digital studies and HCI. She is cofounder and keeper of One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age archive, author of Digital Folklore (2009) and Turing Complete User (2021). Since 1999 she is a professor for art and design online at Merz Akademie in Stuttgart, Germany.

How to apply

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/ Applications are only accepted via [transmediale's submission form](#). The applicants' information will be stored only on our own servers in Berlin.

/ Only one application per candidate across all labs will be accepted.

/ No collective applications.

/ Authenticity matters more than perfection, please use your own voice.

/ Results will be announced in June.

/ For further questions, please contact [submit\[at\]transmediale.de](mailto:submit@transmediale.de)