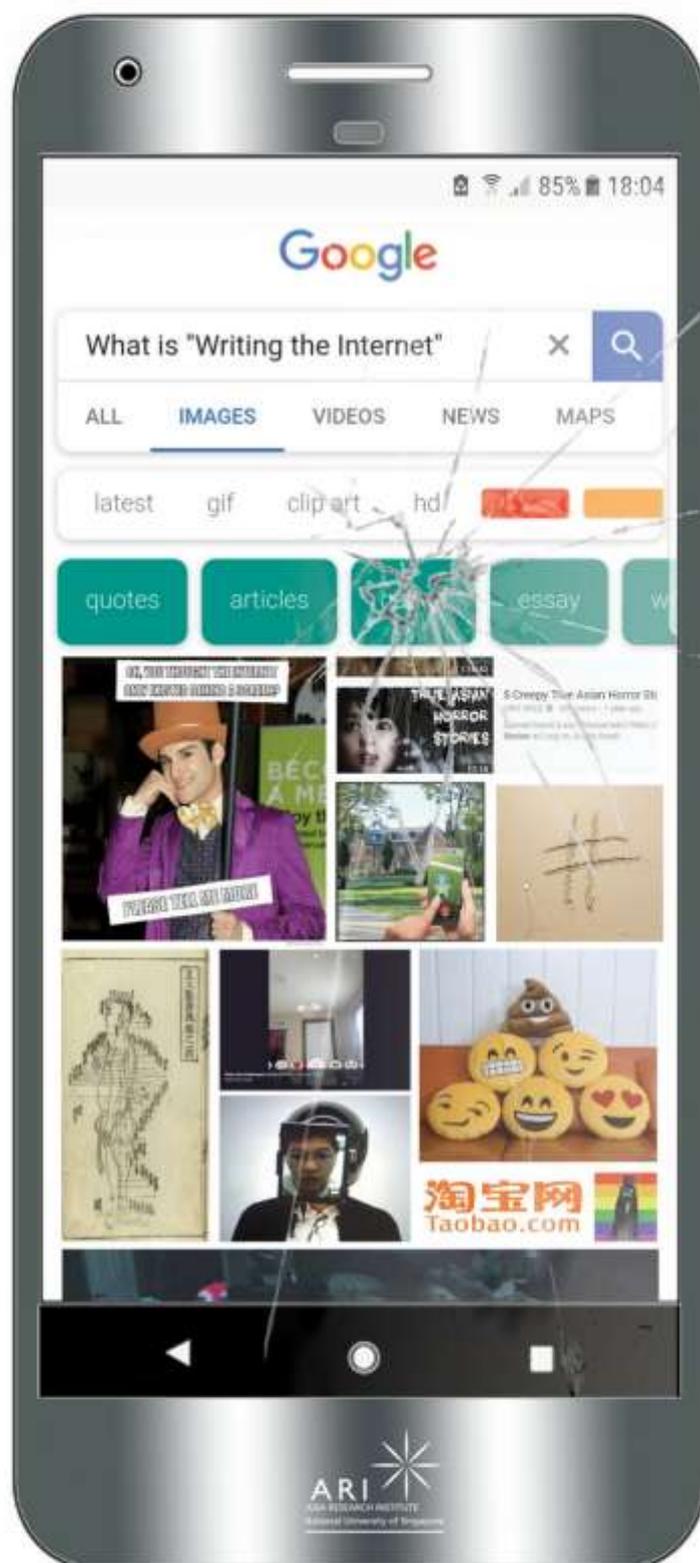


# WRITING THE INTERNET: INTERNET LORE IN ASIA

ORGANISED BY  
ASIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE,  
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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

## 8-9 MAR 2018

ARI SEMINAR ROOM  
AS8 #04-04  
10 KENT RIDGE CRESCENT  
SINGAPORE 119260



[HTTPS://ARI.NUS.EDU.SG](https://ari.nus.edu.sg)

*Organised by Asia Research Institute, supported by the Humanities and Social Sciences Seed Fund, National University of Singapore (NUS).*

This workshop brings together scholars, artists, and storytellers to critique in Asia and globally what it means to *write* the Internet. This metaphor could be interpreted in at least the following ways:

1. What forms of writing make up the “front end” of the internet? How do different internet communities write themselves and their own histories, mythologies, and lore? How are stories remediated and reinvented online and what new forms of writing emerge through this process?
2. What forms of writing make up the “back end” of the internet? How do programming languages, algorithms, technological infrastructure, protocols, and so on, shape internet communities?
3. What does it mean for us, as scholars, to write the internet? What (new) methodologies are needed to do scholarship online and about the Internet? How should we communicate this scholarship to others, given new methods of hosting and sharing information?

We take “digital folklore” and “Internet lore” to be key analytical terms in answering these questions. The term “lore”, in the digital realm, is used to refer to a (quasi-) fantastical background created by a user(s) (often syncretic and compiled from extant or re-purposed legend) or the attempt to create a ‘real’ history (Krzywinska, 2008). Internet lore is often more traceable than other forms of lore, in that records and caches of origin stories may still exist on the web. At the same time, it may be explicitly acknowledged to be artificial and recently invented, and even embraced as such.

The workshop proposes to challenge three assumptions about Internet lore:

- i. That there is a single, global, monolingual (English) Internet that acts as a homogenizing technology, always, or mostly, eradicating difference;
- ii. That written work on the Internet merely transposes or digitizes offline genres rather than recreating written forms and creating new genres of writing; and
- iii. That the connections between writing and the Internet end at the user interface. That they do not extend, for example, into the languages underpinning websites or complex competitive algorithms and automated systems.

### Workshop Convenors

**Dr Eric Kerr**, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

**Dr Connor Graham**, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

### Exhibition

Co-curator | **Dr Eric Kerr**, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

Co-curator and Dramaturge | **Dr Nancy Mauro-Flude**, Department of Communications and New Media, NUS

### Research Assistant and Cover Design

**Aieshah Arif**, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

## WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop adopts an exploratory format with the dual aim of refining an agenda for research on internet lore, including key research topics and questions, and developing a network of researchers in internet studies in Singapore and globally. Panel presentations will be short 5-minute ‘provocations’ aimed at establishing a thematically open and intellectually focused framework.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPEAKERS

Each speaker submits in advance a concise position or ‘provocation’ paper that presents or contextualizes a viewpoint in response to some aspect(s) of the workshop description above. The provocation papers are circulated in advance and will be used as a starting point for discussion. Speakers’ presentations will be approximately 5 minutes and should aim to identify and frame key questions or opportunities for discussion. All participants are expected to read all provocation papers in advance and to come prepared with questions, comments, and feedback. The primary purpose of this is to kickstart a more advanced discussion.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESPONDENTS

The task of respondents is to find connecting themes between papers and to articulate a few key questions, not necessarily related to individual papers or to all. Responses should be 5-10 minutes. Respondents will also act as chairs for the session.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING FORUMS

This section of the workshop is dedicated to collaborative reflection and to formulate new perspectives on lore and digital technology and what it means to “write the internet.” The two writing forums are designed to create space for sharing of thoughts and perspectives. Be prepared to share your ideas through writing sessions and discussions but do not be surprised if, in the meanwhile, you find yourself getting trolled, engaged in a flamewar, or haunted by the omnipresent!

The writings forums will involve smaller working groups formed out of the workshop panels. Panels with few participants may want to collaborate with other groups. In the first forum, groups will respond to prompts put forward by the workshop organizers (see below). In the second, groups choose their own focus to reflect on discussions, themes, and questions that have emerged over the course of the workshop.

A list of readings will be shared digitally prior to the event. These have been compiled by participants in the workshop. Their purpose is:

- To develop a shared reading list for Internet Lore in Asia that reflects the interests of our particular group.
- To provide a depository for the writing forums.
- To provide a common language that can be used or that can act as a foil to think against in panel discussions and in developing the research agenda of the group.

Prompts:

1. How does digital folklore relate to your work?
2. How have we thought about *writing the internet* at the conference so far? What has been the most revealing/generative/provocative idea or discussion for you?
3. What gaps exist in the current state-of-the-art regarding internet lore? In what ways is it incomplete? What have we not talked about so far that you think should be talked about?
4. What important changes are on the horizon among digital communities in the near future? What implications does this have for the future of writing the internet?

# THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2018

09:30 – 09:45 REGISTRATION

09:45 – 10:00 WELCOME REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS (PROLOGUE)

GREG CLANCEY, National University of Singapore

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

10:00 – 10:45 EXPOSITION

*Distraction and its Discontents: Social Media from Critique to Alternatives*

GEERT LOVINK, Institute of Network Cultures, Netherlands

10:45 – 11:15 MORNING TEA

11:15 – 12:25 THREAD 1 | APPROACHES

*Respondent* SUN SUN LIM, Singapore University of Technology and Design

*Once More around Digital Folklore (Through China)*

GABRIELE DE SETA, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

*Digital Tribes: Bovine Myths and Violence in India*

MALINI SUR, Western Sydney University, Australia

*Traveling Folklore and Ethnographic Intertextuality*

JILLET SARAH SAM, Indian Institute of Technology – Kanpur

12:25 – 13:25 LUNCH + EXHIBITION VIEWING (TECHNO-IMAGINATIONS) +

FILM SCREENINGS OF *ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS* & *WHITE SONG*

13:25 – 14:35 THREAD 2 | INFRASTRUCTURE

*Respondent* ITTY ABRAHAM, National University of Singapore

*Alternative Visions of Living Digitally*

HALLAM STEVENS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

*Between Javanese and JavaScript: Writing Tradition into the Internet*

MIGUEL ESCOBAR VARELA, National University of Singapore

*Aerial's Cypher: Poetic-Speculative Storytelling, Software Collage, Wi-Fi Meshing and Hardware Assemblage*

NANCY MAURO-FLUDE, National University of Singapore

14:35 – 14:50 AFTERNOON TEA

14:50 – 16:10 THREAD 3 | REAL-ISATIONS

*Respondent* JASON MORRIS-JUNG, Singapore University of Social Sciences

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***Writing History, Writing Future***

YUK HUI, Leuphana University, Germany

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***To Affect, Be Affected and Affecting as an Ontology of Being on the Internet***

CLARISSA LEE AI LING, Sunway University, Malaysia

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***Haw Par Villa: An Eidetic Prosthesis***

OLIVIER PERRIQUET, Le Fresnoy, France

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

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***Supernaturalize Me: Of Fake Ghosts and Monsters... and How We Become Them Online***

BRIONY KIDD, Playwright and Scriptwriter

16:10 – 17:40 FIRST WRITING FORUM

17:40 END OF DAY 1

18:00 – 20:00 WORKSHOP DINNER (*for Speakers and Respondents only*)

*There will be a bus chartered to take the group from AS8 to restaurant at 17:50*

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20:00 BUS TRANSFER BACK TO HOTEL

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# FRIDAY, 9 MARCH 2018

## 10:10 – 11:30 THREAD 4 | FIGURES AND LITERACIES

*Respondent* CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

***Networked Capillaries of Vigilante Activism on the Singaporean Internet***

CRYSTAL ABIDIN, Jönköping University, Sweden

***Kuntilanak and the Locus of Authenticity in Folklore in the Digital Space***

KATRINA IRIWATI GRAHAM, Horror Writer (Theatre/Film)

***Ethical Forms of Internet Writing: A Look at Internet Research Ethics in Asian Context***

SORAJ HONGLADAROM, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

***(Re)Writing the Internet through Collaborative Storytelling***

ALEX MITCHELL, National University of Singapore

## 11:30 – 12:00 MORNING TEA

## 12:00 – 13:20 THREAD 5 | FORMS AND MOVEMENT

*Respondent* CÉLINE CODEREY, National University of Singapore

via SKYPE ***Near Queer Objects: Writing as Recension***

NISHANT SHAH, ArtEZ University of the Arts, The Netherlands

***Command + Shift + 4: A Screenshot of Online Performativity***

SARAH-TABEA SAMMEL, Alien & Turtle LLP, and National University of Singapore

***Rethinking the Form of Internet's Content***

NATALIE PANG, National University of Singapore

***My Malaysian Uncles are Reddit Conspiracy Lurkers***

TEIK-KIM POK, Performance Artist, Writer, and Live Art Producer

## 13:20 – 14:15 LUNCH + EXHIBITION VIEWING (TECHNO-IMAGINATIONS) + FILM SCREENINGS OF *WHITE SONG* & *ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS*

## 14:15 – 15:00 STORYTELLING SESSION

KAMINI RAMACHANDRAN, MoonShadow Stories and The Storytelling Centre Ltd,  
and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

## 15:00 – 16:30 SECOND WRITING FORUM

## 16:30 – 16:45 BREAK

## 16:45 – 17:30 AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET LIFE AND LORE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND CLOSING REMARKS (EPILOGUE)

CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

## 17:30 END OF WORKSHOP

## 17:45 BUS TRANSFER BACK TO HOTEL

## Distraction and its Discontents: Social Media from Critique to Alternatives

### Geert Lovink

Institute of Network Cultures, Netherlands  
geert@xs4all.nl

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In this lecture, I will give an overview of the work of the Unlike Us network and my writings on social media. After many years of solitude and stagnation, the general discontent with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. is on the rise. I will relate two tendencies of fake news and Russiagate (which have compromised Facebook and Google) with the latest revelations about the role of behaviour science in the mass manipulation of attention on social media. This leads to the Unlike Us question how social media architecture should look like: what alternative network models are available and should be developed?

**Geert Lovink**, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic. He holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne and in 2003 was at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland. In 2004, Lovink was appointed as Research Professor at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and Associate Professor at University of Amsterdam. He is the founder of Internet projects such as nettime and fibreculture. His recent book titles are *Dark Fiber* (2002), *Uncanny Networks* (2002) and *My First Recession* (2003). In 2005-06 he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin Institute for Advanced Study where he finished his third volume on critical Internet culture, Zero Comments (2007).

## Once More around Digital Folklore (Through China)

**Gabriele de Seta**

Hong Kong Polytechnic University  
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Ever since the earliest approaches to the Internet as a venue for social interaction and vernacular production, the idea of “folklore” has been a useful category through which the creative contributions of users could be described and analyzed as coherent repertoires built upon pragmatic practices (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1996). Following the tradition of scholars such as Bakhtin, Propp and other Russian formalists who have grounded profound linguistic, literary and social theories in analyses of fairy tales, jokes and vernacular speech genres, the connection between computing and folklore was first suggested in the classic works of American folklorists like Alan Dundes or Elliot Oring, whose early descriptions of office xeroxlore and e-mail humor (Dundes, 1980; Oring, 1987) paved the way for finding folkloric practices in the expanding spaces opened up by new communication technologies. Contemporary folklorists have approached computerized media from the point of view of urban legends in early online communities (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1996), ASCII artworks in IRC channels (Danet, 2001), local content in non-English language Internets (Kõiva & Vesik, 2009) and newlore (Frank, 2011).

As the metaphor gained currency in media and communication studies, folklorists like Glenn Howard have noted how technologically mediated folklore has been described since the early 1990s “in forms as diverse as jokes, contemporary legends, local rumors, folk belief, music, and storytelling” (Howard, 2008a, p. 183). Legitimized as a lens through which users make sense of new communication media, folklore can help with taking the Internet seriously: rather than dismissing online platforms as repositories for trivial jokes and urban legends (Foote, 2007), the vernaculars of digital media (Coleman, 2010) shape and are shaped by communication technologies and media ecologies (Blank, 2009; Howard, 2008b) and have to be accounted for as persistent processes of hybridization from the perspective of the users that engage in their production and consumption (Lialina, 2009). Produced and circulated at the intersection of amateur engagement with digital

media platforms, corporate design decisions, Internet art and emerging media practices, ‘digital folklore’ is a term that accurately describes the kinds of vernacular creativity practiced on the Internet: “this apparent aesthetic clutter, created by users for users, is the most important, beautiful and widely misunderstood language of New Media” (Lialina & Espenschied, 2009).

As the Internet moved from being a ‘New Media’ to disappearing in the fabric of everyday life for larger and larger user populations around the world, the loci of vernacular creativity online multiplied, with individual platforms, discussion boards and messaging services becoming experimentation grounds for situated genres of digital folklore. Weird Twitter, Dank Vines, Post-Ironic Facebook, Deep-Fried Memes and Aumm are all examples of how the “post-modern folklore” of memes (Shifman, 2014, p. 12) differentiates among different communities of users and into repertoires of humor, content and references, giving rise to what Phillips & Milner (2017) have recently termed “the ambivalent Internet”. Yet, most of the existing discussions of digital folklore, from the earliest approaches to Computer-Mediated Communication to the most recent analyses of the “ugly aesthetics” of Internet memes (Douglas, 2014), are grounded on English-language content, often created and circulated on Western websites and social media platforms, and mostly related to American popular culture and social phenomena. With this short essay, I want to stress the importance of approaching digital content and media practices through the lens of folklore, of thinking about how technologies and their uses change the concept of folklore itself, and of shifting the analysis away from English-language, Euro-American genres and platforms towards geographical areas, linguistic contexts and user communities less accounted for.

To offer an example, I will briefly review the research work I have been conducting in the past five years about vernacular creativity in China. I often describe the sociotechnical context of China as “postdigital”, a term I borrow from Florian Cramer

(2014) to describe a historical moment in which the fascination for “the digital” (intended as both information systems and devices) has faded into the background of everyday life. This feeling of witnessing a moment “after” the digital was a constant of my fieldwork in China, where most users had their first experience of Internet access through a mobile device, where hundreds of local digital media platforms vie for the attention of eight hundred million customers, and where smartphone apps are widely adopted across generations and social strata. In postdigital China, media practices of vernacular creativity are everywhere a smartphone, tablet or laptops is: in the *zipai* (selfies) edited with filtering apps and shared on social media to sell make-up products (de Seta & Proksell, 2015), in the repertoire of *wangluo yuyan* (Internet language) continuously updated by users with clever puns and obscure neologisms (de Seta, 2015), in the *biaoqing* (‘expressions’, emoticons & stickers) cobbled together by chat group that mix references to videogames, Chinese cinema and regional humor (de Seta, 2016), as well as in the elaborate practices of trolling, flaming and picking on each other developed by specific online communities and networked publics (de Seta, forthcoming).



Figure 1. “It seems you don’t know the real value of life at all!”. A *biaoqing* featuring the stylized faces of Korean actor Choi Seung-guk and Chinese politician Jiang Zemin sucking seconds of life out of him, a popular genre of jokes about the elderly CCP member.

Without delving into the history and circulation of different genres of vernacular creativity in China, I want to pull together my previous research on the topic to put forward a few tentative features of what might be called *postdigital folklore* – digital folklore created and disseminated after the widespread uptake of networked communication technologies in specific local contexts. The first feature of postdigital folklore is its often narrow and limited social scale: given the increasingly fragmented use of social media platforms, vernacular creativity is often confined to online space like WeChat group conversations among close friends, VKontakte chats with a few classmates, or Slack pods used by a few dozens of colleagues. A second feature of postdigital folklore is its aesthetic dimension, unmoored from the limited resources of ASCII art or the immobility of desktop-based image editing software: as apps like WeChat, Meitu Xiuxiu or Instagram allow users to easily capture, process, edit and upload multiple formats of audiovisual content (including animated GIFs, short videos, screenshots, high-definition images, etc.), vernacular creativity is practiced by more users, incorporating any context where they are allowed to use a mobile device. A third feature of postdigital folklore is its peculiar relationship with the concepts of locality and globality: ubiquitous in its media forms, yet often hyperlocal in its contents and referents, vernacular creativity after the Internet often functions as mediating surface through which users encounter the global and re-inscribe the local onto it, or the other way around.

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- Gabriele de Seta** holds a PhD in Sociology from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and has recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan. His research work, grounded on ethnographic engagement across multiple sites, focuses on digital media practices and vernacular creativity in Chinese-speaking areas. He is also interested in experimental music, Internet art, and collaborative intersections between anthropology and art practice. More information is available on his website <http://paranom.asia>

## Digital Tribes: Bovine Myths and Violence in India

**Malini Sur**

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Viable internet access via mobile phones has challenged the boundedness of people, as well as the location of place and myths. The relationship between myths and the transmission of phone videos and images on cattle violence and lynching in India, bear upon ethnographic knowledge in ways that resituate the human in the 21st century. Violence surrounding cow slaughter and beef eating in India establishes the margin as a social and spatial arena, and internet lore on the cow, produces digital tribes. In the pages that follow, I briefly situate the margin by historically locating lore as cultural, verbal, material expressions and artefacts, and cows as sacred and economic commodities in 19th and 20th century British and post-colonial India. In my talk, I propose to bring these themes into conversation with current debates in anthropology and share some early thoughts on digital tribes in contemporary India.

In the 19th century, folk lore was relegated folk life. When the British editor William John Thomas inspired by the Grimm Brothers' *Volkspoesie* (literature of the common folk) coined this term for what had previously been referred to in English as "popular antiquities" or "popular literature" — it caught on in the printing press. In Victorian England, "folk" represented the common people — peasants or isolated, uneducated, or lower-class groups — whereas "lore" referred to their inherited wisdom. In the 20th century, scholars revised this view with more generous engagements with expressive traditions and aesthetic communications, emphasizing the agency of folklore (Bronner 2013). However, folk culture continued to be differentiated from popular culture primarily because of its localization.

Despite definitional differences, intellectual consensus prevailed within both folklore studies and anthropology that the "folk" comprised the margin. It was geographically and culturally marginal as it was located on the fringes of a cultural centre and belonged to only a part of the culture. It was also

peripheral in a temporal sense in that folk traditions were seen to continue what persisted from an earlier period (Smith 1959). Marginality in other words, constituted in itself, a kind of belonging. Furthermore, both as a craft and a genre, the gap between the written texts and oral traditions accorded a specific order of hierarchy to life and lore.

The explicit marginality of the lore, as well its relationship with print technology and now increasingly the internet, bears upon contemporary discussions in anthropology. Neil Whitehead and Michael Wesch (2012) have argued that a critical examination of the human sheds light on how anthropology's anthropocentric presumptions ignore not just the "unhuman" but also the "animal" and the "not-quite-human". They posit that studies of online phenomena deepen the ethnographic engagement with "unhuman" populations in ways that also challenge and subvert traditional notions of the human. They however ignore that centrality of the animal in anthropology that has historically shaped the meaning of what it meant to be human.

Let me briefly re-locate the centrality of the animal in anthropology, and the relationship between print technology and myth making that surrounded cattle in British India. Evans Pritchard reminds us that for pastoral communities, like the Neur, in southern Sudan, cattle illuminated people's dependence on nature and social relationships. The social and political relations that revolved around cattle rearing and rustling enabled a pastoral community to work its structure; it made communities cohesive, as well as reinforced social and spatial boundaries, such as with the neighbouring Dinka (Pritchard: 1940). In 19th century British India, the body of the cow became a site of political contestation. The cow united a dispersed Hindu community who mobilised the animal to demarcate Hindus and Muslims in conflicting and irreconcilable terms. The cow was a potent tool that came to represent the universal

“mother” or the universal cow mother and led to violent riots (Robb 1986).

Cattle’s religious symbolism travelled through printing technology via calendar art and the railways that connected markets in British India. BC Sharma’s *Milching a Cow*, made in the 1880s, visually appropriated the Hindu nationalist ideology showing all the Hindu gods encompassed in a cow (Mohanty 2015). Christopher Pinney (1997) has argued that the colonisation of quotidian space replicated the way the body of the cow itself was invested with the divine; in numerous lithographs, the cow became a proto-nation, a space that came to embody a Hindu cosmology. British colonial policies provided impetus to the Hindu nationalist projection of the cow as sacred and cow slaughter by Muslims during religious festivals led to communal clashes (Van der Veer 1994). Protecting cattle by preventing cattle sacrifice and slaughter was critical. The competing meanings of cattle not only was used to mark out Muslims from Hindus, but often translated into competing claims over localities (Jones 2007).

The explosive political connotations that surrounded the cow, weaned attention away from cattle’s centrality in agrarian and pastoral life in India and its economic connotations as commodities. These remained intact throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Cattle were traded at numerous fairs, they are mentioned as an important commodity in the eastern borderlands. Records indicate that, in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, cattle — milch cows and bulls — travelled across British India on railways (Blackwood, 1917).

If folklore’s relocation via printing and later internet onto online archival forms as distinct from a locality bounded domain, did not necessarily redeem its prior marginal status, in the case of cow-violence in India, the internet has powerfully generated new forms of marginality. The differential sacred connotations of the cow that facilitates its slaughter among Muslims and its protection among Hindu nationalists have resurfaced through smart phones in ways that sharpen violent social boundaries within India and well as with the neighbouring Bangladesh. In my presentation, I explore internet lore that surrounds cattle, through the violent production and circulation of phone videos and images.

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**Malini Sur** is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society and teaches anthropology at Western Sydney University. She holds a PhD from the University of Amsterdam (2012). Her research addresses three lines of inquiry — agrarian borders, urban space and environment. The first examines fences, transnational flows, and citizenship. A second line of inquiry explores the relationship that mobility has to urban space, and specifically, with regard to bicycling and construction sites across Asian cities. Finally, she examines the afterlives of natural disasters, air pollution, and climate change. As an anthropologist, she researches these themes historically and with keen attention to visual representation. She has conducted fieldwork in Bangladesh and India, and with South Asian asylum seekers in Belgium. Malini's publications have appeared in academic journals like *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *HAU*, *Mobilities*, and *The Economic and Political Weekly*. She has co-edited a collection of essays entitled *Transnational Flows and Permissive Polities: Ethnographies of Human Mobility in Asia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012). Her public writing has appeared in *Himal*, *The Telegraph* and *Scroll*.

## Traveling Folklore and Ethnographic Intertextuality

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Early sociological reticence in a serious engagement with folklore was resolved primarily through the interpretative turn in the discipline, which promoted the analysis of the text along with the phenomenological contexts in which it is produced and circulated (Thompson 1980). Unlike initial expectations, media technologies (including the new media) have not dispelled folklore but instead generated new contexts for its proliferation. I argue that intertextuality can facilitate the sociological study of folklore in the digital era, given precisely the emergence of these additional digital contexts. The concept was originally developed within literary criticism to refer to the interconnections between texts (Bakhtin 1981, Kristeva 1980). Within media ethnography, intertextuality was redefined by Mark Allan Peterson (2005:130) as “an active social process” where a discourse or parts of it are taken out from one setting and placed in another. Peterson (2005: 132) identifies three moments of ethnographic enquiry - the significance of the shift in contexts (“indexicality”), modifications to the text itself (“iconicity”) and social practices associated with texts within specific fields (“social convention”). Although conceptualized with the mass media in mind, this redefined approach is also effective for the sociological study of folklore in digital spaces.

I hesitate to use the term “digital folklore” since co-production occurs in more complex ways than this term permits. Indeed, my case for adopting intertextuality as an analytical tool rests on acknowledging such complex pathways. First, the concept enables us to explicitly acknowledge the various digital and physical contexts within which folklore flows. Second, by considering phenomenological aspects, sociologists can attend to the significance attributed to the lore in particular digital contexts. Third, this approach also enables us to observe intricate collaborations through which the co-production of folklore occurs in digital fora.

Folklore flows easily today — from one digital platform to the next as well as interweaving

between digital and physical discursive spaces. The digital humanities, adhering to the literary studies definition of the term, acknowledge intertextuality as an inherent feature of the new media itself (Mitra and Cohen 1999, Vasquez 2015). For the sociologist, the task at hand would be to consider the form that the folklore takes not only within the immediate digital platform but also how it shifts when it moves across other digital platforms or physical discursive spaces. Peterson’s (2005:132) inquiry about “iconicity” — how does the intertext change (or not) when it flows from one context to the other — becomes a significant one in this regard. Apart from the transformed text itself, do social performances ascribed to it change within the new context?

One of the affordances of digital media has been an expansion of discursive spaces through which social groups co-produce folklore in ways that were not available to them earlier. This does not mean that retellings did not exist prior to the digital media. Rather, these co-productions might have been excluded from the mass media. For instance, Thirumal (2008) argues that marginalized caste groups are particularly invested in the new media due to a history of exclusion from the print and other mass media in India. Consequently, the sociologist needs to pay close attention to the “indexicality” of the intertext. What significance do social groups attach to folklore as it flows from one context to another? For instance, a previously oral folklore may attain a peculiar significance with the text-ness that digital fora seem to afford it. Further, what kinds of meanings and performances are attached to a lore or a constitutive text when it is introduced into the new digital/physical context? For instance, a newspaper report may be introduced as a significant constitutive text that validates the folklore in a digital arena.

Peterson’s definition of intertextuality allows us to consider the various social practices through which the folklore is co-produced (“social convention”) in digital fora. For the sociologist, this also entails

attention to collaborations between non/low users (Livingstone and Helsper 2007, Neves et al 2013) and the user in the co-production of the folklore in digital spaces. For instance, during my doctoral research I examined the manner in which caste was associated with regional identity in an online network (Sam 2014). Respondents often referred to the role of spouses, elderly parents or other kin in their own posts and responses to caste origin myths in this digital network. Some users regularly read out posts to such low users or non-users. They also frequently and quite explicitly posted on behalf of them. Indeed, in some cases, users sought (and gained) legitimacy in their attempts at co-production of the folklore on the network by indicating that their source was an elderly relative. Such posts elicited similar performances from other users in turn.

Much of the current literature on digital folklore considers as rather separate the aspect of the creation of the folklore (Duffy et al 2015), the creation of digital repositories of existing folklore by experts (Lourdi et al 2007) or experts working with communities (Srinivasan 2006), and its performance in digital contexts (Miller 2008, Buccitelli 2012). Intertextuality provides a framework through which these interrelated aspects of folklore may be addressed as it traverses digital and physical fora. Many studies share a common methodological approach — analyzing the folklore within individual networks or platforms (Srinivasan 2006, Lourdi et al 2007, Miller 2008, Buccitelli 2012, Duffy et al 2012) — which obscures how folklore travels. Fewer studies have considered the flow of folklore across multiple networks and platforms (Peck 2015). An intertextual approach can generate a “connective ethnography” (Hine 2015) of folklore which will uncover these pathways. Through its focus on the significance that communities assign to folklore as it travels across networks and platforms, intertextuality draws attention to why it flows the way it does.

Intertextuality foregrounds the mobility of folklore across digital and physical contexts as well as networks. Further, by considering the interpretative and performative aspects of the flow of folklore, ethnographic intertextuality can unpack power relations within communities (digital, physical or augmented) which influence the selective narrations of the folklore that they co-produce.

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## Alternative Visions of Living Digitally

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A spate of recent scholarship in the history of technology has examined what might be called “alternative” histories of networking. These include Eden Medina’s book (*Cybernetic Revolutionaries*) about Cybersyn in Chile, Ben Peter’s *How Not to Network a Nation* about the “Soviet Internet”, and the recent book by Kevin Driscoll and Julien Mailland about “Minitel” in France (*Minitel: Welcome to the Internet*). These are important developments in the history of information technology because they begin to move away from the standard narratives about the (American) Internet. This allows for not just more international stories, but also begin to suggest a rejection of the notion that there was just one path that networking could have followed and that we ended up in the only place we could have. Our digital world could have looked very different.

This opens up many possibilities for telling stories about the history of networking in Southeast Asia. In particular, it opens up ways of telling them not as “side stories” to the main event of the (American) Internet, but rather as stories that deserve attention in their own right as examples of what possibilities and visions existed for networking before this horizon was closed off by the spectacular growth of the World Wide Web from the early 1990s onwards.

One story that suggests itself in particular is that of Singapore’s “Teleview.” Somewhat akin to Minitel, Teleview was a “videotext” or “videotex” system that operated via a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). The Teleview computer was connected to computers in subscribers homes via the telephone line connected to a 1200-bit modem (later higher) and a dedicated Teleview terminal (composed of two Motorola 68000 processors). Unlike other similar systems of the time, Teleview was also able to display photo-quality images. Since these could not be transmitted over the network,

the system also operated via a UHF transmitter, which would broadcast images directly to a TV set.<sup>1</sup>

The system was set up and operated by Singapore Telecom. It was first operated on a trial basis from 1987, with the full system available to the public in 1991. Teleview was designed as a way to bring Singapore into the information age: it would provide banking services, stock and business information, inter and intra-business communication, educational services, electronic directory services, games, government information, magazines, and travel information (booking holidays, flight information and ticketing).<sup>2</sup> The government had high hopes: “[Teleview] will enable all Singaporeans, old and young, to participate in the New Age. It will benefit all of them, each in different ways. It will help our children in their education. It will raise productivity at the workplace. It will also improve the quality of life at home... Teleview joins the MRT and Changi Airport... as distinct milestones along our path.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite this enthusiasm, uptake was slow. Although the cost was low (\$US 5.50 per month plus 3 cents per email and 35 cents per hours of connect time<sup>4</sup>), only about 30000 Singaporean households (around 5%) subscribed to Teleview by 1994.<sup>5</sup> The text-based presentation and the proprietary standards for communication became a liability once the World Wide Web’s graphical user interfaces began to emerge. Teleview was eventually modified to become accessible via PCs and to become a portal

<sup>1</sup> Kwan Ting Keong. 1990. The development of Teleview and its applications. In: Eddie C.Y. Kuo, Loh Chee Meng, K.S. Raman, eds. *Information Technology in Singapore Society: Trends, Policies, and Applications*. Singapore University Press: 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Yeo Ning Hong. 1988. New leader, new age. Singapore government press release, 1 September (03-1/88/09/01).

<sup>4</sup> Sandy Sandfort. 1993. The intelligent island. *Wired*, 1 April.

<sup>5</sup> Poh-Kam Wong. 1996. Implementing the NII vision: Singapore’s experiences and future challenges.

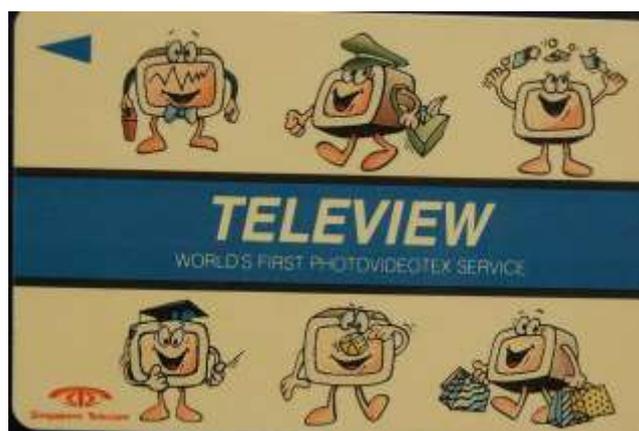
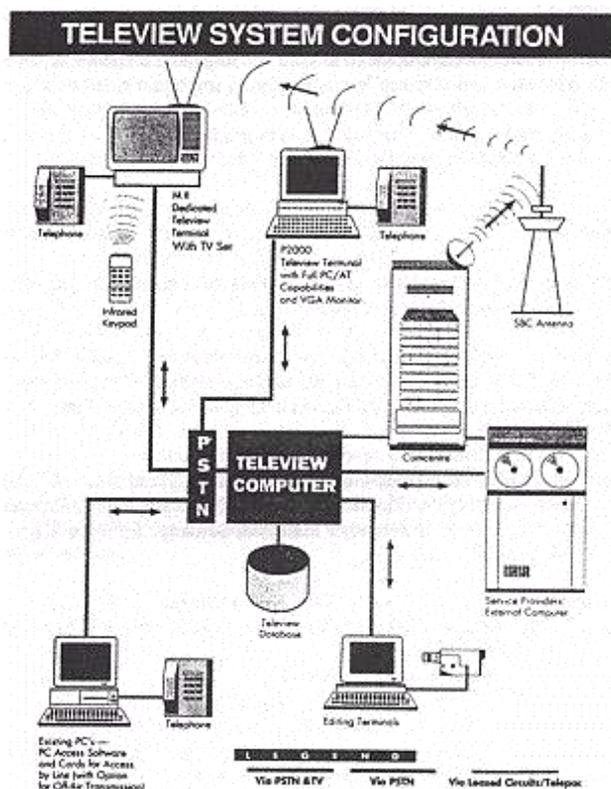
through which users could connect to the global Internet.

Given this history, it is tempting to understand Televue as a kind of failure – something that was not taken up widely and was quickly displaced once the “real thing” came along. But reading Televue not as a “failure,” but as an alternative vision of how to network a nation, opens up some different possibilities for thinking about its history, about networking, and about Internet “lore.” In particular, this kind of history would take seriously the vision of both the government and engineers in creating Televue — what was the system supposed to achieve? What kinds of transformation would it effect and how? Moreover, it could pay attention to the experience that people did have with Televue. What did they use it for? How did they feel about it? And, in particular, what part did it play in introducing them to information and communications technologies?

*Wired* magazine describes the average Televue user as educated, rich, “thirty-something yuppies of Singapore.”<sup>6</sup> Contrast this with the vision of the National Computer Board in their “Vision of an Intelligent Island”: the report tells the story of the whole Tay family using future iteration of Televue – Mr. Tay, a tailor, uses a giant wall screen to display shirts to his customers; Mrs. Tay uses it to work from home, shop online, and play Mahjong with her friends; their son uses it to get information about bus routes and Singapore wartime history for a school assignment.<sup>7</sup> Such visions are important, allowing us to begin to reconstruct different narratives and imaginings of networking and digitality.

Such accounts might draw on a range of different kinds of sources: images of people using Televue, both official and unofficial (I am including a few such images in this document), advertisements and publicity material for the system, oral histories, archives of online forums and chats, BBS archives, and newsgroup archives. Televue may indeed have its own “lore” — comprised especially of the kinds of memories people have of using and interacting with it. The framing of this project permits us to

consider these experiences as part of a broader cultural history of networking. Ultimately, they may help us to better understand what effects networking and other digital-online technologies have had on societies.



<sup>6</sup> Sandy Sandfort. 1993. The intelligent island. *Wired*, 1 April.

<sup>7</sup> National Computer Board. 1992. A vision of an intelligent island: the IT2000 report. SNP Publishers.

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## Between Javanese and JavaScript: Writing Tradition into the Internet

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Javanese is a hierarchical language which is difficult to learn. The fathers of the Indonesian movement, although many of them ethnically Javanese, chose not to use Javanese as the national language since its many registers and complex etiquette force speakers to acknowledge one another's different status in a conversation (Sneddon 2003). In contrast, Indonesian is relatively easy to learn and smooths over differences in status.

JavaScript is a programming language that is easy to learn, originally developed for enthusiasts that were not software engineers (Keith and Sambells 2010). It is still often mocked by engineers but has risen to become the *lingua franca* of front-end web development (through node.js it has also made some inroads in back-end development). More interestingly, JavaScript can be linked to the development of the so-called Web 2.0 applications where users can interact with content. Interactivity requires many moving parts, but a key component is the features of JavaScript that enable users to interact with content once it has been loaded (a purely HTML page, even one dynamically generated by a server, did not allow for this).

Comparing Javanese and JavaScript stretches disciplinary imaginations and such methodological proposition requires interpretive leeway. Computer languages are not like natural languages in many ways. However, areas such as Critical Code Studies (CSS) increasingly analyze software code as if it were other kinds of textual production, akin to literature (Wardrip-Fruin 2009). Here, though, I take Javanese and JavaScript to represent opposing philosophies of engagement. Javanese is an ancient language with a rich history, JavaScript is a new language that emphasizes newness and constant change (the constant "beta" of software development). Hence, we have egalitarian openness and innovation versus tradition and hierarchy. What happens when languages such as JavaScript are used to preserve, disseminate and question traditional Javanese cultural products? What combination of the ethos of

flat sharing coexists or counters the status-conscious traces of tradition? In what follows I take Javanese in a literal sense but JavaScript in a loose sense to denote not only JavaScript, but also the sociotechnical ensemble of interactivity, intuitive user experience design and social media afforded by a combination of technical tools and imagined utopias of Internet participation. The following short description of three projects gives a sense of the range of possible options that emerge from the combination of JavaScript "writ large" and Javanese traditional culture:

- *Sastra Jawa* (<http://sastra.org>) is a collection of online literary materials for Javanese. It includes a dictionary and a comprehensive catalog of materials from the 19th century to the present. It also includes a JavaScript based system to enable users to write in the Javanese script or *aksara jawa* (ꦏꦱꦫꦗꦮ), which is notoriously hard to write in with digital tools and falling to disuse. This site's classic interface relishes in academic elegance combined with the best practices of flat design, which is favoured by many business and academic platforms (as opposed to older skeuomorphic interfaces).
- *Punokawan Solo* (<http://www.punakawansolo.com/>) offers information on the live *wayang kulit* (Javanese shadow puppetry) performances which are transmitted live over the Internet. The website is very simple (based on a blogger template). But unlike the previous project it has some social media integration and users can share specific pages to social networks. More importantly, this site is linked to YouTube performances that are broadcast live over the Internet. In such performances, a great deal of interaction can be seen. Many users log in at the same time to collectively watch *wayang* (one of the many pleasures of watching on this site

is that one gets a sense of a community, since the number of people that have logged in at the same time is prominently displayed). The platform also enables people to leave comments and interact with one another. The site privileges a traditional conception of *wayang kulit* via social media.

- The Contemporary Wayang Archive is a collection of translated contemporary versions of Javanese *wayang kulit* recordings (disclaimer: I am involved in this project). This site was developed mostly in JavaScript and the code is open source. It also enables users to share content over social networks but does not enable adding comments to specific pages. In contrast to other projects, it champions a dynamic view of Javanese culture that emphasizes radically innovative versions of *wayang kulit*.
- Kluban (<https://kluban.net/>) is an ad-hoc, comprehensive yet haphazard collection of factual pieces of information connected to Javanese *wayang kulit*. The most famous feature of the website is a monthly-updated schedule of *wayang* performances across Java. The schedule has become a source of authoritative information, but it tended to privilege performances from Banyumas (an area of Java) in its initial phases. This site enables comments from users but such comments are mostly empty. The site's design emphasizes social collaboration and the interactive, messy, and emergent aesthetics of traditional social events.

Collectively, these projects show how an older tradition benefits from the existence of online portals. The traditions are inaccessible to some due to the intricacies of the scripts, the archaic languages and conventions that obsessively recreate the past in the present and the present in the past (Becker 1995). But the online projects make these traditions newly accessible by adopting the principles of transparency of flat design, the non-hierarchical communication of social media and constant development (the treadmill effect: you need to move to stay relevant) that are philosophically at odds with Javanese traditions. These combinations, though, highlight one of the possible avenues for the study of the Internet in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The Internet is the most complex machine ever built and

it is changing all the time, responding to the various needs of communities of makers and users. It has been argued *ad nauseam* that the Internet poses a serious threat for traditional modes of knowledge. At the same time, however, the Internet also offers unlikely pockets for the survival of such traditions. It is both things at the same time and we need a critical language to evaluate and understand such developments. It seems likely the next chapters of the history of the Indonesian Internet will be partially written in Javanese and partially in JavaScript.

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## Aerial's Cypher: Poetic-Speculative Storytelling, Software Collage, Wi-Fi Meshing and Hardware Assemblage

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My position statement is driven by demystification of hardware and software, and the 'mystification' that lie in and through the performance of the machinic assemblage. I cut up text to assemble a chatbot corpus for parsing, or opening up machines and systems to reassemble them to act out in a performative manner, to destabilize their traditional operating paradigm (so called, neutral, transparent but ironically closed systems). The intention is to highlight profusion, play, ivresse and how the written symbolic formulae of computing machines, metaphysics and the performance of language have historically co-constituted one another, or have been integrated in what was formally considered *techné*. As such, this inquiry explores the connections between arcane cultural practices such as: cyphers, scrying, augury, divination and, at times, their simultaneous concurrence and conflict with present-day modes of expression in contemporary art forms and digital culture, namely Internet Lore or Digital Folklore, 'online amateur culture, DIY electronics, dirtstyle, typo-nihilism, memes and chatbots' (Espenschied & Lialina 2009) for instance.

If we turn to Florian Cramer's comprehensive notion of magic and writing, which is 'at its core, a technology, serving the rational end of achieving an effect, and being judged by its efficacy...' (2005, p.15), this very paradox - on the one hand, the matter-of-fact demystification of technology; on the other, mystification - black magic - black box (that is, the input and output code is ambiguous, unknown and immaterial) is the very core of my research. Recently I made an informal visit to 'Fo Guang Zhuan Yun Tang' a divination shop in Geylang Road Singapore. Materially I was immersed in a cultural mash up (Chinese, Thai Buddhist, Feng Shui, New Age Pop) paraphernalia. Speaking to the manager of the shop, Jason Ong, we began talking about spells and bewitching. Providing a metaphor he explained 'Black Magic Spells' put on people are similar and alike to a DOS attack. Depending on who has written the code, and how many attacks a day upon the

person, that have been programmed, will influence the treatment that they may offer to a client, in which a spiritual investigation by his mother would have to take place. Jason Ong is also a computer system administrator, along with his role as Divination consultant. In the same way Cramer discusses how 'The technical principle of magic, controlling matter through manipulation of symbols, is the technical principle of computer software as well' (Cramer, 2005, p. 15). This is the paradoxical ground upon which theories of Internet Lore, and representation in general must rest, in my view a ground that is not completely solid, to be sure, but one that is also not entirely illusory, imaginary or unreal.

When writing for the Internet, the fictional performance of written code, simply described in everyday computing terms, can be rich with significance - in the technical origins of software action in a verbose output of textual data or even in the hardware assemblage - the coloured cables are laid bare, and the hardware black boxes uncovered to reveal the inner working flashing, beeping components of the mechanism. But nothing is shown by this; it is de-illusionary and magical in the same moment. Matthew Kirschenbaum reminds us 'computers themselves were initially engines of prediction and prognostication' (2008, p.4). The entrails of a WIFI Ethernet Hub, opened out from its container, electric beeping transmitting cable guts are clearly seen. The prominently displayed hardware actually functions as a custom built WIFI access point. The act of opening up computer hardware and revealing inner parts demystifies the black box of the machine, reenchanting and giving insight into a newly liberated space. The computer components, usually hidden, are spread out, reminiscent of supernatural augury, not unlike when oracles looked at entrails of chickens, to divine the future. The installation is assembled to contextualize the computer. Playfully extending from the maker culture aesthetic, largely male inhabited, re-

purposing existing norms and practices typical of modding or WIFI system administration, it is an augury of sorts, without explicitly being so.

### **\*Aerial's Cypher\* WIFI**

In the research project 'Aerial's Cypher' I am devising a narrative through practices of poetic-speculative storytelling, software collage, Wi-Fi meshing and assemblage, thus revealing how calculating machines influence our desires and fears, concerns and prejudices and how we have the ability to re-think the mechanism. \*Aerial's Cypher\* focuses on digital folklore using custom built wireless network as its medium, the artwork makes connections between the presence of the supernatural and also the politics of female artists working with technology; voices that have always been talking - but haven't always been heard, to be able to partially control and rewrite (or at least understand) that technology ourselves, as we live our lives and make meaning from them. The artwork raises awareness around the ethical issues that arise in the context of ongoing technological innovations in an era of increasing interest in AI, and other nonhuman agents. Making invisible things visible, aesthetically drawing attention to how portable mobile devices are routinely used by large corporations for data mining and related purposes of consumer capture.

By devising encounters with network entities (chatbots), visitors to the workshop are asked to join \*Aerial's Cypher\* WIFI (via mobile device). When they tick AGREE to the Terms of Use, 'sprites or ghosts' (chatbots) both haunt and broadcast willing audiences mobile device emissions with poetic-speculative emails/texts. People are provoked to reply to the data repository with a (ghost) story [via email or text]. If they do so, the network entities are appeased, and the communications cease. If not, communication continues for the duration of the installation. This is the point and reason that the artwork employs a custom WIFI network, to demonstrate it is not simply a neutral technology.

\*Aerial's Cypher\* enables an alternate view of the information we transmit on a daily basis and highlights the technical structures that observe and act performatively which in are becoming increasingly inconspicuous. Poetic fragments are revealed from network transmissions, such writings are kept on an online wiki repository. The work can

just as easily be observed and heard by the audience without giving over (ones data), although the veracity of the digital experience will be different. Throwing the 'reasonable expectations; of the spectator into high relief, problematised 'operations of consent in theatre and performance (LaFrance 2013)' will be analysed. As such, instances of voluntary servitude (Bourdieu 1987) and the 'double distinction' (Stengers 2015) proposed between users as audiences, participants, and end users, or even between practitioners and professionals in this particular work is nascent. Reappraising computer networks – the Internet - through a performative lens, audiences are provided with direct contact to the strategies used in networked space, guided by chatbots masquerading as 'ghosts' who poetically illuminate the complexity of uninformed consent strategies typically used in online database user/client communications. In an era of increasing activities emergent in artificial intelligence (AI) industry developments, and other nonhuman technological agents, the work is a metaphor for the capacity of our technologies to both read and write new realities.

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## Writing History, Writing Future

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The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism. Here one is reminded of a somewhat modified expression of Proudhon's: whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat.

— Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*

The deception hidden in the word “humanity,” as articulated by Carl Schmitt above, has haunted us since the 15th century, when the word was first used to describe the “human race, humans collectively.” The word is illusory not only in that it is highly ideological — Schmitt asserts it can be instrumentalized to denounce the enemy as inhuman and claim the self as the only human, as Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un have demonstrated recently — but also because humanity as such doesn't exist: whoever speaks in its name is lying. If we recall Schmitt's assertion today, it is because different *x*-humanities, should this *x* be *post*, *trans*, or *super*, are scrambling to present us a definite future of humanity. And if we follow Schmitt by suspending the term humanity, we will need to consider the consequences of the collapse of its semantic reference and, further, reflect on the crisis of the “humanities” in view of the term's increasing “backwardness” in relation to technological acceleration.

To refuse the term humanity is to refuse the future of humanity, precisely because, built as it is upon an illusion, such a future is even more deceptive than humanity itself. Then the immediate question is: having refused the future of humanity, how should we perceive the question of the future? What kind of future can we still have, other than returning to the nonmodern by pretending that modernization and globalization never happened? This is the point of departure of our discussion, which attempts to understand what is at stake in the question of futurity described by the technological hype of transhumanism and singularity: human-machine

hybrids, augmentable intelligence, perfect emotional control, memory transplantation, immortality, artificial intelligence, smart cities, space immigration, etc. The Japanese animation classic *Ghost in the Shell* has best shown us the scenarios of such an imminent future: to plug in or not to plug in, that is the question. Future, which is the “yet to be” or the “yet to come”, is already closed in a technological determinism, or bad materialism, whether old or new. Although not *yet* there, the “not yet” is *already* known, and what is unknown is no longer in question. Since the unknown is that which is excluded, either it is the feeling of impending catastrophe, or it is the mysterious that is not yet proved and endorsed by technoscience, and remains the task of poets, as Martin Heidegger suggested.

The future of humanity is the product of a synchronization based on the global temporal axis realized by modern technology; by synchronization, I mean first the sharing of a common temporal standard such as clock time that unifies all production processes and circulation of capital, as Schmitt calls economic imperialism; second, the common view of a world history in the process of making according to the following time axis: premodern — modern — postmodern — apocalypse. If the singularity signifies the end of history in the Hegelian sense, the emergence of *Homo deus* coincidentally corresponds to theodicy as the end of history. We could say that the future of humanity is a synchronized effect produced by technological development that points toward a phantasmal *Homo deus*, while reflections on other *futures* are discredited as being variants of epistemological humanism or conservatism. The synchronization that commenced with colonization and modernization gave rise to the globalization of today—a globalization that is, however, already at an end, since if synchronization (of production and capital flow) attains optimization by eliminating technological differences, then dialectically, once the so-called Global South takes the lead in

technological competition, the advantage and privilege enjoyed by the Global North for the past century will be jeopardized, and consequently protectionists, neo-reactionaries, and the extreme right will surge in popularity, reflecting an unhappy consciousness in view of the decline of the West. However, if we follow this logic regarding the competition between countries over the development of artificial intelligence, then it will be as Vladimir Putin told the Russian children, “Whoever leads in AI will rule the world,” since no matter how the cartography is divided, we are still on the same global temporal axis and therefore moving toward the same *telos*. Would rejecting this concept of humanity and its claims to the future allow us to conceive a new concept of world history that is able to bifurcate into diversities?

The bifurcation of futures can only be achieved by breaking away from the synchronization described above to envisage different technological futures. This speculation is based on an antinomy of the universality of technology addressed in my recent book, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, which could be stated:

Thesis: technology is an anthropological universal, understood as the exteriorization of memory and liberation of bodily organs, as some anthropologists and philosophers of technology have formulated;

Antithesis: technology is not anthropologically universal, it is enabled and constrained by particular cosmologies, which go beyond functionalities and utilities.

The peculiarity of the Kantian antinomy is that each thesis holds on its own but opposes the other; such an antinomy must be resolved by a form of thinking beyond universality and particularity.

Synchronization relies on the thesis and undermines the antithesis. To answer the question concerning futurity, we must clarify the antithesis before a resolution can emerge. This is why I propose that each culture should develop its own history of cosmotechnics by systematically rediscovering and formulating its epistemologies and tracing the history of its epistemes in response to the current historical moment. Here is a primary definition of cosmotechnics: the unification of the cosmic and

moral orders through technical activities. Every culture has its own cosmotechnics, each differing from the other in terms of relations and the dynamics of these relations. The aim of conceptualizing cosmotechnics is to reopen the question of technics that was unfortunately closed down in past centuries. Following the analysis in Heidegger’s 1949 lecture later published as “The Question Concerning Technology,” we find two concepts and essences of technics. The first is the Greek *technē*, which means *poiesis* or bringing forth (*Hervorbringen*), and the second is modern technology, the essence of which is no longer the Greek *technē*, but rather enframing (*Gestell*), meaning that everything is considered calculable and exploitable as resources (*Bestand*); while it is difficult, if not impossible, to position other kinds of technics—for example, the Chinese, Indian, or Amazonian—without reducing them to Greek *technē*, it is self-evident that they are not “modern” technologies.

The challenge is: how can these rediscoveries and histories of cosmotechnics contribute to the bifurcation of futures?

It is of course impossible to answer this question in such limited space. What I want to emphasize here is the urgency of reopening the question of technology, and thereby putting a homogenous technological future into question as well. Every culture will have to investigate its histories of cosmotechnics, which in the past century have been reduced to *one* history of technology measured by the advancement of particular techniques or technical systems, from metallurgy to papermaking or railways. To prepare for these investigations to emerge, we must reject the notion of the future of humanity presented as the realization of *Homo deus* or the progress of modernity. This is no Luddite refusal of computational machines and modern technologies, but rather a matter of reappropriating these technologies through the rediscovery of cosmotechnics so as to overcome the limits they impose on us. By rejecting the linear path attached to the image of technological progress, we also reject the politics of acceleration as the only option available for resolving social and political problems, since if the bifurcation of futures is possible, acceleration can no longer be measured by quantities, e.g., degree of automation or amount of productivity. Instead, it will be measured by the

*capacity of technology to bifurcate* into heterogeneous cosmotechnics, which in turn allows multiple futures to emerge and remain irreducible to the global axis of time perceived as world history since European modernity.

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## To Affect, Be Affected and Affecting as an Ontology of Being on the Internet

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In *episode 8 of Season 13 of Criminal Minds, "Neon Terror,"* the main antagonist of the episode escalated his crimes because he was addicted to media attention, obsessively surveilling every channel he could access for media coverage of the murders. When his final victim of choice (before he was caught) was the opportunistic news editor who gave him airtime, she told one of the FBI agents that she found her entire ordeal 'exhilarating,' as she became, then, the centre of media attention. The thrill of going viral.

Exhilaration, thrill, excitement – all these signal heightened emotions that in turn, produce heightened sensations. While these sensations are seemingly explicit, they operate through subtler responses to the affecting source. Heightened emotions and sensations are all packaged under affect. However, affect is not merely demarcated by spikes in one's visceral reaction to a particular object or environment - it is also about a more general capacity for responding to change and transition – affect involve subjective as much as objective qualities, being transversal in nature (Massumi 2015). The point of interface to affect is invisible yet amplified through the effects of the user's/respondent's form of responding – internet media platforms are evolving to respond to how best to elicit that reflexive and non-cognitive reactions, by reshaping what we think we knew, or had understood, about media content and media infrastructures. The instantaneous conduit of information translates to a rethinking of the meaning of attention in relation to media, virality and affect.

This provocation considers how affect, as a bridge between the social and the technical, has evolved within internet studies. However, is the ontology of affect essentially a condition invoked in response to a social signal prior to the onset of a more reflective engagement with the object eliciting that response; or merely an involuntary biological response to stimulations that just happened to call up some

rather complicated associations of abstractions and somatic memories (Sobchack 2004)? The invocation of the term of *jouissance*, originally aimed at a different context, could be illuminating to an updated look on affect as *jouissance* extends from cinematic studies into the realm of participatory/interactive media platforms – the distinction between producer/creator and consumer, and the affective relationship, is less clear.

However, this seeming democratic facet of the internet is not all dandy; according to some scholars (Chesher 1997, Nunes 1997) who considered the internet before Web 2.0, during a time when the internet was much more static, with the only instantaneous interactions taking place being through Usenets, emails, and relay chatrooms. Nevertheless, most of these services only allow limited forms of textual exchange, and were much more ephemeral since the information flow were limited in terms of their circulation and took longer to gain traction, if any traction could be gained. As Chesher pointed out, the physical computer and scrolling text lacked "televisual impact" (p. 81).

Today, high quality content (in the aesthetical/emotive, even if not epistemic, sense – i.e. one could produce high quality cheesiness) could be had at a click, so that competition among media outlets is now about the posting and hosting of highly similar content that are, in actuality, repetitive and no more insightful. The banality matters less than the clicks that could be garnered to keep revenue pouring in. Marketing specialists are certainly interested in understanding what motivates clickability (Berger 2013) and social scientists/humanists are interested in what motivates the rise and reification of the banal into the spotlight since the time Walter Benjamin had thought about the mechanical revolution that enabled massive reproduction of the image.

Two questions are posed:

1. Is the affective more overwhelming in a social-informational network privileging immediate feedback, to the point where the possibility of reflective and thoughtful politics become undermined in participatory democracy?
2. *This question is a spin off from Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Flore's The Medium is the Massage*: Is the older training of observation [theories about the media and the medium] irrelevant in the present moment, because those older observations are based on psychology's responses and concepts conditioned by a former technology (that the authors referred to as "mechanization")? Is technology over-determined in present studies of human-digital machine interaction, and therefore, the consideration of affect?

### Media Critiquing Media

[A] *Viral Sial* – a Malay-language (with some English thrown in) 30 minute documentary of a mockumentary (in 2015) that went viral and led to extreme cyberbullying and trolling, with the usual death and rape threats levelled against the female host of a popular VOD produced by a digital radio station in Malaysia, BFM. The topic that stirred such strong emotions was Islam and the *hudud* law. The host/standupper of this documentary attempts to elicit first impressions from various members of the public, and from media experts. What was notable was the lack of deep discussion on the actual act of cyberbullying and gendered forms of online harassment (references were fleeting and if at length, probably edited out). Mob rule, driven by the thrill of collective cyber ambush, turned a religious disagreement into a collective act of lynching.

[B] *Ingtoogi: the battle of the internet trolls* – a 98-minute Korean independent film is one of the films in the past decade that took a caustic view of the South Korean society's addiction to the internet. Without giving away the premise of the film, the subject of the film is about internet trolls, but given a twist more disturbing than the original subject. The director took the phenomenon of the bystander effect into another level in that the bystander would now rather take video footages of violence in action rather than intervene – just last year, there was an

article on *The Atlantic* about the desire to live-stream violence.<sup>1</sup> Marry that idea to the act of pwning and live-action video-game street fights involving an unsuspecting civilian – and we now have a tale of revenge, deviance, more violence, and both online and offline harassment. To the dysfunctional mix is added a mercenary teenage girl with no parental control whose favourite past-time is to make money off the deviant fantasies of others through her channel. The director of this film also made *Socialphobia* in 2015 (102 minutes long), which bears no relations to *Ingtoogi*, although the former is another film about digital communities, trolling and everyday violence. Suicide, be it the outcome of the online activities of the victims or real-life dysfunction, is also a theme that pervaded both films, and made more explicit in *Socialphobia*. In both films, the affective quality of the connection between the digital community where the characters are located, and their actuality, are represented in film through the reflection of a scrolling screen as netizens are depicted as posting their opinions, responses, and responses to their responses, about meaningless and endless banality.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/01/chicago-beating-facebook-live/512288/>

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## Haw Par Villa: An Eidetic Prosthesis

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Haw Par Villa opened in 1937, the creation of Tiger Balm brother magnates Aw Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par. Our project, at the crossroad of art and philosophy, explores and re-imagines the sculptures, tableaux, and dioramas of the park through virtual/physical installations and reflection on memory, place, and objects. We employ the metaphor of an eidetic prosthesis to consider individual and collective memory through the park and to conjure up the park's dematerialization through memory and virtual reality. It is an exploration of and meditation on continuities and discontinuities between e.g. physical and virtual environments; oral, written, sculptural, pictorial, and digital narrations; the epic and the mundane; biological, biographical and collective memory; and, through this, storytelling.

### Visionary Environments

Haw Par Villa is an example of what historians have called a "visionary environment." What these places have in common, in the main, is that they are some combination of a singular obsessive creator; often increasing in size and intensity over time; surviving in tandem with their creator; demolished on their death by government authorities or hostile neighbours; fusing religious, political, and moral messages; syncretic and idiosyncratic; often the product of local craftsmen or amateur enthusiasts. They can sometimes appear gaudy, kitsch, and ostentatious as well as moralistic, pious, and political. They have antecedents in the follies, grottos, and hermitages in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and so are, in a sense, modern structures.

Being dependent on one person, the destruction of these visionary environments — and the potential elimination of their memory — is always a real threat. Often they are destroyed by hostile or embarrassed neighbours as in the case of Clarence

Schmidt's House of Mirrors — a vast home constructed of hundreds of old window frames in Woodstock, New York state — or Armand Schulthess's Casa Reggia in Ticino, Switzerland — a garden of several acres of signs and messages. A long battle existed between authorities, enthusiasts, and Nek Chand, a transport official in the northern Indian city of Chandigarh who, in 1958, began an illegal construction in a jungle clearing which gradually expanded into 25 acres of sculptures, buildings, arcades, gorges and waterfalls.

### Haw Par Villa

Like their Tiger Balm product, the Haw Par Villa garden soothes and shocks in equal proportions. It follows in the tradition of the "learning garden," a park whose purpose is to educate and inculcate a moral and social ethic. It has been described as "a sculptural sketchbook," a corporeal form of storytelling through objects. It is at once a materialization of collective memory and product of an individual vision and imagination. The scenes of the park look like studio scenery temporarily frozen. The statues (there are about a thousand) have an unsettling expressiveness, paused part-way through an action. When you lift your camera to take a picture, you realize that each perspective modifies the expression of the statues and transforms the scene. Rather than prescribing one interpretation, the scenes submit themselves to the eye of the viewer, by offering the possibility of a new writing within the original writing that of the brothers Haw and Par.

Aw Boon Haw is said to have begun and ended each day with folklore. He would walk around the gardens with his craftsmen, recounting myths and legends that he wanted to be added to the park. Each evening, he listened to Li Da Sha's Guangdong stories on the radio. In an interview with a

biographer he described himself as “a transmitter of knowledge, someone whose task it was to clarify and pass on that which came before.”

### Eidetic Prostheses

The idea of the eidetic prosthesis is an extension of phenomenological understandings of the relationship between technology and the self, as well as more recent conjectures such as the hypothesis of an extended mind. Some people have the ability to remember a lot of details in pictures and to remember them, as if they were lighting an interior projector and can contemplate them again internally, at will. This is what is called an "eidetic memory". At the same time, we all have experienced how stories present in objects, things, smells, tastes, and sensations can prompt memories to surface. Perhaps virtual environments too can be eidetic.

If the stories portrayed in the park are the expression of a collective memory, it is also possible to establish certain formal analogies, on the individual level, between the way the park is organized and psychological memory. The park has undergone several transformations since its creation in the 1930s. Some parts have been destroyed; others have been consolidated or have undergone modifications. Like the memory of an individual, it is a heterogeneous patchwork of myths, a sedimentation of ambivalent stories, archetypal figures belonging to different eras.

Haw Par Villa is a place where cultural transmission takes on a sculptural form. The scenes of the park are visual and tactile, the absence of text preserves their polysemy, calling in the first place the imagination of those who look at them. If the objects — in which we include the scenes and the sculptures — have the capacity to bring out memories, as Proust eloquently demonstrated with his madeleine, they can also extend memorial capacities by externalizing them.

By its distributed nature, the internet has become a kind of monster that escapes any possibility of total representation or control. It appears to be moved and driven by inscrutable, hidden forces, as geological phenomena or living beings are. But these are animated forms of a disembodied kind. Our project then might be regarded as a reflection

on how to involve bodily functions (vision, memory, perception of the surrounding environment) in the virtuality currently at work on the internet. The project is, analogous to memory, a dematerialization of the park.

Rather than present a rupture when moving to a virtual environment, what we see are continuities. Our project looks as much toward the future as much as we dig things out from the past, trying to bridge older stories with contemporary ones, considering the villa as alive, rather than a dying thing from the past that needs to be rescued from abandonment.

**Olivier Perriquet** is an artist and a research scientist. He is interested in the materiality of images and their relation with thoughts and body, through its most mysterious manifestations as in memory or during dreams. He has been experimenting with live cinema and in installation for over ten years, with systems of capture and projection machines diverted or built from scratch, and is invested in various fields at the crossroads of the arts and sciences, bearing a particular interest at the crossing of disciplines and imaginary. Olivier Perriquet has a PhD in computational biology and graduated from Le Fresnoy-Studio National. He has been conducting research at the Center for Artificial Intelligence of the University of Lisbon and at the Department of Mathematical Linguistics of the University of Tarragona from 2006 to 2012, then guest artist at Duke University, Department of Art and Art History (Fulbright fellow). He is currently responsible for research at Le Fresnoy and teaches at the media/art school of Chalon-sur-Saône in France.

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## *Supernaturalize Me*

### Of Fake Ghosts and Monsters... and How We Become Them Online

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The opportunity to be part of this workshop has encouraged me to examine a key thematic element of my film and theatre projects from a new perspective. I want to consider this element not only through the historical lens of genre traditions and influences (as I have done previously, including in the process of developing the work) but in the context of internet writing, and specifically social media. In doing so I hope to interrogate the idea more deeply, reflecting on its potential to resonate more strongly with contemporary experience.

Many fiction and performance writers choose to dissect human fears and frailties through the vehicle of the supernatural. I am interested in stories featuring characters who are themselves engaged in acts of invention, albeit for different reasons and usually less consciously. This notion — let us call it the mythologisation or supernaturalisation of the mundane — is one that I keep returning to. To look at it another way, I like writing about fake ghosts and monsters.

This should not imply any lack of interest in stories about the genuinely supernatural. The influence of folklore on horror cinema around the world is an area of endless fascination. What do the monsters of a society say about that society and its preoccupations? (Why does contemporary Asian cinema feature so many tragic female ghosts? for example<sup>8</sup>). But a complementary area is that of stories dealing with the creation of pseudo-supernatural entities out of the raw material of ordinary people, objects or events.

For example, in my 2010 short film *The Room at the Top of the Stairs*<sup>9</sup> a young woman moves into an art school share house and keeps hearing about a strange and badly behaved girl, Carmen, who used to live in her room before her. The unnamed protagonist develops a mental image of Carmen based on the physical traces she's left behind (such as marks on the bedroom wall, self-portraits, clothing and other ephemera) and on what is said about her by others. A mythology develops and Carmen becomes the protagonist's nemesis, purely because she seems to occupy so much 'space' in the house in spite of her physical absence. The film resolves with the two finally meeting, with Carmen's power dissolving under the main character's scrutiny (see Dorothy discovering that the Wizard is just a man behind a screen).

*The Room at the Top of the Stairs* was conceived as a kind of private joke. It's a mash-up of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, in which a timid young bride feels overshadowed and menaced by her husband's charismatic dead wife, and a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story about a young artist who takes herself too seriously. Actually though, as much as *Rebecca*<sup>10</sup> is an effective psychological thriller, it is itself a meta-commentary on the traditions of gothic literature. And it could be said that *Rebecca*'s direct ancestor is Bertha Mason of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, another mythologized "other woman" who torments a young heroine. All three stories — *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca* and *The Room at the Top of the Stairs* — employ the trappings of the supernatural to give their entirely non-supernatural events impact.

<sup>8</sup> I wrote an article about this back in 2008, attempting to grapple with such notions in the context of Indonesian horror filmmaking. It is very much an outsider's perspective, so I apologise in advance for any erroneous assumptions contained therein!

Kidd, Briony. Beyond the Grave: Horror and Indonesian Cinema. *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, No. 157, 2008: 76-81 Read in PDF form here.

<sup>9</sup> View the 15-minute short *The Room at the Top of the Stairs* at <https://vimeo.com/15829926> using password 'stairs'

<sup>10</sup> I am here referring as much to Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 film of the same name as to the source material.

The “creation of a fake monster” trope can play out in a variety of ways. In my radio play *The Pit*<sup>11</sup> a female prison inmate believes she is going to be sacrificed to the monster under her cell’s floor that she hears the other women chattering and singing about. Her sense of impending doom leads her to stab a prison guard so that he may be taken in her stead, but, too late, the “monster” is revealed to be no more than a hazing ritual inflicted on her by neighbouring inmates.

The screenplay I am currently working on features two women who run a strange motel in a post-apocalyptic suburbia. They become known to the impoverished locals as the “Belles Dames Sans Merci” because of their ruthlessness and hoarding of supplies. Someone has painted graffiti on the outer wall of the motel depicting them as cruel, ethereal figures (in reference to the tradition of the witch or enchantress in fairytales as much as to the Keats poem).<sup>12</sup>

So the threat posed may be imaginary, born of suggestion. Or the threat is real — either physically or in a psychological sense — but its nature mischaracterized or exaggerated. A further twist on this trope is when it is almost impossible to know if the threat is real or not, and that ambiguity creates the story’s tension.<sup>13</sup>

I propose that the “creation of a fake monster” trope in film and literature is about examining a fundamental aspect of human psychology: our tendency to “storify” experience. In the realm of art, this can be productive and cathartic. In the realm of ordinary daily life, it may not be so benign. Catastrophizing, seeing patterns where none exist, attributing malevolence as the most likely

explanation, demonising the “other”: such interpretations can lead us to feel trapped, ill-fated and imperiled, to the point that the greatest danger we face is our own resulting behaviour.

In an era where political leaders around the world use their populace’s fears against them — seeking to divide along racial and religious lines, to harden hearts against immigrants and refugees, to blame the disenfranchised for their fates — it is important to keep telling stories about how monsters can be invented.

This theme plays out in an even more direct and observable way on social media. It can be found in the many forms of self-mythologisation indulged there. Lonely men pretend to be monsters (“trolls” no less) in order to attract the attention of women. Feminist activists use words and imagery that bring to mind famous warriors and historical figures<sup>14</sup>, encouraging us to see them in a similarly mythic light. Celebrities cultivate alternate personas (rebel, jester, spiritual guru) via their social media profiles.

The President of the United States seems to be striving to appear as a maverick straight-talker, so engaged with the struggle to “MAGA” that he is engaged and working almost 24/7. Where this characterization falters is in attention to detail. His tweets of concern on various issues coincide directly with Fox News reports on these same issues. You do not have to be a political analyst to see that Trump is being controlled by other people’s mythologising, even as he attempts to project his own distinctive creation.

Dramaturgical problems aside, how can we use the capacity of social media to mythologise ourselves and others in a responsible and productive way... not to evoke fear but to empower? How do we remain authentic, if we know we are, in some sense, performing or fictionalising? Does it matter if the boundary between “life” and “art” is becoming increasingly blurred? I suggest that there is much to be gleaned from genre storytelling and how it depicts both real and “fake” monsters in answering these questions.

<sup>11</sup> Premiering at Dark Mofo in Tasmania in 2016, *The Pit* is a 45-minute experimental radio play conceived and produced in collaboration with the Radio Gothic collective.

<sup>12</sup> One of the key influences for this work is *Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte* (Robert Aldrich, 1964), in which Bette Davis plays an eccentric older woman who is mythologized by the neighbourhood children to the extent that they sing a song about her and scare themselves by daring each other to approach her doorstep.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Innocents* (Jack Clayton, 1961), Charlotte Gilman Perkins’ *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> See Rose McGowan’s recent tweets and #rosearmy and the Shitty Men in Media List and “I Am Spartacus.” <http://junkee.com/sexual-harassment-whistleblowerdoxing/142125>

## Networked Capillaries of Vigilante Activism on the Singaporean Internet

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This paper draws upon in-depth digital ethnography to interrogate the generations and genealogies of vigilante activism on the Singapore internet, in relation to the obscurity and spectacle of internet folklore. By tracing the trajectory key websites, forums, and social media pages that constitute networked capillaries of call-out culture and public shaming, as well as their dominant cultures among users in the community, the paper positions cultures of vigilante activism as an in-route for understanding the relationship between state and peer surveillance, national law and internet mores, and commercial authorship and charismatic ownership in Singapore. I use 'internet folklore' as a shorthand for the authorial account of events, pieced together by squillions of pseudonymous internet users, who in each incident assess personal morality and assign public blame based on populism in the public court of social media commentary.

Against the backdrop of stiff censorship laws in the print media, the internet in Singapore is often posited as a more liberal state. This was the case from the inception of the country's technological infrastructural planning in the intelligent Island Masterplan in 1991 (Telecoms Infotech Forum 2007; Lim, 2001), up till present day continuous assertions that the state practices a "light touch" (Koh 2015) approach towards regulating the internet. As such, digital spaces have opened new frontiers of connectivity and dialogue between otherwise separated users that would not have been possible with the closely monitored broadcasting stations and broadsheets in Singapore.

Although the internet, like other mainstream media, is not free from state policing and censorship, it is afforded the freedom for more contentious expressions, as long as they are not prosecutable by the Sedition Act. Singaporeans are increasing by consuming alternative journalism new sites, websites belonging to opposition parties and political blogs, and these user-run avenues have also come under state control under new licensing

schemes in recent years. However, political and activist humour social media groups that partake in dissidence or naming-and-shaming in the name of activism, social consciousness, and civic mindedness have gone under the radar through their use of satirical net lingo and subversive vernacular passed off as humour and forms of play, comprising highly complex community registers (Nekmat & Lee 2018).

### Physical Materialities of Internet Folklore

Public shaming culture has evolved rapidly in the last decade in Singapore, in part stipulated by the affordances and politics of new digital platforms, and stimulated by the seduction of the highly profitable attention economy. And much of this is facilitated by the particularities of this country that have enabled and networked such particular ways of being.

For one, peer surveillance and public shaming are lubricated by Singapore's small population. While most similarly densely populated cities around the world accord their citizens a level of namelessness and facelessness from the sheer diversity of residents and complexity of space, Singapore is an urban city-state that behaves much like a small village town: Everyone knows everyone else's business by virtue of space compression and the extensive intersection of social ties.

From an "intelligent island" to a "smart city", Singapore is also the antithesis of a luddite community. Citizen data is micromanaged and high IT penetration facilitates extensive digital literacies: Citizens who leave or return to the country are processed and greeted by a machine in full name; Official documents can be requested via a completely online automated process that necessitates the surrender of updated profile images; The cumbersome administration of banking, insurance, tax, and other financial affairs are mediated by multi-device verifications; Pedestrian crossings can be especially patient with less mobile

senior citizens if only they scan their ez-link cards on a reader; Young people are becoming acquainted with the newest software beginning with computer-assisted lessons in kindergarten.

These ingrained technological literacies have also fostered a high smartphone penetration rate and social media use in Singapore. In other words, given the digital footprints and tacit IT knowledge rendered increasingly compulsory for daily living, it feels more instinctive to “CSI” — colloquial forum lingo for intense profiling based on in-depth and corroborative internet searches — anyone and does not require too much effort or sophistication to do so. While local variants of “CSI-ing” borrow from hacker traditions of doxing, in which large amounts of private identifying content is released punitively, thus far practices of “CSI-ing” seem to be less intense and malicious, focused on small bytes of information such as a person’s full name, age, place of residence, and workplace. It is not that surprising, then, that public shaming viral videos are a dime a dozen in modern-day Singapore. But how did we get here?

### Capillaries of Internet Folklore

Initial call-outs of public shaming incidents are usually first posted by everyday, ordinary citizens. But the ecology of internet-shaming networks in Singapore is intricate and diverse. This usually comprises key gatekeepers and content amplifiers, such as prolific social media users and accounts that have the ability to spread content far and wide. Also involved are a host of digital and traditional media stakeholders who are simultaneously vying for the transient attention spans of browsing eyeballs — these include for-profit entertainment websites (such as *Mothership*) and crowd-sourced submissions on mainstream media pages (such as *STOMP*).

In the last few years, a protocol of trend-making has emerged organically among such “virality amplifiers” in the local internet landscape. Singular social media posts are usually uploaded by ordinary citizens on their personal accounts, on citizen-journalism tabloid site *STOMP*, or on one of a few popular forums including *Sammyboy*, *Hardware Zone*, *Flowerpod*, and *Cozycot*. In the late 2000s, some of this content would be picked up by tabloid print newspaper, *The New Paper*, as feature stories. But

by the early 2010s, organic digital media groups were taking over.

In the wake of internet vernacular and creative formats such as memes, humour-based Facebook groups run by hobbyists would fan the flames of selected content to virality through strategies including comical meme-making, challenges to followers to “CSI” the protagonists, or antagonistic calls for public repentance. The most prominent of these groups was parody Facebook page *SMRT Ltd (Feedback)*, which evolved from a for-laugh group of trolls, to vigilante internet activists, to an advertorial platform, to a for-hire competitive intelligence service provider. While the *SMRT Ltd (Feedback)* witch hunts were often political in nature, other competing Facebook pages such as *SGAG* maintained a more lighthearted and jocular tone, choosing only to meme apolitical content within the out of bounds (OB) markers of official Singapore dogma.

### The Profitability of Internet Folklore

By the mid-2010s, young people who were prolific enough to earn money on social media through advertising peaked as micro-celebrities and Influencers. Tabloid news websites began wrestling for these new advertising dollars by integrating paid ads on their platforms, and the distinction between non-monetized and sponsored content became difficult to ascertain. As such, viewership from their coverage on public shaming controversies could earn them a sizable revenue. This incentive thus motivated for-profit websites to innovate with how they instigated, framed, and prolonged incidents of public shaming.

Entities like *Mothership*, *Must Share News*, and *Vulcan Post* mine social media for potential shaming content as fodder, often produced by the free labour of internet users (which is unevenly reciprocated with scant backlinks or namedrops to their original posts). Such sites milk the life cycle of transient viralities by breathlessly producing updates on the smallest of details in new posts, each with their unique URLs in order to maximize viewer traffic and thus ad revenue. This only serves to extend the longevity of public interest and register clickthroughs as “user engagement”. For instance, the “Toa Payoh couple” fiasco of April 2017 — in which a husband and wife were tracked down,

humiliated on the internet, and legally charged after a video of them verbally assaulting an elderly man went viral — spawned at least 15 different posts with unique URLs for *Mothership*, which claims on its About page to have at least “180,400 page views daily”.

But the internet climate was not always like this in Singapore. In the early 2000s, popular social issue bloggers such as *mrbrown* (Kinmun Lee) and *Yawning Bread* (Alex Au) were respected public opinionators who wrote thought-provoking commentaries on similarly viral incidents (such as the 2006 debacle where 18-year-old Ms Wee Shu Min, the daughter of a then-Member of Parliament, published scathing elitist comments in a viral blog post). However, their approach was never to shame a specific individual, but to open up dialogue for making sense of such bad behaviour. Where posts carrying such community-oriented commentary served as important digital platforms and ad hoc forums for internet users to trade words and rhetorical fists, the likes of for-profit tabloid-esque platforms such as *Mothership* pander to the logic of clickbait and sensationalism, scraping the bottom of the barrel for web traffic and ad revenue.

And so the ecology of public shaming progressed as a sense of public activism intertwined with for-profit clickbait. Located somewhere between the justice-oriented, crowd-sourced “citizen journalism” and the praxis of accumulating social and financial capital from viewership is the digital portal *STOMP*. A seething hotbed of public shaming, the platform is so prolific and influential that it has come to shape and even govern much of public shaming culture on the Singapore internet.

### Authority and Authorship of Digital Folklore

In its present day incarnation, call-out culture in Singapore is a compassing of personal politics, an attempt towards soliciting like-minded others through Likes and Retweets and very often a herding of oneself into the correct crowd of social justice ethicists. More valuable and sustainable intervention feels outsourced to everyone but no one in particular, broadcasting an externalized sense of responsibility to unspecified others, since the labour of instigation is achievement in and of itself. But this dynamic only functions as a self-sustaining mechanism if it remains what media theorists refer

to as “lateral surveillance”, or the mutual watching and policing by equals in a neutral setting. What happens when the powers that be attempt to use the vocabulary of social media to partake in public shaming?

In June 2017, Minister of Home Affairs and Law, K Shanmugam, published a Facebook post to name and shame a Facebook user for gloating over the death of a Traffic Police officer. While other state officials, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Member of Parliament Baey Yam Keng, have used their official social media accounts to highlight the good deeds and achievements of citizens worthy of praise, publicly naming and shaming an individual ahead of official news coverage on the incident is a rare occurrence. In his emotive post, Minister Shanmugam cited being “deeply upset and angry” over the perpetrator, Thomas: “People like Thomas are sick in the head. No decency or any sense of right and wrong [...] You wonder what human decency people like Thomas have — to be so self-centred, smug and making nasty remarks about an officer who died doing his duty [...]”.

Unlike the anonymous forum posters, the concealed vigilantes of SMRT Feedback (Ltd), the opinion leaders *a la* bloggers like *mrbrown* and journalists like Kristen Han, and the everyday ordinary citizens on Facebook, Minister Shanmugam speaks from a position of relative power and authority. The Facebook account from which he posted is an official outlet for his public ministerial persona to disseminate information and interact with the citizenry. To call out the perpetrator on social media through his public portfolio, instead of making a statement through the “proper” channels of the press, seems to imply that Minister Shanmugam tacitly endorses call-out culture and pressure through social policing. Moreover, as a bystander the Minister is not seeking redress from the perpetrator, but rather, using his position of authority to parade ill-behaviour in a didactic opportunity to cultivate a chilling effect against other would-be perpetrators.

More pressingly, given the tight censorship of the media and political critics in Singapore, spaces on the internet are the rare few public domains where citizens can air some dissidence and grievance. Yet this incident of a Minister loud-hailing into a platform traditionally peer-governed by equal

citizens comes across as a disruption of citizens' lateral surveillance and an intrusion by the censorious state. Should such despotic call-out practices become more common or even become the norm on social media, lateral surveillance could insidiously give way to a super-imposed hierarchy of morals assessment and blame assignment according to one's relative position in society. Consequently, the democratic potential of using spaces on the internet to seek redress where the state apparatus has come up short withers away and stifles valuable spaces for public negotiation and meaning-making.

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## Kuntilanak and the Locus of Authenticity in Folklore in the Digital Space

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As a feminist horror writer one of the subjects that fascinates me and recurs in my work is the idea of reclaiming stories and reframing female characters in a way that reminds the audience of the power within those characters.

I have always had a magnetic terror-based obsession with the Indonesian ghost Kuntilanak or Pontianak as she is known in Malaysia. I grew up hearing stories of her on creepy, fog filled nights up in the Puncak mountains outside of Jakarta where we would spend weekends attempting to escape the heat of the city. Her penchant for haunting pregnant women, babies and children was of course especially threatening to me and my friends.

In my early 20's I became pregnant which triggered an essential disclosure and healing of childhood abuse at the hands of my father. Suddenly, I related not to the child the Kuntilanak might attack, but to the Kuntilanak herself. My folkloric understanding – all passed orally on long car trips or during dark nights illuminated only by the dying embers of a fireplace – was that the ghost was once a woman who died in childbirth, that pregnancy being a result of tragic circumstances such as a rape and/or an abusive husband. In my lineage of knowledge, she had a hole in her belly – or what I later preferred to think of as her womb or feeling centre. This hole prevented her from being whole. It was the source of the vulnerability that led to damage – her 'woman-ness'.

By my late thirties, I became pregnant with my second child. I knew I wanted to create a short film about the Kuntilanak and to tell it from her perspective. To me she holds the justifiable fear women have of men, pregnancy, childbirth and the socially bound parameters on the role of mother. But by this time I had moved away from Indonesia and had been living in Australia for 15 years – my trust of my cultural cache and right to tell this story, to know what a Kuntilanak is, was shaken.

I went online to check that I had the facts right – only to find that there is no one clear definition of this folk character. I devoured forums and wikipages, both in Bahasa Indonesia and English, I watched clips of films and trawled through images (I know most of them now), but the particulars of what a Kuntilanak is proved to be slippery. All agree she is a beautiful woman with long dark hair who is scary and has something vague to do with hating men and children. That is about it. Everything else was up for grabs – where was the hole (in the neck, back, belly) or was there a hole at all or if she has a hole is that a Sundel Bolong. Can she be killed with a nail to the head, is she followed by the smell of frangipani, is she vampiric, was she pregnant, was she a stillborn female, was she a mother at all etc etc.

Everywhere there were contradictions and arguments. But nowhere was she cared for – nowhere was her personhood important or acknowledged. When she was a revenge character no one cared for the living victim she once had been, for the pain her life had contained. A ghost is after all is always preceded by being an alive human being. There were no forums that spoke of specific women who had been raped and died.

This is despite the existence of strong Sundanese and Javanese rituals performed on pregnant women that are *designed* to keep the Kuntilanak away. In fact, those rituals were actively discouraged by the Sukarno government who were keen to move away from the old superstitious beliefs proliferated by lay midwives. The rituals still exist, however many modern women undertake a version of these rituals without any understanding of its original purpose.

In the end I made my decisions based upon what I grew up with which I decided was authentic knowledge enough, and by my sociological and feminist intention to redeem her from the apparently unexamined sensationalism that sprawled across the internet. I decided that I owned her story as much as anyone else and that my

folkloric reclaiming might be a tiny step towards protecting this wronged woman.

The resulting short film, *White Song*, was shot in Brisbane, Australia as Indonesia. I held a production meeting to explain the cultural importance of ghosts in Indonesia and of the Kuntilanak in particular. As I did the white Australian members of crew sort of nodded, but when my Indonesian cast members explained that they had seen Kuntilanaks, or that one lived in her aunty's house etc, the Australian crew nearly fell off their seats.

The traced folkloric character of the Kuntilanak has gone from my internal experience to my searching for a single external locus of authenticity only to find that this doesn't exist back to my own internal experience and funnelled into a series of images made up of binary (we shot on digital) and equally passed on in person at my meeting and to folks who have watched the film at various festivals and venues in Australia, South America and the USA.

#### *White Song* – Short Film

The most famous of Indonesian ghosts, the Kuntilanak, tells of the haunting of a young woman. Told from the ghost's perspective *White Song* reclaims the humanity of a supernatural creature by exploring the intersection between the yearnings of a dead woman and those of a living one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNLjGhjV39o&feature=youtu.be>

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## Ethical Forms of Internet Writing: A Look at Internet Research Ethics in Asian Context

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A look at how the Internet is written not only involves how it is done, but also how it *should* be done. In this talk I will focus on the ethical guidelines that are or should be in place when scholars take the Internet itself, i.e. as it is written, as an object of study. Internet research ethics is a relatively new field of study that emerged as an offshoot of research ethics in the offline world. Conducting research in a population in the offline world calls for a consideration on how the population should be protected as they are human beings who have rights. Numerous guidelines have emerged to ensure that researchers respect the participants' rights and autonomy while they conduct their research. In the same vein, when information is gathered in the online world, the identity and the rights of the participants from whom the words that constitute internet writing should also be protected. As the Internet is expanding to become both a means to do their works and also as the object of their investigation itself, both the scholarly works which are the objects of internet research ethics investigation, and the deliberations within internet research ethics itself, comprise internet writing which is the topic of the meeting.

In this paper I would like to focus more specifically on the cultural factors that influence internet research ethics. Should the principle behind deliberations in internet research ethics be sensitive to the cultural values, say, of the East and the West? Here the principles of internet research ethics do reflect the age-old discussion on value pluralism. However, a more interesting aspect of the phenomenon is the possible line between the online world and the offline world with regards to how people construct themselves through words and how they write themselves and importantly how these issues interact with deliberations on research ethics on the internet. For example, in my previous study (Hongladarom 2017), I looked at how an MA thesis in internet studies at a Thai university straightforwardly

discussed the pseudonyms of bloggers who are housewives when they discuss their roles and daily lives with their peers on the internet. As internet research ethics have not been a rule at this university, the researcher uses the real pseudonyms—the same names that these bloggers actually use in their real-life postings in Thai language blogs. This makes it possible for an investigating reader to know the real, offline identity of the housewives. However, the purpose of my paper is not to pronounce what is right or wrong in this situation, but to illustrate a case where ethical deliberations themselves are part of internet writing, and that cultural factors do play a part, because a possible explanation of how this type of situation has taken place is that Thai researchers perhaps are not aware of potentially harmful consequences to the housewives if their names are released to the public. The harm is more serious than if the investigating reader finds out the real identity of the bloggers through the blogs themselves, because in the thesis the researcher has interviewed the housewives and published the results in her thesis. This, together with the use of the real pseudonyms, reveals much more information about the person than is possible through their blogs alone. Thus here we have the blogs of the housewives, the thesis that publishes their interviews, and the deliberations on the ethical nature of such undertaking, all intertwining and constituting writing the internet.

What we have here is thus a kind of academic writing that is informed through background culture, which perhaps unconsciously filters through the researcher's mind as she is writing the internet with her thesis. This does not mean that it is not a problem in the West, but the fact that the realization that there should be a serious study of internet research ethics has arisen first in the West seems to show that cultural factors are indeed involved. This also does not imply that there is no ethical awareness in the East, but the way ethical awareness

plays itself out in the two global regions is different, and this issue is also interesting in itself. This has led, among other things, to Thai internet users being much more reluctant in general to reveal who they really are, perhaps much more so than a typical user in the West. A possible explanation of this is that there is a lack of clear, actually enforced regulation in Thailand, resulting in Thai users trying to protect themselves by not revealing their real names even in Facebook and Twitter. However, in an atmosphere that tends to generate trust, as in one where a researcher interviews a number of research participants, the researcher is perhaps too trusting when she publishes the results in the thesis, apparently being unaware that the information there can be misused.

Here then, a question in the abstract of the Workshop can be answered. The question is: What does it mean for us, as scholars, to write the internet? My answer is that it means that the scholar has to be aware of ethical ramifications of her writing, and that the ethical ramifications in question are also part of the lore of internet writing in Asia, something that is very much part of the subject matter of which it is a consideration.

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**Soraj Hongladarom** is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Ethics of Science and Technology at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. He has published books and articles on such diverse issues as bioethics, computer ethics, and the roles that science and technology play in the culture of developing countries. His concern is mainly on how science and technology can be integrated into the life-world of the people in the so-called Third World countries, and what kind of ethical considerations can be obtained from such relations. A large part of this question concerns how information technology is integrated in the lifeworld of the Thai people, and especially how such integration is expressed in the use of information technology in education. His recent books are *A Buddhist Theory of Privacy* and *The Online Self*, both published by Springer. His research articles have appeared in *Bioethics*, *Minds and Machines*, *The Information Society*, *AI & Society*, *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, and *Social Epistemology*, among others.

## (Re)Writing the Internet through Collaborative Storytelling

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*We love to take forms of communication built for telling the truth and lie in them, in other words to create fictions.*

(Wittig 2017)

In this short paper, I will explore ways people repurpose the platforms provided by the Internet to create collaborative fictions in the form of netprov, or networked improvisation (Wittig 2017). This use of the Internet to create distributed, transmedia stories suggests that, rather than simply digitizing offline practices of writing and storytelling, these networked platforms allow people to create new written forms, new genres of writing, and new ways of playfully improvising and creating folklore. After first introducing the concept of netprov, I will discuss *Monstrous Weather*, a recent netprov, and consider ways that this form encourages further retelling, rewriting, and adaptation of stories across media.

Networked technology has often been repurposed for storytelling. As Rettberg (2005) describes, early online collaborative storytelling projects such as Coover's *Hypertext Hotel* (1994), a collaborative hypertext document created by Coover and his students, and Rettberg, Stratton and Gillespie's collaborative hypertext novel *The Unknown* (1998), all made use of Internet technology to connect people to create and share stories. These works involved a limited group of participants, and took place within custom-made websites.

As social media platforms began to proliferate, people began to use these technologies as a medium for collaborative storytelling, capitalizing on the fact that people may or may not realize that what they are encountering is fiction. A form of creative, imaginative play, netprov involves groups of collaborators use existing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit to "co-create micro-work[s] of imaginative fiction" (Wittig 2015).

According to Wittig, netprov is:

... a way of using existing digital media in combinations to create fake characters who pretend to do things in the real world... they induce a moment of vertigo where people don't quite know whether it's real or not — 'was what I'm reading written by a real person, or is it fake?' (2015)

An example of this is Wittig and Marino's *OccupyMLA* (2011), in which three fictional characters tweet about the plight of non-tenure faculty members, claiming to have "occupied" the Modern Language Association. Reading the comments on the *Chronicle of Higher Education* article in which the authors explain their performance (Wittig and Marino 2013), it is clear that many who encountered the work did not initially recognize that it was a work of fiction. In addition, those who did notice it was fictional did not always appreciate the satirical nature of the work, instead taking offense at its "cartoonish" portrayal of adjunct faculty members. Perhaps one reason for this was the fact that many readers failed to appreciate that each individual tweet was actually part of a "larger, interconnected story that would require immersive reading" (Berens 2013). This suggests that this type of dispersed, performative, transmedia storytelling is creating, not simply a series of micro-fictions, but instead the basis for a larger, fictional story world, a digital folklore of the sort that could perhaps only exist on the Internet.

To understand the process of creating a fictional world with a rich, shared folklore from a fragmented set of micro-fictions, it is worth looking in more detail at a recent netprov, *Monstrous Weather* (Meanwhile... netprov studio 2016). This work was played out in the form of posts in Google Groups. Participants were encouraged to "summarize a scary story somebody told the week the internet was down... include one bit of weird weather." Initially the stories were self-contained, making use of the "weird weather" theme but having little else to

connect them. Gradually, however, posts began to make reference to each other, sometimes as the result of authors mentioning another author's name (as a fictionalized versions of the actual author), and at other times by referring to events depicted in earlier posts. Although there was never a completely cohesive "fiction" created over the three weeks of the performance, there was a sense that all of these micro-fictions were building upon each other and creating a common "lore". This became most apparent in the final few posts, where a sequence emerged that seemed to be trying to bring some sense of closure to the larger fiction.

Following the end of the "official" collaboration, several of the authors embarked on adaptations of all or part of the story collection in a range of other media, including a PDF release of the "Thor in Minnesota" thread, and interactive adaptations in platforms such as Twine, HypeDyn, and Ink. Suggestions were also made for an adaptation as a printed book, a Google maps version, and possibly even a version printed on umbrellas. Finally, several of the authors performed a reading of selected story fragments at the Electronic Literature Organization conference in July 2017.

It is interesting to consider why the authors felt the need to rework and retell what was initially an ephemeral, fragmented online performance. According to Hutchinson (2006), the fundamental appeal of literary adaptation "comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk); so too is change." Wittig claims that "[n]etprov is experienced as a performance as it is published; it is read later as a literary archive" (Wittig 2017). This may be true, but for these participants there seemed to be a need to continue to perform, to rework and retell the stories, perhaps to recapture the experience of the collaborative performance, or perhaps simply to keep the stories alive.

Nothing is ever constant or static on the Internet. It is this ability to continue to rework, retell, and rewrite that characterizes writing on the Internet, and that makes it challenging and rewarding to study the spread of stories, true or otherwise, in this new medium.

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## Near Queer Objects: Writing as Recension

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The emergence of democratic digitality in India has been seen as a close ally to the expressions and writing of queer identities. The Internet and queerness in India are often seen as syncretic (Manayath and Vasudevan 2014) — one would not exist without the other, and hence the writing of queerness and writing of being digitally connected often are the same. If there were ever a way of conceiving a state of homo-nationalism (Yue, 2016) where the state was being written through the intimacies of its populace, then the digital would have to be the first medium to reify it.

Being digital, it might be argued, is being queer. There is no denying this new condition of writing and being written, of crafting sexual identities and coding digital platforms and technologies, as the Internet encounters the conditions of queerness. However, even as we celebrate the Internet as providing this affordance, and the formation of new political and affective communities of queer belonging, thus granting visibility and voice to a hitherto invisible and unheard group of people, there is a specific form of coerced invisibility that is overlooked in the understanding of how queerness and Internet get co-written.

I want to make this argument particularly looking at

### #Kand Videos

Kand videos, refer to a subgenre of user generated videos that show men and women, in gender separated spaces, indulging in ‘just a little fun’, often in various stages of undress and expressing a homosocial (if not homoerotic) contact that would be otherwise taboo in everyday social life. Kand videos have been celebrated as the moment of visibility of the queer Indian body, becoming the reference point of sexual identification and expression. I want to propose that while it might seem like these moments of finding a voice and coming of age are indeed a part of the promise that the Internet holds, it is important to examine the specific materialities of the technical architecture and the cultural containment

of disruptive bodies online. I want to argue that the Kand videos represent a particular trope of writing the Internet and our bodies with it, which promotes visibility while continually denying the very thing that it makes visible.

### #StraightActing Queers

Within the queer dating apps, across the global landscape, one of the most recurrent hashtags that is used is ‘Straight Acting’. Apart from the cultural taboo that propels this #straightacting metadata tagging. Digital information overload has ensured that what we consume on most of our social media websites and feeds is not serendipitous or agential consumption — most of what reaches us is governed by predictive algorithms that curate and customize information for us.

This central mechanism of algorithms designing our information feeds essentially means that objects that are identified as queer would only be promoted and circulated within the filter bubbles of other queer persons, following the principles of network homophily that builds segregated neighbourhoods of sexual profiles. Kand videos, identified as queer or homoerotic objects would be contained in digitally segregated neighbourhoods where nodes (users) identified as queer are all stored in similar databases. The networks, based on big-data correlations and predictions, continue to build segregated zones where people who carry similar profile markers are put into filter bubbles of information circulation. Effectively, in order to reach people who are not explicitly or self-claimed queer, the videos will have to eschew almost all pretense of affective and emotional depth. They will be presented only as fun and games, as #straightacting so that their internal desires and mechanisms of queer identity and fantasy can be masqueraded and made palatable outside the filter bubbles and enable digital memetic virality.

The Kand videos, then, even as they find a space of writing queer writing remain in an echo-chamber.

And if they want to escape it, they have to wear the mantle of ‘just fun’, denying the queer body a claim to queerness, and make it palatable to the straight eye. This particular capacity of the Internet to not just write the content but also define the vectors of its circulation thus writes the queer body as schizophrenic — in order to be queer, it has to first perform a heterosexual identity. Bodies and videos that do not manage to be #straightacting, are often removed, chastised, censored, and punished by coded normative exclusions prescribed in terms of service, rules of conduct, and self-appointed vigilantes who ‘flag’ these videos as inappropriate or offensive.

### #NoHomo Audiences

#NoHomo is another hashtag that continues to emerge in the description and disclaimers of these videos. #NoHomo is routinely used for self-identification with queer dating cultures, especially by men who might be married to women, as well as those who fetishise trans-encounters. However, #NoHomo is not just a space for self identification that marks the fluidity of sexual practices and identities. As a meme and as an invective, #NoHomo is used as a way of control, chastisement, and policing of how people express themselves on the web.

If there are comments which marvel at the homoerotic space, single out a particular body as one that they desire, or wish to be a part of this orgiastic setting, the commenter is invariably condemned with the proclamation #NoHomo. The hashtag is then not just an adjective — something that consumers adapt for themselves, it is also a verb — a declaration that there is no space for gay and queer people in the discursive and distributed spaces of these videos. Any expression of queer desire or even the hint of consuming these videos through tropes of desire is faced with this hashtag and subsequently also derided, flagged as inappropriate, abused and threatened. The performers themselves rarely take up #NoHomo in their descriptions, but those who have appointed themselves the police of digital spaces, will speak on their behalf and insist that this is not for homos. The Kand video will always be a near-queer object, but never quite queer.

The queer body, within the digital spaces is simultaneously hypervisible and selectively visible.

When it is hypervisible, it is engineered to be #straightacting and when it is selectively visible, it is engendered as #nohomo. Melissa Greg, in her thesis on forced experience, particularly pays attention to how the identities of those who receive affect are monitored and constructed, where the agency, not only of the artefact but also those who receive it is put in strict bounds. If you receive Kand videos, you might have an aspiration towards queerness but you would never be able to name it as such.

This particular phenomenon of Kand videos allows me to come back to our conversation about writing the Internet: It is a strange form of writing, where as long as there is no name, no identity, no explicit desire spelled out, this writing will be allowed. But if it was ever named, claimed, or celebrated as queer, then that voice will be silenced and queerness will continue only in these conditions of gray areas of gayness, where you can speak, but cannot have a voice, can have a desire but not claim it, and can have actions but never an identity.

And as follow-up questions, what we need to contemplate is three things:

1. What are the scripts of the Internet that prescribe rather than describe conditions of life and love in emerging network societies?
2. What are the bodies that have to bear the burden of being written as well as writing, and what are the kinds of digital network architecture protocols that override the desire and affect of these bodies?
3. How do we understand the vectors of correlation that refuse identities and focuses on atomization of practices which thus lead to the writing of hypervisible identities that support the status quo and continue to neglect and exclude those who bear disruptive desires?

The queer body works on tropes of recension — the capacity of reconstructing its queerness through practices and experiences as opposed to predefined identities and structures. The act of recension might be seen as a new way of writing the Internet, where we do not begin with the logic and logistics of the digital network but look at the various layers of digitality that form the conditions of writing, the acts of being written, and the negotiations to escape the texts that we are being installed in.

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## Command + Shift + 4 A Screenshot of Online Performativity

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I discuss performativity through the perspective of writing the internet, focusing on the user and the content-maker, primarily across web applications and content, but also carrying implications for web design.

As a film scholar and media industry professional, I am both a user and a content maker.

I seek to combine and focus these approaches to pose questions about the relationship and experience of users and facilitators of content, exploring the feedback loop of demand and supply of content as a hermeneutic process, asking about receiving and creating content, and the application of data.

Discussing performativity online incorporates the term of embodiment regarding the establishment of repeated actions, sensual experience and interactions, and the continuous rehearsal and execution of online user behaviour and identity. While phenomenology provides one possible approach to explore the experience of user and content maker further, here, my investigation of the term of embodiment is filtered primarily through that of performativity, and wider implications on identity from gender studies, which I relate to digital literacy as a form of online self-conduct.

I recommend we re-visit Judith Butler's 'Gender Trouble' (1990) through the perspective of writing the internet. Examining how gender and identity are being constructed as society-wide processes that function across both community and the individual, surprisingly in both cases without as well as through rules of reciprocity, Butler provides the discourse of performativity, which is highly relevant to today's understanding of digital culture.

My proposed discussion applies more broadly to digital culture, yet I would like to qualify this by addressing online entertainment culture, focusing on

social media and video content. A common understanding in entertainment is 'Give the audience what they demand'.

What does that mean for digital culture, and what does this mean for online audiences - users - content makers? And to which extent can this be open to questions, or does it become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', a user behaviour observation based on statistic expectancy bias?

The number of clicked 'like'-buttons and data analysis reports show how many people watched the latest video that I uploaded. Many industry professionals will enthusiastically crunch these numbers and conclude what kind of content is successfully received, what 'goes viral', and is stimulating user responses, and they will present the holy grail of modern content production: The numbers that tell us what is demanded by whom; by women, men, below 30s, over 40s, territories, etc.

Butler's theory of gender performativity develops around the actions we take as and within a society, and the practised, applied notions of identity and behaviourism, strongly depending on speech acts and repetition, and rehearsal of semiology and signifiers of gender identity in everyday life. I apply this perspective to discussing online behaviour, for example on social media. Platforms condition users to behave in a certain way, to repeatedly perform actions, adapt to specific language (branded e.g. 'googling' as a verb), and to be rewarded within — and beyond — the system of this particular platform. Facebook pops up little windows, suggesting the reward of audience outreach if we post something 'relevant'. Meaningfulness, topicality, actuality, contemporary realism of human interactions are put in context of personal and corporate branding and marketing strategies, and at the same time are crucial part of our digital identities.

As a user, I perform the likings, the looking up, the verbal reference in my offline life, the rehearsal of an online persona, captivated in algorithms that suggest social appreciation of my identity — bridging online and offline, in search of the real ‘me’, both marketing strategy-wise, and often, personally, as a way to stay connected, to be part of an exchange, to promote ‘my content’. Am I ‘my content’? Shortcutting the discussion between rehearsed and repeated digital actions to digital identities and offline people within increasingly online societies: To which extent are my actions online giving insights to my user behaviour, and to which extent to my person?

Now, here I come as a content maker, receiving commissions for online videos. The data we gather motivates someone to come over to me and instruct that my next video should play on the fact that  $x$  amount of  $z$  gendered viewers aged  $y$  watched my latest video. Brand proposals are written, brand identities created, non-existing characters created to visualize an emotional brand experience. User profiles are constructed, and narratives about consumer behaviour are generated, on which basis seemingly relatable fictional characters are developed, embodying the user profile. There is my audience; that non-existing, stock-footage-faced character. Marketing outreach targets are set. The process of online performativity shapes and constitutes a process of embodiment that we can discuss specifically within digital literacy. Actions, content, and economization of identities are becoming extensions to users and content makers. Users begin to embody brand figures by default, as they are being presented with certain content, content makers embody the audiences they statistically evaluate, target, and produce for.

The perspective of digital literacy then can mean that we practice awareness of these mechanisms, that we are able to negotiate between offline and online identity, or that we reflect on generating identity clichés and second-nature personae as signifiers of a commercialized online economy, instead of digital sociology.

The book ‘Technically Wrong’ (2017) by Sara Wachter-Boettcher sketches the trajectory of proxy servers collecting user data and drawing up estimates about consumer tracks. Those servers, according to the author, were estimating the gender of users, and on that basis, marketing strategies were

formed to aim at those online gender identities. If this is true, then the bias about any specific type of online identity, not just gender, becomes a self-feeding feedback loop without escape. Audiences are being estimated and served based on that estimate — therefore, whoever responds makes this estimate come true. Models of online user and content assessment alike become self-contained, self-validated machines of algorithmic perpetuity. The hermeneutic circle of learning processes, socially and economically, is short-cut and transferred to another universe of machine-learned and human practiced bias, where authenticity is only valid because its initial outset is disconnected from its target. The web is affected in design, systems, and operation by such processes. In online marketing, the term ‘organic’ refers to audiences that reached content by themselves, by stumbling upon it, or by following the content maker. Non-organic audiences are cash-bought spans of attention. Audiences and spectatorship are tradable values. Whether audiences demand or whether there is a demand for audiences has become seemingly the same mean to win an economical race for clicks, a stand-in for monetary potential, but also, for society, and redundancy.

Are audiences created by content makers, or by users? On which side is each one of us?

If we are members of a digital culture, which language and signs of literacy do we promote, and share?

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## Rethinking the Form of Internet's Content

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### The Problems

Before the creation of XML, content on the Web had to be written using HTML. HTML was used to define structural elements of a webpage, and users had to know HTML programming in order to create content on the Web. However, with XML, users no longer need to learn HTML coding in order to create content. This has two implications: a) the rapid growth of user-generated content, and b) with content now separated from its form, content can be exported and 'mashable' with content from other webpages.

Various scholars writing about Web 2.0 have hailed the value that is created through user-generated content as the key distinguishing characteristic of Web 2.0 (Shirky, 2008; Wesch, 2007). There are many benefits as already articulated by many scholars, such as: enriched social networks (Benkler, 2006), businesses becoming more competitive, innovative, and sensitive to the needs of customers (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), amplified, and mass personal communication in society (Shirky, 2008).

In this presentation I present two problems that have also come about as a result of the Web as we know today. The first is the problem of *platform blindness*. In the early days of the Web there were only a few platforms for one to browse content: web pages and forums with web pages being the dominant platform, and they were also mostly text and static images. YouTube emerged in 2005 as one of the earliest platforms for sharing user-generated videos, with the "Numa Numa" video dance as one of the first worldwide participatory movement (Wesch, 2008). We can observe many other similar movements today that connected people across borders, #MeToo and #TimesUp being more recent examples. But while hashtags connected content, they do not take into account the context of platforms. For instance, a post created using Facebook may come with attributes in the content that are different from a post on the same topic but

created using YouTube or Instagram. We must address this issue, as there are now many more platforms that can be used to create content on the Internet (and access is no longer limited to the Web), and each social media platform comes with its own history and algorithms of coding 'social connectivity' (van Dijck, 2013). We can also think of these platforms as the non-human writers of the Internet, with their unique (and often unknown) algorithms have, and their different affordances. By missing out on the features and affordances of platforms, content can be misunderstood and abused.

The second related problem is the issue of *context collapse*. As Vitak (2012) explained, context collapse refers to "the flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in one's social network, such that people from different contexts become part of a singular group of message recipients" (p. 541). In other words, because there are multiple, possible audiences, creators of content no longer know for sure who they are writing messages for. It is not that context is ignored; the problem is that multiple contexts are 'collapsing' into one single moment — that comes when a user is thinking about writing something on the Internet. I argue in this talk that this is an unintended consequence arising from two developments. The first is technological — with XML and the ability to export content, mashing content from different sources, one no longer knows for sure how his/her content may be recreated or interpreted by a different audience. We can think of another example from Facebook. With the sharing feature, content that was originally written and intended for friends can be shared with people you do not even know, and hence be subjected to greater misunderstandings. The second development is related to the massive adoption of technologies. As more and more people adopt and use social media in their everyday lives, the problem of context collapse is compounded. When creating content on Facebook or YouTube, a user has to deal with all the possible permutations of audiences on

his or her social network: friends, parents, grandparents, colleagues, acquaintances, schoolmates, classmates, partners, ex-partners, children, and so on. As a result, the user is, in Wesch (2008)'s own words, "frozen in front of this black hole of contexts, faces a crisis of self-presentation". Because of this problem, I argue that people take a few recourses. They may take risks and put out content created after processing context the best way they can (but, as I will show in some cases, they are caught off guard by unanticipated consequences when their writings are shared). Or they may put out content that is as general and broad as possible to account for the most public audience. We can already observe this, with many tweets on Twitter being retweets of news media articles, or retweets of things public figures have written. That comes with issues of authenticity, power, and representation of voices online. The other trajectory is that many users withdraw from writing and posting content online completely.

### The way forward

I will conclude my talk on a methodological and research implications for scholars. As researchers studying the Internet, it is crucial that we do not ignore the problems highlighted. I discuss two recommendations in studying content on the Internet. Firstly, adopt socio-technical values in thinking about the core subjects of analysis, to allow for various social systems encompassing the content that is created. Scholars such as Bargh & McKenna (2004) have highlighted this already as an approach that is growing, which focuses on the "interaction between features of the Internet communication setting and the particular goals and needs of the communicators, as well as the social context of the interaction setting" (p. 578). Secondly, ask pertinent questions about the context driving the creation and writing on the Internet. Who do they represent, and are they aligned with the goals of analysis? What are the assumptions underlying our study of writing on the Internet? In discussing this question, I discuss evidence of how writing on the Internet needs to be treated as a genre and unit on its own, rather than understood through comparisons with offline expressions.

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## My Malaysian Uncles are Reddit Conspiracy Lurkers

### Teik-Kim Pok

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I will be stitching together news, memes and conspiracy discussions that my 60-something elderly Malaysian relatives share on social media apps such as WhatsApp. I will attempt to reveal a patchwork of intercultural influences on their social interaction and reflect on how the extended Southeast Asian family grapevine navigates the boundaries of political discussion across cyberspace in the digital palm of their hands.

In an era where the phenomena of attachment to folkloric modes of sharing, algorithmically-skewed ideological echo bubbles and the 'post-truth' news cycle are interlinked, I intend to present an early development of this work to provoke greater discussion about the role of lore in this workshop

### 1. Context

Recent events such as the Brexit vote and the election of Trump has been lamented as evidence of the body politic demonstrating a diminished ability to distinguish between contemporary examples of 'fake news' and verifiable information about policy – a diminishing ability that has been seen to undermine optimum conditions under which suffrage could be exercised in a Western political context — that is, by an informed citizenry.

While the creeping influence of hyperbolic news-spreading has been in stock-in-trade since the yellow journalism of the 19th century, the current environment of conflating of news and entertainment, the rise of celebrity as charismatic authority and social media as a dominant force in information broadcasting that has been blamed for being vulnerable to political weaponisation and fear-mongering, with companies such as Facebook expressing latter-day contrition for its role transitioning from uncurated platform to broadcaster.

### 2. Inciting Thoughts

At the same time, closer to home, a confusing picture began to emerge in my family's social media network. Like 21st century Asian families whose connections have become more diasporic across the globe, our main mode of staying in touch has been through apps such as the Facebook-owned WhatsApp Messenger, a virtual kinship glue of sorts.

The newsfeed consisted of family travel plans, wedding, recipes, Chinese New Year arrangements and funeral announcements, as well as the odd meme amongst cousins. By 2016, they began to be replaced by forwarded news items from my older and highly-educated relatives that were unverifiable. They were couched in sensationalist tones and generally focused on either a) excoriating political bogeyman, b) overstated crime waves or c) spruiked questionable health fads. A number of these appeared to be monetised clickbait and a handful related to the American election, which had little direct relevance to my Malaysian relatives

That this was transmitted almost exclusively by the older generation was at first perplexing. Out of my cousins' and my concern, we began to post debunk these posts with links from more reliable sources as well as 'hoax-slaying' sites such as snopes.com. The ensuing conversations ranged from head-scratch inducing to heated.

While I was initially tempted to write this off as an exercise geriatric 'mis-fearing' through sharing compelling stories of risk and danger (Sunstein, 2006), upon further reflection, I perceived the potential for a deeper unpacking of my relatives' cultural cognition as a function adhering more to folkloric modes, rather than a conscious effort to perpetuate untruths.

It is from this point that I am cognisant of the disorientation wrought by the speedy evolution of communication channels that has given rise to "culture-defining tensions of reason and faith in the

post-secular phase, where societies, and the secular and sacred, are integrated differently...by way of dis-enchantment *and* re-enchantment are constantly pulling at each other” (McManus, 2013)

Simultaneously, the racial and economic rhetoric in Malaysia has hovered in divisive tones and at similar fever pitch to that in the West. Due to the graft and corruption case, the 1MDB strategic development fund scandal (Case, 2016) that has tested the resilience of Malaysia’s already-stretched public institutions, the atmosphere of instability coupled with distrust of the political classes has have invited an emphatic response from its citizens not unlike the populist trends in the West.

When Bascom names the basic paradox of folkloric function as providing ‘socially-approved outlets for repressions’(Bascom, 1954) wrought by conformity-enforcing cultural norms, it did not necessarily extend to the phenomenon of viral fake news as entrenching a crises of cognitive dissonance in 21st century participatory democracy.

### 3. First Stage Presentation

It is from this starting point that I will present at the workshop a 5 minute performative digital rabbit warren, inspired from discussions and archives of my relatives’ WhatsApp group, and invite participants to share their stories of managing their fake news-induced anxieties across familial networks.

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**Teik-Kim Pok** is a performance maker and live art producer whose work has sat in audience-activated experiences and speculative interactions.

His most recent work dabbles in conflating discursive, pseudo-therapeutic and popular cultural references. Kino Klink, which debuted in 2013 at the Underbelly Arts Festival on Cockatoo Island, was a mocked-up therapy space where audience members could choose to interact one of four performers to unpack Joseph Campbellian tropes explicitly demonstrated in Hollywood blockbusters they were familiar with as a source of life-coaching device. Part-film club, part speculative social practice, the work invites audiences to weigh up the mythic significance of our popular cultural artefacts in an embodied way.

I’m not a psychic, just a performer, a passive interactive installation which was exhibited in 2011 at the Tin Sheds Gallery at the University of Sydney, was billed as a horoscope rewriting exchange. Drawn from psychologist Bertram Forer’s 13 statements of validity, viewers were encouraged to anonymously compose horoscopic advice for strangers for which they could swap for prewritten advice.

On screen, he has appeared as the titular character in Alvin’s Harmonious World of Opposites, a feature film by Platon Theodoris who won a Director’s Choice Award at the Sydney Underground Film Festival in 2015. Teik-Kim has worked at Playwriting Australia, the national company for new play development, constructing access, mentoring pathways and eventual production opportunities for playwrights whose work sit outside the dominant Anglo/European model. Formerly a committee member of CAAP (Contemporary Asian Australian Performance) and with whom he collaborated on Lotus, an initiative focused on enabling the production of Asian-Australian theatre-makers on the Australian mainstage. As an arts writers, he is also was a regular contributor to RealTime, one of Australia’s leading contemporary performing arts journals for 25 years.

In April 2018, Teik-Kim will graduate as a member of the inaugural cohort of MFA’s in Cultural Leadership at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Sydney.

## About Respondents, Organisers, and Exhibitors

**Itty Abraham** is Head of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He moved to NUS from the University of Texas at Austin, where he directed the South Asia Institute from 2007-2010. Before that he served as program director for Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Global Security and Cooperation at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York and Washington, D.C. He is the author, most recently, of *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics*, published by Stanford University Press in 2014; the editor of volumes on borderlands, political violence, and nuclear power; and numerous scholarly articles and book chapters. He was a Fulbright-Nehru senior fellow in 2011 and has received grants from the National Science Foundation, and the Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur foundations, among others. His research interests include science and technology studies, postcolonial theory, and international relations.

**Paolo Casani** is currently a part-time PhD research student at the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities. His research is an exploration into ways in which computer, information and communication technologies (ICTs) impact how we see, understand, and conceive ourselves and the world at large. It aims to collect testimonies and insights about the ways and extent in which these new technologies influence how we experience our sense of self and express and create identity. Paolo's academic background includes studies in art and graphic design, the humanities and computer science. He holds a BA in Philosophy and an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck, University of London, where he also studied Computer Science. Paolo also has an MSc with Distinction in Business Systems Integration from Brunel University, West London.

**Gregory Clancey** is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, the Leader of the STS (Science, Technology, and Society) Cluster at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), and Master of Tembusu College at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He formerly served NUS as Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and as Chairman of the General Education Steering Committee. Assoc Prof Clancey received his PhD in the Historical and Social Study of Science and Technology from MIT. He has been a Fulbright

Graduate Scholar at the University of Tokyo, a Lars Hierta Scholar at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, and a Visiting Professor at Nagasaki University. He has won three NUS teaching awards. Assoc Prof Clancey's research centers on the cultural history of science & technology, particularly in modern Japan and East Asia. His book *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2006) won the Sidney Edelstein Prize from the Society for the History of Technology in 2007; and was selected as one of the "11 Best Books about Science" for the UC Berkeley Summer Reading List in 2009. He is co-editor of *Major Problems in the History of American Technology* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998), *Historical Perspectives on East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine* (Singapore: Singapore U. Press & World Scientific 2002), and *The City as Target* (NY: Routledge, 2011). Assoc Prof Clancey is the 2012 recipient of the Morison Prize from MIT for "combining humanistic values with effectiveness in the world of practical affairs, and in particular, in science and technology".

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**Connor Graham** is a senior lecturer at Tembusu College and a research fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. His research centers on living and dying in the times of the Internet in Asia, with a particular focus on new information and communication technologies.

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**Briony Kidd** is a graduate of the VCA Film School and lives in Hobart, Tasmania. Her best known short, the gothic melodrama *The Room at the Top of the Stairs*, recently debuted on the Shudder platform and her latest short, *Watch Me* is now on the festival circuit. Her latest project in development is a feature film supported by Screen Australia, inspired by the 'psycho-biddy' films of the 1960s. Briony is also a founding member of the Radio Gothic collective, which uses text, foley and live sampling to create creepy tales for theatre and podcast. In addition to her own creative work, Briony is a freelance writer and the director and programmer of the *Stranger With My Face* International Film Festival, which focuses on women's perspectives in genre. *Stranger With My Face* was recently named in Movie Maker Magazine's list of The World's 15 Bloody Best Genre Fests.

**Sun Sun Lim** (PhD, LSE) is Professor and Head of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. She studies the social implications of technology domestication by young people and families, charting the ethnographies of their Internet and mobile phone use. Her recent research has focused on understudied and marginalised populations including youths-at-risk, migrant workers and international migrant students. She has authored more than 70 books, articles and book chapters. Her latest books are *Mobile Communication and the Family: Asian Experiences in Technology Domestication* (Springer, 2016) and *Asian*

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**Kamini Ramachandran** is director of MoonShadow Stories and The Storytelling Centre Ltd. She is also creative producer of StoryFest: International Storytelling Festival Singapore. A fellow of the Royal Society of Arts with a BA English Language & Literature (Hons) UK, and MA Arts Pedagogy & Practice from Goldsmith's, University of London, she currently teaches her course The Storytelling Intensive at LASALLE College of the Arts. Kamini has performed commissioned works for The Esplanade, The Arts House, the National Arts Council, as well as festivals and conferences across Europe, Asia, Australia and Middle East. Kamini is a founding member, four-term president (2008-2012) and Vice-President (2012-2017) of the Storytelling Association (Singapore).

**Eugene Soh**, a.k.a. DUDE, (b. 1987) is a computer programmer who 'accidentally' became an artist when his photographic piece, contextualizing Da Vinci's Last Supper in a local hawker centre setting, surfaced on social media in 2012. That discovery, with its tongue-in-cheek commentary on contemporary life in Singapore, catapulted him into the art world. He has since been a full-time artist who codes really well.