

Welcome to Digital Intimacies #7

This year's symposium is hosted in partnership with UQ Art Museum's *Conflict in My Outlook* exhibition series. We hope the conversations throughout the Symposium and artworks in the current exhibitions stimulate engagements with how our lives are entangled with digital media, how digital media proliferate and obliterate intimacy, and the back and forth between our kaleidoscopic invention and creation.

Conflict in My Outlook is a two-part exhibition series entitled *Don't Be Evil* (UQ Art Museum) and *We Met Online* (online) exhibition. Lifted from Google's original corporate motto before it was insidiously removed in 2015, *Don't Be Evil* considers the all-pervasiveness of networked technologies on our everyday lives. With a focus on the techno-politics that define our age, participating artists investigate how the Internet has reshaped social relations and information flows, capitalism, and democracy, through forces that we as individuals have very little control over. (See online artworks such as [Xanthe Dobbie's Wallpaper Queens](#) or [Kate Geck's rlx:tech – digital spa](#), [Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman's i'm here to learn so :\)\)\)\)\)\)](#) or [Daniel McKewen's The 'ideo-log' Project](#)).

Don't Be Evil seeks to materialise the invisible power structures operating beneath the surface of our devices: complex interfaces of bodies and data that are propelled through satellites, fibre optic cables and server farms into machine learning initiatives and tradable futures. The exhibition correlates the extractive infrastructures that continue settler-colonial legacies through the mining of data, human labour and finite resources.

UQ Art Museum will host a tour of the exhibition from Curator Anna Briers during the symposium.

Following the Digital Intimacies tradition, over 30 papers will be showcased across disciplines that explore all facets of the entanglements between our intimate experiences, feelings, affects, experiences, bodies and digital media and technologies. Like last year *Digital Intimacies* will proceed without a registration fee. This means it won't be fully catered, but we hope to provide some catering - such as a main meal on both days. We're doing this to be as inclusive as possible on participation and responsive to an ever-changing situation with restrictions on travel and gatherings. Please note that all UQ events are subject to change at any time.

Live tweeting? The symposium hashtag is **#digint21** and please tag **@HASSUQ**.

We welcome you to contact [Digital Cultures and Societies](#) for more information.

– *The Digital Intimacies #7 team and UQ Art Museum*

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Unceded Lands on which The University stands. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. This always was and will always be Aboriginal Land, a place of shared knowledge and language, community, creativity, and storytelling.

Program overview

DAY ONE

0900-1015: Curator's tour of *Conflict in My Outlook_Don't Be Evil*

1015-1030: Welcome

1030-1200: Session 1: *Encounters with Bodies*

1200-1245 Lunch

1245-1415: Session 2: *Body Work*

1415-1545: Session 3: *Scenes, Waves, Fashions, Memes*

1545-1600: Session break

1600-1730: Session 4: *Creators*

1730-1830: Performance and drinks.

DAY TWO

0900-1030: Spotlight talk: Xanthe Dobbie and Emily van der Nagel

1030-1200: Session 5: *Everyday Feelings*

1200-1245: Lunch

1245-1415: Session 6: *Cute, Chill, Super toxic*

1415-1530: Session 7: *Care*

1530-1545: Session break

1545-1715: Session 8: *Identities*

1715-1730: Closing remarks

1730-1800: Performance and drinks.

A note on the format: all performances and panels will be livestreamed via Zoom webinar. Where we've noted 'online' or 'in-person' is just to indicate whether the speaker is presenting from UQ or not. If you have registered in-person, please attend at the venue both days.

Program – Day One

Curator's tour *Conflict in My Outlook_Don't Be Evil* **0900-1015**

Venue: UQ Art Museum, meet in the foyer (in-person only)

Welcome **1015-1030**

Venue: Terrace Room, Sir Llew Edwards (14) and livestreamed.

Session 1: Encounters with Bodies **1030-1200**

Chair: Mo Engel

Elizabeth Stephens (in-person)

Heavy Breathing: Intimate Encounters with Patricia Piccinini's Posthuman bodies

Patricia Piccinini's digital artwork "Breathing Room" is a multimedia video triptych of the internal anatomy of a mutant life form. Within a mass of pulsing pink flesh, a series of rectum-like orifices pant faster and faster before releasing in a long sigh and breathing evenly again, on a repeating loop. Installed on three walls of a small viewing room, "Breathing Room" is an immersive work that encloses the viewer inside this mutant biology. In this presentation, I will take "Breathing Room" as representative of the profound re-imagining of the body in Piccinini's work. Hers in an oeuvre in which anatomies are turned inside out and organs rearranged, in which flowers become meat and walls come alive. Piccinini herself often contextualizes her own sympathy for the monster as part of a long feminist tradition that can be traced back to Shelley's Frankenstein. This presentation will examine the intimate encounter with the monstrous and posthuman, in all its fleshy alterity, staged in this body of work.

Mair Underwood (in-person)

"Trenbolone is like the bat shit crazy girlfriend you consider breaking up with daily, but you never do because the sex is so fucking good lol": Bodybuilders' relationships with, and on, the veterinary anabolic androgenic steroid, trenbolone

Digital communities, particularly online enhancement drug-using communities, are spaces where relationships are formed. These relationships are not only with people, but also with drugs. They are spaces where drugs have social lives. In this presentation I discuss the findings of my research into the veterinary anabolic, trenbolone. Trenbolone is used by cattle farmers to ensure the muscularity of beef cattle. It is such a powerful drug that the run-off from cattle farms causes complete sex reversal in the fish exposed to it. Although not deemed fit for human consumption, this drug is also used by bodybuilders, who describe it as unlike any other anabolic androgenic steroid. An extremely versatile drug that produces a certain valued aesthetic ('cut', 'dry' and 'vascular'), trenbolone is referred to as producing a 'comic book effect'. But bodybuilders have a love/hate relationship with trenbolone, often experiencing significant side effects in relation to mood, anxiety levels, sex drive and sexual

proclivities. Through internet memes and quotes from bodybuilders, I illustrate bodybuilders relationships with, and on, trenbolone.

Marianne Clark (online)

Next Stop, the Pelvic Floor: Rethinking Bodily Interiorities and Exteriorities through Mobile Apps and Insertable Devices

An array of mobile apps and insertable devices aimed at improving pelvic floor function have emerged in the last decade alongside more familiar digital self-tracking devices and period tracking apps. Part of broader gendered health assemblages, these apps and devices promise to help users of all genders address and prevent pelvic floor dysfunction and consequently avoid feelings of embarrassment caused by incontinence, improve sexual function and pleasure, and regain a sense of control of one's life. While these apps share similarities to other self-tracking devices and media, the intimate and interior nature of the pelvic floor raises intriguing questions around bodily interiors and exteriors and the role of the digital in the production and disruption of these boundaries. In this paper I take up new materialist concepts in order to complicate common sense understandings of the 'pelvic floor' as a discrete biological entity and examine pelvic floors apps and devices as bio-techno-social phenomena.

Clare Davies (online)

Digital technologies and embodied experiences: a study in a sample of women in Australia

Today, new dietary trends such as clean eating, veganism, intermittent fasting, and paleo dominate social media platforms. These dietary trends are significantly embedded in food and health discourses that shape popular beliefs and present the affective forces that promote an ideal state of being healthy that the layperson can achieve through a specific way of life, rather than following mainstream nutrition science. My research project aims to explore the role of digital technologies among women aged 18-35 living in Australia to uncover the factors that influence dietary practices. I situate my study as part of an emerging field of scholarship that draws attention to the entanglements of relational ontologies and engagements that explain human health and embodiment. Initial findings from qualitative fieldwork point to the micro-political encounters and affective forces that women face when making health and food-related decisions, including those impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Given the potential effects on health outcomes, individual experiences that prompt and shape certain food behaviours require analysis. This research will impact the field by contributing to the limited existing literature on the role of digital intimacies in food consumption, understanding the utility of an integrated framework to better understand the factors that influence normative ideals of embodiment and food consumption that may help situate the discourse and interactions that promote ethical communications.

Sarah Cefai (online)

Content after content warnings: Notes on the trigger

What can we learn about the 'transfer of power' (Kipnis 2018) in the culture of the content warning? Content Warnings can be situated in a number of ways: as a history of the present of theories of censorship and representation; a mediation of 'offence'; a manifestation of the politics of affect in digitally networked societies (and their attendant under-regulation, networked misogyny, public sexuality, and so on); an apex of the culture wars (polarisation, abstraction, anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, defensive affect, etc.). Furthermore, content warnings claim to presume a theory of trauma. This paper offers some reflections on

the role of the 'trigger' in situating the image that has become intimate to us not only through 'circuits of representation' but dataveillance. The trigger invites reflection on the status of the media image as an effect of an interaction between the psychologization of affect (linked to the tech industry itself—'emotional computing' and so on) and its ontologisation (linked to Spinozist, Massumian, Whiteheadian and so on 'critical immanent philosophies'). Centring on the role of temporality to these accounts of the affective image, including the temporality of the trigger, this paper revises the feminist corporeal hermeneutics of "what an image can do" (rather than what it represents) to examine the legitimacy of the right to be offended as a feminist political, ethical, and epistemological position in the context of the structures that make images intimate to us. *What are the ways in which we can think about the trigger and its alternatives? How might the trigger reinscribe digitally mediated intimate publics or culture in general, and what can be claimed through this?*

Lunch catered by *Garnishes*

1200-1245

Session 2: Body work

1245-1415

Chair: Alex Bevan

Tarmia Klass (online)

Auto/ethnography in Video: Digital Research and Video Fieldnotes

Can video act as a form of feminist praxis in an auto/ethnographic study of fatness online? My PhD project is an auto/ethnographical exploration of the Fat Acceptance Movement (FAM) and Body Positivity (BOPO) communities on Instagram. As part of my ethnographic fieldwork, I will be creating Instagram content as a component of my participant-observation. All of this aims to create an ethnical reciprocity between myself as the researcher and my research participants. I propose to embed the digital into my practice of autoethnography through the use of mixed-medium autoethnographic fieldnotes – both paper notes and video notes. The entanglement of the digital into the methodology of research and record keeping in a project that explores fat acceptance spaces on Instagram is inevitable. As autoethnography is significant aspect of my research project, I have further entangled digitality and method through using video to capture autoethnographic fieldnotes. I argue that video in this way presents a creative and non-traditional feminist praxis, enabling research to not only be read but felt, seen, and evocative through various sensorial experiences.

Fiona Abades-Barclay (online)

Postfeminism and Digital Fitness Cultures: Exploring parasocial Virtual Communities

In this paper, I establish the centrality which online communities have amongst women within digital fitness cultures amid a postfeminist context. I have conceptualised, these communities, as ParaSocial Virtual Communities (PSVC) – given the parasocial forms of online interaction that take place amongst the influencers and followers at its heart. I examine the PSVC terrain in relation to young women's online consumption and engagement with digital fitness cultures; exploring the ways in which PSVC have become a key arena in which the contradictions and dilemmas of contemporary femininity are played out, navigated, and struggled with. The application of a postfeminist lens over PSVC communities has enabled me to shed light on the paradoxical ways in which social media and aesthetic labour have become instrumental in increasing women's visibility, empowerment, and freedom but only within the logic of commodity culture and patriarchal heterosexuality.

Marissa Wilcox (online)
Becoming Instagram Bodies

The body is never completely human. It changes with challenges and is afflicted by social and cultural norms and ideals. It takes up the material culture it is embedded in and adapts to the world as it moves through it. Embodiment for some cultural theorists, is an architectural experience (Halberstam, 2018), it can be built through the more-than-human. In this paper, I present a posthuman and new materialist perspective which theorises the body as emergent of and enmeshed with Instagram. Building on Rebecca Coleman's (2009) work in her book *The Becoming of Bodies: Girls, Images, Experience*, I tie together two empirical case studies from a larger project to explore how feminist and queer digital art on Instagram has the capacity to change and affect the body, which I theorise as the becoming of an "Instagram body". I offer insights from ethnographic interview data with my participants and images of their art about bodies to encourage further discussion into ways bodies are seen as expanded, agentic, multiple beings, sites of living history and cultural resistance.

Rebecca Olive and Kim Toffoletti (in-person & online)
Sport, bodies and digital technologies

Sport and physical activities are most associated with bodies in action and on fields, courts, pools and other spaces; physical, embodied, emotional, affective, relational, material, intimate, emplaced. But participation in sport is now as active online as it is on offline fields of play – athletes, teams, commentators, fans and everyday participants all use digital media and technologies as important aspects of their practices and cultures. The dis/connections created across various digital media and technologies have changed how we consume and experience sport, and how it has come to be part of our lives and communities. In this panel, we will explore the impacts of digital media and technologies on experiences and cultures of sport, physical activity, exercise, and movement practices, and how they have deepened the entanglements running through sports as mediated practices.

Emma Phillips (online)
"Why does she have to wear make-up? She looks better natural?": Staged Photos and Sexual Subjectivities

As women's sexy selfie making practices have burgeoned, so too have popular and feminist discourses of concern about them. One aspect of concern is that they are inauthentic or 'unnatural' presentations of self. I argue that naturalness discourses are operationalized to reinforce long-standing, classed ideals of feminine sexual presentation which marginalize some self-representations and legitimize others. In the large volume of academic work on selfies and the power structures which regulate women's bodies, little attention has been paid to the intersection of women's sexuality with class and the aesthetic codes which function as limits for women whose sexy selfies fall outside the norms of feminine acceptability, read in class terms as respectability. This paper emerges from a project which examines the aesthetic components of the sexualisation debates through the co-creation of images between a professional photographer (myself) and women who take amateur sexy selfies and upload them to Instagram.

Chair: Nicholas Carah

Maria-Gemma Brown (in-person)

"The Dead Mall as a Feeling": On Living in Capitalism Ruins

The US landscape is littered with the ruins of dead and dying malls. These malls are either abandoned, left to decay, or are open but eerily quiet with few shops and fewer people. These ruins are dreamworlds, visions into the past – when the mall was a mecca of American society. Malls were imbued with the late 20th century – a sense of hope and optimism for a future brought by consumer culture and technological advances (Cole, 2020 & Koc, 2017). These futures and the prosperity they promised have failed. Nothing has come to replace them. Mark Fisher (2009) argues we can no longer imagine the future as capitalism has become naturalised to the point it is reality – an atmosphere constraining thought and action. When we no longer have visions of an alternative future, the ghosts of past utopias are welcome guests that haunt these dreamworlds. An internet “scene” has grown in these capitalist ruins. They call themselves “dead mall enthusiasts” – an intimate public (Dobson, Carah & Robards, 2018) that shares and expresses worldviews, memories, and affects centred around the mediatization of the dead mall. I have observed this scene, conducting a textual analysis of the subreddit r/deadmalls and the YouTube channel “Dan Bell” to understand how they reckon with the ruination of mass consumer capitalism and its associated futures. Dead mall enthusiasts channel and modulate the affective intensities of failed futures by reflecting on the optimism we have lost. The dead mall alerts us to the capitalist reality we live in. It also alerts us to our affective potential, reminding us of our ability to dream of alternative futures.

Leanne Downing (online)

Bardcore: Transhistorical emotions and digital media’s reconfiguration of love, death, and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic

This paper explores digital intimacies and emotions as expressed in the Bardcore / Tavernwave music trend that emerged on global music platforms during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns. Defined broadly as a musical genre consisting of medieval-inspired remakes of popular songs, Bardcore draws on a rich history of memes and popular media (mis)representations about the medieval period; an era popularly associated with love, death, loneliness, and the bubonic plague. Drawing on a larger piece of research into transhistorical emotions and digital art memes (forthcoming with Cambridge University Press), this paper reflects on Bardcore’s intentional and playful reconfiguration of historical feelings in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it argues that Bardcore’s use of medieval sounds, emotions and images for present day purposes is not naïve. Rather, it represents a complex reworking of medieval emotionality and plays with an awareness that contemporary uses of medieval and popular music artifacts are deliberate misreading of their historical intent. Moreover, it is argued that it is precisely through these misreadings that larger issues of pandemic-induced emotional distress, loneliness and despair are brought to the surface for contemporary audiences. In thus providing a cross-genre, and cross-historical analysis of emotions, this paper considers the reception and reproduction of historical feeling by digital media audiences and contemplates the entanglements between historic and contemporary emotional life within 2020 – 2021 Bardcore movement.

Paige Street and Kath Horton (in-person)

And, do you care? The Cultivation of responsibility through digital fashion activism on Instagram

As the fashion industry faces increasing scrutiny for structural injustices, digital fashion activism has emerged as a form of political consumerism. Instagram campaigns drive narratives of responsibility where consumers of the global North are targeted as responsible agents capable of driving 'positive change' (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass, 2010, p. 21). What is less clear, is exactly how consumer responsibility is cultivated on social media platforms, that is to say how consumers are encouraged to self-identify as both complicit in global injustice and to simultaneously feel inspired to exercise political agency. Taking the activist organisation, Fashion Revolution (FR) as a case study, we examine how consumer responsibility is cultivated through its Instagram account @fash_rev. Specifically, we examine how FR cultivates a "disposition toward responsiveness" which mobilises its followers to take action toward injustice in the fashion supply chain (Schiff, 2014, p. 1). In our critique, we examine how FR's digital messaging cultivates responsibility through feelings of care and a sense of connection with distant Others. This project aims to conduct a close examination of how the communicative and visual practices of digital fashion activism on Instagram are used to mobilise feelings and responses toward structural injustices.

Natasha Zeng and Shirley Chen (online)

"Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss": Memefied feminism on TikTok

Catchcries of empowerment and enterprise continue to be invoked within the postfeminist mainstream (Negra 2014). Yet, on the social media platform TikTok, a number of alternative feminist trends have emerged. Young users are increasingly disidentifying with, or even zealously rejecting, a number of postfeminist ideals through the use of humour and irony. Expanding on scholarship examining teenage girlhood on TikTok (Kennedy 2020) and the 'memefied' politics of Gen Z (Zeng and Abidin 2021), we consider how young girls on TikTok have developed 'remixed' feminist identities by positioning figures such as the 'girlboss' and the 'pick me girl' as imagined others. Throughout our analysis, we consider how emergent tensions surrounding teenage girlhood online, including performing 'wokeness' (Kanai 2019); compulsory irony (Chateau 2020); and compliance with hegemonic feminine norms, generate an environment where establishing a young, feminine identity is rendered particularly fraught. We argue that through humorous and ironic depictions of the 'girlboss' and the 'pick me girl', an always-oppositional relational structure is produced, building a collective feminist politics that lacks positive identity markers; an identity predominantly based on disidentification with imagined mainstream others.

Thomas Marotta (online)

"Hey look at what I'm doing, look at me!" The Oral Performance of the Everyday Social Image

This presentation examines the changing ways people make themselves visible to the world as a result of new devices and social practices that enable the capture and sharing of photographic images. Obviously, many twenty-first century folk enjoy using the affordances of new systems of representation to express, interpret and make sense of the conditions of their lives - through online networked spaces we perform visual representations of ourselves and our lives. Here we actualise the human need for affiliation with others and engage in the dynamic performance of relatedness and connection in everyday encounters. These interactions form part of the ubiquity of digital information permeating our lives being pushed from our smartphones offering us the digital potential for an endless stream of texts, updates, notifications, emails and social interaction through images.

We increasingly create and consume images constructing our ideological selves through online networked spaces where we perform visual representations of ourselves and our lives. This is occurring through social online interactions in digitally networked environments where we actualise the human need for affiliation with others and engage in “the dynamic performance of relatedness and connection in everyday encounters.” [1] Images inhabiting this form of technologically mediated sociality are presented in an increasingly oral mode. Edwards argues that orality and photographs are “performatively intertwined” with verbal articulation of images extending their social function. [2] Through orality images become part of dynamic and shifting storytelling where the spoken and the seen are brought together, played and replayed on different occasions connecting people to people.

Session break

1545-1600

Session 4: Creators

1600-1730

Chair: Caroline Wilson-Barnao

Jia Guo (online)

Contextualising Virtual Girlfriendship in gendered social media: A digital intimate public of Chinese beauty and fashion blogs/vlogs

Although more male and gender-diverse creators as well as audience are participating in beauty & fashion blogs/vlogs, these social media spaces are dominantly occupied by women. Drawing on Lauren Berlant’s conception of intimate publics, in this research, I focus on beauty & fashion communities in Chinese social media and the virtual girlfriendship emerged from such gendered digital spaces in the context of contemporary urban China. During June to September 2020, I interviewed 31 Chinese middle-class women, aged 22-32, who are actively engaged with beauty & fashion blogs/vlogs. 16 of them are long-term followers in the beauty & fashion online communities and 15 operate their own social media accounts as content creators. In the semi-structured interviews, they narrated the experience of online interactions with others in beauty & fashion blogs/vlogs, and how they feel in these interactive activities on a daily basis. In the analysis, first, I address on the notions of authenticity and affective relatability, to theorise how the digital intimate public is established regarding its gender-class formation in the Chinese context. Second, while femininity is disciplined, and postfeminist horizontal surveillance is produced with the masquerade of girlfriendship, opportunities of care, support and (self)help, and feminist sentiments are also circulating in such digital intimate public. Especially in today’s China, where the public and political sphere for women is shirking, the intimate public of beauty & fashion blogs/vlogs provides a juxtapolitical potential for young women in their everyday life.

Jin Lee and Crystal Abidin (online)

YouTube-Influencers as a new Korean diaspora community

This study examines YouTube Influencers as intimate nodes for Korean diaspora where Koreans living abroad feel a sense of community by sharing some private stories about themselves. We unpack this by exploring how young Korean diasporic people in Australia and Nordic countries come into YouTube, how they communicate with their (Korean) subscribers and vice versa. We select YouTube-Influencers living in Australia and Nordic countries—the regions that are frequently fantasized by media in relation to nature, education, and slow living lifestyles. Based on our in-depth interviews with seven Korean diasporic YouTubers living in these regions and a content analysis of their YouTube videos and comments, we focus on

transnational intimacy between these YouTubers and their subscribers. By situating this transnational intimacy within the contexts of postcolonialism, neoliberal Korean socioeconomies, and social media cultures, we discuss Korean diasporic YouTubers' channels at two levels: (1) a place where the YouTubers negotiate their privacy boundaries and function as a privately public space with a sense of belonging for Korean diasporas; (2) a place where postcolonial desire for the West and a nationalist and nostalgic idea for Koreanness are conflicted, facilitated by young Korean's recent movement of leaving Korea (tal-cho) due to the extremely competitive socioeconomic situations in Korea. We show that transnational intimacy between the diasporic YouTubers and subscribers is an extensive form of postcolonial intimacies in the contemporary social media culture, in which young Koreans with precarity strive to establish a new identity of "Koreanness" at the intersection of globalization and digitalization.

Kiah Hawker (in-person)

The human and the machine: Cultural implications of Augmented Reality

There is a significant shift happening within social media environments due to the integration of Augmented Reality (AR) technology. AR is an immersive technology which applies digital simulations which overlay real world environments. Currently, AR is most common and accessible through mobile devices, specifically in the form of filters and lenses within social media environments. On platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok AR filters are becoming increasingly more crucial to the functionality and everyday practices within the apps. The industry surrounding the creation of AR technology is also rapidly expanding, as these major platforms develop programs which enable AR creation in a more accessible and scalable manner. As this technology continues to grow and shift the foundations of social media, it's crucial to consider the potential ramifications at play. This conference paper offers preliminary findings into the social and cultural implications AR may afford as it becomes increasingly ubiquitous. By interviewing both everyday users of social media and creators of AR content I offer a comprehensive understanding of the technology now and ways it is shifting cultural and social structures within digital environments. I will specifically explore how AR impacts these themes: the human and machine relationship, the social media and technology industry and the everyday practices of social media users. AR is an immersive and complex technology which will likely transform how we use mobile devices and present oneself on social media. It is therefore integral to continuously develop feasible methods of researching AR tech and emerging themes.

Celia Lam (online)

Connecting and disconnecting: fan responses to celebrated mediation of lived realities during Covid-19

In March 2020, during the beginning of the pandemic lockdown in parts of the US and UK, actress Gal Gadot (of Wonder Woman fame) released a video featuring a celebrity singalong to John Lennon's 'Imagine'. Media responses to the event are best summarised by *The Guardian* in an article titled: "Gal Gadot and Friends singing to us about self-isolation? That's a bit rich." What followed were a series of pieces predicting the collapse of celebrity culture and forecasting fundamental changes to the structures of fame post-pandemic. While it is unlikely that celebrity culture will completely vanish in a post-pandemic era, media attention highlighted two issues, which are also concerns in contemporary celebrity studies scholarship. Firstly, an increasing focus on the utility of celebrity figures; secondly, critiques of the types of celebrity access presented through mediated social media platforms. The mediation of everyday experiences by the famous is often discussed in relation to the establishment of a sense of authenticity and perception of intimacy, through which fan celebrity relationships are formulated and maintained. Presentation of the everyday offers

fans (seemingly) direct access to celebrity figures away from the control of stylists and publicists; finding the celebrity 'at home' decreases the distance between fan and celebrity. Yet, as media responses highlighted, Covid-19 changed how this mediated everydayness was perceived; emphasising distance rather than proximity (we are in this together but look at where you are). Through a comparative study of US/UK and Chinese celebrities, this presentation examines how pandemic conditions re-shaped fan-celebrity interactions and fan reactions to celebrities' mediated realities. It considers the extent to which national discourses about pandemic control influence fan reactions, arguing that acceptance of mediated everydayness is contingent upon the function of celebrity figures.

Katie Brennan (in-person)

Digital Weavers: Using Serres and Science Fiction to Re-examine Hashtags and Global Politics

This paper uses the work of Michel Serres along with William Gibson's novel *The Peripheral* and Ted Chiang's novella *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* to argue that diverse spacetimes are brought together in the overlaps of online and offline worlds by hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter. These overlaps help make people aware of events and issues in global politics that they may be unaware of or apathetic to otherwise. This article is related to my broader research on nonhuman agency. In this paper I emphasize how digital nonhumans both take advantage of and can create intersections between multiple worlds. The key image of my paper is that of the hashtag as a weaver bringing together and intermeshing assemblages comprised of human and nonhuman actors: the "Weaver...untangles, interlaces, twists, assembles, passes above and below, rejoins the rational, the irrational, namely, the speakable and the unspeakable, communication and the incommunicable" (Serres 52). This paper examines and 'plays' with the politics of online and offline interactions and emphasizes the materiality of digital media.

Performance with drinks & canapés

1730-1830

Thao Phan and Liquid Architecture: Listening to misrecognition (online)

Introduced by Anna Briers and Nicholas Carah

What is the sound of racialisation? How might we listen to misrecognition? What does machine error tell us about the precision of racism? And how can the tools of a racist system be used to transcribe new forms of resistance?

This experimental presentation by feminist technoscience researcher Thao Phan brings together critical work on race and algorithmic culture with new techniques for dissecting and analysing automatic speech recognition, applied to personal and public archives drawn from Thao's life and research on race. Broadcast live on Zoom and across multiple platforms, this event is part of Machine Listening, an ongoing investigation and experiment in collective learning, instigated by artist Sean Dockray, legal scholar James Parker, and curator Joel Stern for Liquid Architecture. In addition to Thao's presentation, the event will feature a discussion and demonstration of the Word Processor tool, developed by the Machine Listening team and Reduct, and recently launched as part of the event 'Unnatural Language Processing', at Unsound Festival.

Program – Day Two

Spotlight session: Xanthe Dobbie and Emily van der Nagel (online)

0900-1030

Bodies in flow: pulsing, throbbing, jiggling across screens, through headsets, under fingers – An invited spotlight session with Xanthe Dobbie and Emily van der Nagel, featuring Xanthe Dobbie's *Real Things* quiz and *Eidolon*.

Venue: Terrace Room (Level 6), Sir Llew Edwards Building (14) and livestreamed.

Chair: Nicholas Carah

Google is my primary partner: The fall of cyberfeminist idealism and the gentrification of individuality as reflected by new media practice – *Xanthe Dobbie*

Our relationships with technology are entrenched, erotic and wilfully inescapable. As ever, it is the duty of art to critically reflect upon the impact that these relationships have on contemporary experience. The technological progress of recent decades has been exponential, however, within the throes of late capitalism, choice economy, and the gentrification of individuality, we are unwittingly pushed further towards a conservative, Western, hetero-patriarchal myth of success. Here, a “good life” is synonymous with engagement in an age-old system of consumerism designed to maintain socio-political hierarchies, marketed to us as empowered journeys of aspirational self-expression. What happened to the flagrant, visceral activism present in the cyberfeminist artwork of the 1990s, which envisaged a post-binary, post-cyberpunk world led by femme hackers? How was it subsumed by the very matrix it fought against, sold back to us as de-politicised aestheticism decades later? Building upon notions of postfeminism and its impact on neoliberal and popular feminism, this paper traces the evolution of critical media art practice since the 1990s. Queering through (mis)use of technology is presented as a method of radical creative intervention, whereby technologies are disconnected from capitalistic intention and reimagined as self-reflexive tools of critique. Such interventions constitute my own creativepractice research, which draws on digital and historical archives and works with and against technology in the development of new work. Liberally refencing 1990s web aesthetics, recent works *Cloud Copy* (2021) and *Wallpaper Queens* (2020) typify purposefully failed technologies aimed to expose our current cyborgian status. This paper charts the downfall of early internet idealism epitomised by the cyberfeminists, positioning the creation of new work as a means for analysing the past as it relates to potential futures. *Cloud Copy* and *Wallpaper Queens* are updated entry-points to an evolving critical conversation surrounding our increasingly intimate, increasingly co-dependant relationship with technology.

Xanthe Dobbie (b. 1992, Sunshine Coast, Australia) is a media artist, filmmaker and PhD candidate, whose recent projects have included live-streamed, interactive theatre. Their works dredge content from the vast databank of the Internet, re-configuring it through the lens of queer world-making and feminist critique. Xanthe lives and works in Lismore on the unceded lands of the Widjabul/Wyabul people of the Bundjalung Nation. Recent solo exhibitions include *PLEASUREDOME, or, A Vision in a Dream*, performed online for interactive livestream, created with Harriet Gilles in collaboration with Marcus Whale and Solomon Thomas, Griffin Theatre Company, Sydney, Australia (2020); *One Million Views*, in collaboration with Tiyan Baker, Next Wave Festival, Melbourne, Australia (2016); and *Heavenly Bodies: Altered Pieces*, John Buckley Gallery, Melbourne, Australia (2014). Notable group exhibitions include *Conflict in My*

Outlook_We Met Online and Don't be Evil at UQ Art Museum, Brisbane (2020-2022); Double Adaptor, MARS Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria Melbourne Design Week, Melbourne, Australia (2020); Widgets and Doohickies from a Camp Toolbox, Project Space, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia (2019); Artivisms Now, La Trobe Art Institute, Bendigo, Australia (2018); Femmosphere, Schwules Museum, Berlin, Germany (2017); and Future Strategies, Project Space, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia (2014). Dobbie won the Best Experimental Show for Harriet Gillies The Power of the Holy Spirit, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Australia (2019); and won the People's Choice for No Vacancy, Midsumma Australia Post Art Prize (2018). They were a finalist in the John Fries Award, University of New South Wales Galleries, Sydney, Australia (2016); and the Macquarie Digital Portraiture Award, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia (2014).

The fluid and the fixed in digital intimacies: Theorising the screenshot as disruption and repair – Emily van der Nagel

Movement is essential to digital intimacies. We scroll and swipe our way through our screens, often encountering platformed content that sparks another kind of movement; that of affect. Curiosity, frustration, joy, anger, and arousal rise and fall within us, moving through our bodies. With so much sliding and slipping past us, the screenshot has become a way of fixing our digital world in place for a moment. Whether we approach the screenshot as a photograph, image, document, receipt, or notification, it demonstrates a disruption to the movement and ephemerality inherent in the digital. In the contested context of Not Safe For Work (or adult) content, the threat of being de-platformed lurks in the background. Community guidelines, content moderation, payment providers, and algorithmic detection all form a politics around how sexually intimate platforms can become, and how much of whose bodies are granted visibility. As digitally intimate content moves, and moves us, the screenshot is a feature of our devices that halts a moment. Images are snatched out of their original context; private text messages leak into the public; a platform informs a user their photo has been captured instead of allowed to move on. The affects and impacts that a screenshot provokes depends on what happens to it next: whether it remains still, on a smartphone's camera roll or a computer folder, or moves again, to another recipient and context. Exploring digitally intimate cultures through the mundane technology of the screenshot means following the interruptions and unintended circulations of images captured, not through a lens, but across a screen.

Dr Emily van der Nagel is a Lecturer in Social Media in the School of Media, Film and Journalism at Monash University, and Secretary of the Association of Internet Researchers. She researches and teaches social media cultures, platforms, identities, and intimacies. Emily's work has been published in *Porn Studies*, *Social Media + Society*, *Internet Histories*, *Continuum*, and *First Monday*. Her first book, co-authored with Professor Katrin Tiidenberg, *Sex and Social Media*, was published in 2020. Emily tweets at @emvdn.

Session 5: Everyday feelings

1030-1200

Chair: Mo Engel

Amelia Johns, Anita Harris, Jessica Walton, Gilbert Caluya (online)

"I feel like if it wasn't online, we wouldn't have bonded as well": classroom and informal togetherness in pandemic times

During 2020/2021 school-aged students in Australia experienced a complete shift in their learning and socialising, with classrooms shifting from face-to-face learning in institutionalised settings to remote learning using digital platforms such as Google

Classroom, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which are accessed by students in their bedrooms and on their personal devices. While some scholars have analysed this "pivot" by examining issues of privacy (with formal, public education being brought into private, intimate spaces of the home) and equity (focusing on themes such as the digital divide limiting educational experiences for marginalised youth, including young people from migrant/NESB) fewer studies have focused on the everyday experiences of digital intimacy and isolation experienced by young people, including young people from NESB and low socio-economic areas, as they navigate a range of platforms to simulate experiences of "hanging out" with friends outside of school time. This paper reports on findings from an ARC study 'Fostering Global Digital Citizenship: The everyday practices of Diasporic Youth in a Connected World' by acknowledging that in a reality (for Australian-based youth at least) where borders are closed and everyone is staying at home, digital platforms—rather than bringing the world, including transnational families, closer—have instead fostered togetherness, intimacy and bonding at a local level. In this paper we will examine the experiences of four participants in our study, from a diverse mix of cultural backgrounds, in Sydney and Melbourne. Through a mix of mobile ethnography techniques and semi-structured interviews, the participants discuss how formal learning and socialising on Zoom and Teams has simulated similar or even increased experiences of social bonding, intimacy and trust among classmates.

Ellen van Holstein (online)

The everyday spaces of digital inequality during lockdown

The ongoing series of lockdowns in Melbourne intensify the use of digital technologies in the home. Remote schooling, working from home, and online service delivery by governments and health practitioners are all manifestations of this intensification. A booming research literature on the impacts of digital divides during the pandemic highlights unequal access to digital devices and bandwidth and reveals deepening health and education disparities. This paper adds to that literature by focusing on the spaces in which people use digital technologies. We present an ongoing study with residents of a Melbourne public housing estate that includes a survey, focus groups and participatory mapping-based interviews. The paper analyses the tensions and allegiances that arise in households as members who are differently positioned in terms of their age, gender and responsibilities lay claim to infrastructure and private spaces in the home to complete work, schooling and engage in private conversations with family, friends and service providers. The study creates detailed insights into the digital practices and strategies of people on low incomes as they aim to make do with limited availability of devices and workspaces in small homes. The paper puts forward an approach to digital inequality that considers the characteristics of spaces in which digital technologies are used.

Maura Edmond (online)

This is my impression of someone doing the work

Throughout the COVID pandemic, messages of care—corporate expressions to the community, calls for us to kind to each other, sentimental valorisation of care workers—have become ubiquitous, circulating at precisely the moment that our 'crisis of care' (Fraser 2016) has become impossible to ignore. As Wood and Skeggs (2020) warn, such vaunting of care papers over 'the conditions for care that pre-existed the coronavirus' in which caregiving—hospitals, hospices, childcare centres, aged care homes—had 'become a valuable and lucrative space for profit'. As care transforms into a buzzword, put to use by societal actors—from politicians to celebrities to corporations—we see in these new representations and proclamations "often disturbing assumptions about what counts as meaningful care" (Chatzidakis et al 2020, p.890). Highly emotive, branded calls to care, says Sobande (2020), "mask distinct socio-economic disparities", obscuring the many not addressed or

accommodated in branded messages of belonging. Moreover, care talk—with all its gestures to ‘cohesion’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘all in this together’—risks sliding into the reactionary discourses and war metaphors that pandemics invite (Hage 2020). @regarding_care is an Instagram profile which offers an initial typology of this new rhetoric of care, focusing on its most seductive representations in marketing and branding material. During the conference you can view the collection on the [@regarding_care](#) Instagram account. You are invited to comment or to share examples you might have encountered.

Katherine “Katie” Mackinnon (online)

Memory Mining: Researching the Afterlives of Intimate Data

Leaving behind remnants on the web is unavoidable and built-in to the very nature of online participation. These remains are often described as active or passive footprints, which are both materials we are aware of generating (posts), and that which generates around us as we move through the web (metadata). For young people who were growing up online in the 1990s-2000s, these digital traces might be better understood as abandoned and haunted data that have shifted public and private contexts over the course of a decade. What once felt like a small, intimate, or private space online could have changed with a platform’s terms of service or site design, increasing searchability, connectivity, and discoverability. Web archives also contribute to the visibility and accessibility of old web data, as they crawl the open web to capture and extract intimate data. This paper shares findings from the Early Internet Memories project, where millennials (born between 1981-1996) participated in a series of qualitative, online semi-structured interviews that walked-through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine’s in an “archive promenade” to find their digital traces. Participants are positioned as co-investigators and analysts of web archival material, enabling simultaneous discovery, memory, interpretation and investigation. Together, we walked through the abandoned sites and ruins of a once-vibrant online community as they reflect and remember the early web. This approach responds to significant ethical gaps in web archival research and engages with feminist ethics of care (Luka & Millette, 2018) inspired by conceptual framing of data materials in research on the “right to be forgotten” (Crossen-White, 2015; GDPR, 2018; Tsesis, 2014), digital afterlives (Sutherland, 2020), indigenous data sovereignty and governance (Wemigwans, 2018), and the Feminist Data Manifest-No (Cifor et al, 2019). This method re-centers the human and moves towards a digital justice approach (Giesecking, 2020; Cowan & Rault, 2020) for engaging with the afterlives of intimate data.

Sérgio Barbosa (online)

Do WhatsAppers foster digital intimacy ties?

Chat apps boom have spawned new challenges in digital intimacies research. First, the “boom” made it possible thanks to the implementation of end-to-end encryption on messaging platforms. Second, it has been a successful way to replace the traditional SMS within the blast of smartphones and, third, it was pivotal to incorporate privacy affordances. From the North to the South, these global chat platforms cross the social relationships of individuals, digitizing them and making them an intimate part of everyday life. This paper investigates the so-called WhatsAppers - emerging (digital) activists who appropriate the chat app intensely to participate in political life. To develop my argument, I look at the case of #UnitedAgainststheCoup (henceforth UCG, for Unidos Contra o Golpe), a WhatsApp private group which emerged in the city of Florianópolis, Brazil – one of the largest social democracies in the Global South. The goal is to explain how WhatsAppers foster (private) ties on chat apps with support from existing digital intimacies literature. The comprehension over the digital intimacies research on and with WhatsApp has two main contributions: (a) the research enables us to understand the private connections on WhatsApp behind-the-scenes;

(b) little research has privileged WhatsApp beyond the Silicon Valley “born-and-bred, without contextualizing their use and appropriation in Global South countries.

Lunch catered by *Garnishes*

1200-1245

Session 6: *Cute, chill, super toxic*

1245-1415

Chair: Kiah Hawker

Paul Byron (online)

'Kinda Chill' and 'super toxic': LGBTQ+ young people's conflicting accounts of mental health support on social media

What does it mean to get mental health support from your everyday use of social media? In 2020, 660 LGBTQ+ young people across Australia were surveyed about digital and social media practices relating to mental health, and 59% of participants indicated getting mental health support from social media. Those respondents were asked which platforms they found to be most and least supportive, who they engage with on those platforms, and what it is about these platforms that makes them feel supportive or not. This paper considers how 'mental health support' is presented in statements from these 378 participants, aged 16-25 years, and how support is attached to digital environments and practices (or not). Survey data reveals a distinction between platforms considered most supportive to mental health (Instagram, TikTok and YouTube), and those most commonly considered as unsupportive (Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat). Yet, for each of these questions, nine common platforms feature as both supportive and unsupportive. As well as reflecting on key distinctions found between platforms, this paper looks across platforms to consider how support and its lack are described, understood, and differently attached to mediated experiences of connection: to peers, friends, information and more. Findings highlight varied uses and experiences of common social media platforms among LGBTQ+ young people, and a need to not only consider which platforms afford the most support, but to give attention to how support is located, described, and contextualised through one's movements across a social media landscape. Throughout these data, support is commonly characterised as involving either friends or 'people like me', and features easy communication, opportunities for learning and sharing, and a sense of not being alone. These were found in platforms also often described as toxic, superficial and full of negativity. Interview data collected in 2021, in which LGBTQ+ young participants' friendship and peer support practices are further discussed, will be drawn upon to extend this analysis.

Darcy Morgan (online)

Ace Spaces: Conviviality and Solidarity in Asexual Networked Counterpublics

This paper considers the significance of asexual networked counterpublics on the social networking sites Twitter and Instagram, which comprise not only asexual-identified people but an array of people who find utility and affirmation in asexual spaces or who inhabit the label “asexual” transiently or less certainly. These counterpublics have emerged in response to the pressures of compulsory sexuality, as well as ongoing debates about asexuality's inclusion in queer spaces. I ask: What can asexual networked counterpublics teach us about new modes of being and relating that resist compulsory sexuality's imperatives? How can these convivial collective efforts theorise new intimate worlds to inform our queer solidarities? Drawing on Schwartz's (2020) work on memes as “low theory,” I highlight the richness of

asexual internet meme-making and sharing practices, both as a vessel for meaning and affect, and as a collective and democratised mode of theorising asexuality. To demonstrate their rich communicative and affective capacity, I use memes as a visual aid throughout. Overall, I argue that the asexual networked counterpublics can offer a model for a queerly asexual politics—one that enables “asexually abundant lives” (Przybylo 2019) and forges convivial queer solidarities founded on shared affinities, affects and investments, rather than circumscribed by presumably stable and homogeneous identity categories.

Rob Cover (online)

Digital Hostility, Conflict and Adversity: Online Cohabitation and Ethics of Intimacy

The past half-decade has witnessed a substantial increase in online hostility, adversarial speech and conflict, particularly trolling, hate speech, public shaming, pile-ons and other forms of deliberate and non-deliberate adversarial behaviour, indicating a cultural normalisation of incivility in online communication. Trolling brings online hostility into a new register marked not by the anonymity of online bullies or the extensive of an offensive remark, but by large numbers of perpetrators in what can be described as the cultural ‘massification’ of digital hate. The instantaneity and substantial numbers involved in online hostility that, taken individually may otherwise be understood as ‘mild’, warrants a shift from apprehending ‘content’ to addressing behaviour, reception and cultural norms. Although there have been several preventative and intervention strategies (cyberbullying education, platform moderation, regulatory policies, legislation), in addition to digital citizenship discourses, little attention has been paid to ethical practices or expectations, and how they might underpin regulatory and pedagogical approaches or allow us to critical engage with those approaches in ways that do not call for a laissez-faire approach to ‘free speech’. This presentation draws on digital ethnographic research to discuss digital hostility from a cultural studies perspective. Drawing on Judith Butler’s readings of Levinas (non-violent responsiveness) and Arendt (cohabitation), this presentation foregrounds an ethical approach to addressing digital hostility as one built on cultural practices that account for what I frame as “intimate digital cohabitation” rather than on practices of content management, censorship and legal or platform regulatory mechanisms.

Megan Rose (online)

“Intimately Cute”: an ethnographic study of Animal Crossing: New Horizons during COVID-19

When *Animal Crossings: New Horizon’s*, a video game for the Nintendo Switch, was released in March 2020, its cute characters, activities and world provided much comfort for players as the world went into lockdown. The 20-year-old franchise has been known to fan communities as a source of care, calm and routine for players experiencing anxiety and depression, but *New Horizon’s* timely release took this digital technology to a global level, selling over 25 million copies. Globally successful games that create cute worlds and characters that are housed in portable devices, such as *Pokemon* or *Tamagotchi*, have been described as “blending flexibility and fantasy into technology that is conveniently portable, virtuality that is intimately cute” (Allison 2004: 46-147). Studies of cuteness have explored the caring and playful relationships encouraged between humans and cute objects. But what other dimensions of experience and relationships are formed in cute digital spaces? Drawing on in-game ethnographic interviews (n=11) and a digital ethnography of fan communities on Reddit, Instagram and Twitter in 2020, this paper explores the kinds of intimacies and relationships formed in *New Horizons* and the role this has played in facilitating healing and comforting experiences for players during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Lena Molnar (online)

"I've decided that I don't have to be cool" Young people's Boundary-setting in solidarity to gender based violence online

One of the obstacles to publicly confront and challenge gender-based violence is that to do so may increase the potential for violence. Indeed, the structural positioning of gendered power to marginalise others continues to benefit the commodification of their bodies through labour. This paper discusses how 16 to 25-year-old Australians share social media content about preventing gender-based violence and managing or avoiding backlash. As Butler (2016) posits, to even call attention and care for these vulnerabilities requires more supportive and equal social structures in practices of resistance. Indeed, participants reflect Ahmed's (2021) notion that complaints can create complaint. For this reason, it was not uncommon for participants of this study to generate care and comfort through setting boundaries in responding to conflict and prevent further harm for one another. Drawing on small online focus groups, I discuss how participants refer to how they negotiate boundaries or make public the potential for vulnerability to obstruct power and build solidarity through social media, for example, through refusing to cooperate with peers or institutions in bad faith. On these occasions, such practices can build resistance in support of a system of care.

Session 7: Care

1415-1530

Chair: Alex Bevan

Lyndal Sleep (online)

Governing women through promiscuous digital personas: Algorithmic governmentality and the couple rule in Australian Social Security

This paper uses an algorithmic governmentality perspective to argue that women social security recipients are governed through digital personas, using the case study of the couple rule in Australia. In Australia's heavily targeted social security system, recipient's assessment as single or a member of couple has implications for their entitlement to payment, and rate of payment. These types of decisions are known as couple rule decisions. A broad range of evidence is used to inform decisions about social security recipient's relationships. Traditionally, this included home visits from social security officer "sex snoopers" checking for extra toothbrushes or clothing that may be left behind by a love interest. However, more recently, the information decision makers use to decide if a woman is single or a member of a couple is more abstract, for example, rent receipts, loan applications, or Facebook posts.

This reliance on the digital detritus of everyday life to inform social security decision making about relationships, and therefore entitlement, indicates that new mechanisms of governing are at work. This paper argues that this can be understood as algorithmic governmentality, where women social security recipients are constituted and reconstituted through exaggerated quantifiability into a possibly promiscuous digital persona using information which is abstracted from women's daily lives. However, despite this new mode of governing, the patriarchal assumptions at the foundation of the couple rule endure, enacting harm to women social security recipients in new and old ways within logics specific to algorithmic governmentality.

Ian Tucker (online)

Digitising practices of support in community mental health during COVID-19

A digitisation of mental health support has been underway for some time (Ellis & Tucker, 2020). This includes the development of digital versions of existing practices of support, such as embedding existing therapeutic interventions in digital form (e.g. CBT), through to embracing digital ways of creating new forms of online-only support (e.g. peer support communities). These moves were underway pre-Covid, but the virus has catalysed a digitisation of support. Tens of thousands of 'mental health apps' are now available that range in focus from meditation through to AI-driven chatbots. There is also the use of digital platforms by existing community-based mental health groups, which can engage individuals with a range of arts and creative activities, along with providing more general peer support. In this paper I explore new practices of support enacted in and through digital platforms. The use of digital forms of support involves reconfiguring relations that individuals have with mental health, with others, and in a context of increasingly data-rich environments. Support relationships face a simultaneous distancing (geometrically) and closeness (immediacy of digital support). Digital practices have the potential to transform the multiple spatial and temporal relations as technologies become relational actors 'in the present', shaped simultaneously by memories and anticipations as to what the future holds. These questions shape the discussion in the present paper, which draws on a project investigating Covid-19 support practices in relation to community mental health groups in the UK that faced having to adapt their provision as the pandemic struck. The paper presents insight of the reconfigured support practices and their impact on experiences of mental ill-health.

Shubhangi Butta (online)

Does Trust Enable Calculated Risks? Perceptions about Mobile Phone Mediated Intimacy in Emerging Adults in Urban India

Today, mobile phones are used extensively by emerging adults in mediating sexual intimacy in relationships. This study fills this research gap by examining attitudes towards mobile mediated intimate communication among emerging Indian adults. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 emerging adults between the ages of 18–30 in an Indian urban metropolis. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Results from the data analysed show that emerging adults generally hold 'trust' as a central element of their relationships and tailor their mediated intimate behaviour accordingly. The dynamic between trust and digital intimacy was revealed to be extremely interesting as while a lack of trust in relationships can hold people back from indulging in intimate activities due to the underlying risks, an indulgence is also what was noticed to enhance trust in relationships. In order to mark their journey from lack of trust to its enhancement, with the risks such as revenge, accidental leak of information, etc. being a barrier, the young adults also seem to have adapted to it by minimizing those risks. Use of specific applications like Snapchat, covering body parts that reveal one's identity all counted towards this risk mitigation. Hence, the existence of risks was well acknowledged but strategized such that it didn't have to imply an end to the digital intimacy, rather get established as one of the building blocks of trust.

Paro Mishra (online)

Digital Intimacies and Gendered Surveillance in the lives of Cross-border Marriage Migrants in Rural North India

This paper examines digital intimacies in a relatively underexplored area of cross-region/cross-border marriage migration. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, this paper focuses on female marriage migrants from distant parts of India and beyond who have migrated to North India in response to local bride shortages. Uprooted from their familiar

socio-cultural environment and separated by vast geographic distances, marriage migrants overtly depend on mobile phones and other digital mediums to maintain contact and intimate ties with natal kin. This is a challenge in the rigidly patriarchal context of north India, where their lives are constantly under surveillance by their affinal kin for various reasons. This paper illustrates that for the cross-border brides, digital technologies and the intimacies they enable act as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they strengthen their ties with the natal kin; on the other hand, they disrupt the process of their belonging in the affinal families. The gendered and generational power geometry and social location of migrant women in the host region mediates and shapes the ways in which digital intimacies are extended and negotiated by migrant women. This paper makes a strong case that the emancipatory and celebratory discourse around use of digital technologies by migrants (especially migrant women) and its affordances must be interrogated against the backdrop of their social location.

Frances Shaw (online)

'Proper distance' in the age of social distancing: Hepatitis C treatment, telehealth, and questions of care and responsibility

During COVID-19, telehealth (the use of phone and video technologies to facilitate medical care) has played a prominent role in the treatment of hepatitis C. As part of a qualitative study on the accessibility and effectiveness of telehealth for hepatitis C treatment during this period, this paper considers the ways healthcare practitioners and patients experience and manage their proximity to each other in accessing and providing care through telehealth. The paper uses the work of Roger Silverstone (2003), specifically his term 'proper distance', to theorise how ethical relationships are mediated by technology. Silverstone identifies a paradoxical effect in which the relative anonymity and distance of a mediated conversation can enable more honest conversations while also reducing the sense of responsibility to the other. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 40 telehealth providers and patients, we explore how patients and practitioners understand distance and proximity in their discussion of telehealth for hepatitis C treatment. In keeping with Silverstone's work, we find both groups express some ambivalence about the impact of telehealth on relationships, on the one hand expecting and privileging simple, transactional relationships, and on the other hand expressing concerns about the loss of intimacy in healthcare relationships and a sense of 'missing something'. We go on to consider how these negotiations of proper distance in telehealth differently shape patient perceptions of stigma and vulnerability. The paper concludes by outlining some considerations for better understanding treatment relationships, healthcare intimacies, and responsibility in the context of changing healthcare modalities.

Session break

1530-1545

Session 8: Identities

1545-1715

Chair: Caroline Wilson-Barnao

Hao Zheng (online)

Chinese queer female students' digital discourses and practices in transnational transitions

This paper examines how Chinese queer female students negotiate their self-representation in digital discourses and practices. The paper is based on my PhD research exploring Chinese queer female students' queer and adult identity making in Australia. Using interviews and

'social media scroll back' (Robards & Lincoln, 2019) as research methods, the research aims to capture the complexities and tensions in Chinese queer female students' narratives about their intercultural journey, 'in-betweenness' in youth transitions, and constant negotiation over their identities. Social media content is a valuable archive of individuals' long-term transitions. Scrolling back through social media also provides insights into how participants make meaning of the past from the present moment. Through examining their self-representation on social media and its related contexts across temporal phases, I explore the following questions in this paper. First, I ask how Chinese queer female students reconfigure their private and public space on digital platforms to negotiate their queerness; Second, I examine how these students' (un)expressed sexuality, intimacy, and emotions construct a façade of their 'double life' for the audience in different contexts. I aim to complicate current understandings of Chinese queer young people using social media for connection and visibility (Li, 2020; Yang, 2019; Shao & Wang, 2017; Hildebrandt & Chua, 2017), and further explain the sense of "double or split value scheme" (Martin, 2018) in Chinese female students' youth transitions through a specific queer perspective.

Jaekyung "Jae" Roh (online)

Migrants' forming intimacy in digital spaces: Korean women migrants' use of online cafes

The study discusses the use of online cafés by Korean women migrants, focusing on ways of negotiating their experiences of racism and forming digital intimacy. The study examines how women's suffering from racism and alienation can impact them and how their sharing in online communities can help shape identities and solidarity among the café members. In recent years, a growing number of Korean migrants have turned to digital culture to exchange information and secure space for support and belonging. The need for a space in which the 'politics of listening' is made possible also becomes even more crucial in face of continued exclusions and everyday practices of racism in contemporary multicultural Australia. The form of community building is likely to take on further importance in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. This article discusses the use of popular online 'cafés' by Korean women migrants to Australia as means of negotiating experiences of racism and alienation. This study addresses the question of how Korean women migrants share their experiences of racism and marginalisation and how the experiences impact women within digital cultures. Through the textual and narrative analysis of participation in three Korean online cafés adopting the methods of 'affect', racism can be understood as holding a significant place in shaping in Korean women's identities and intimacy between members. The content analysis of the online posts and comments indicates that as a profoundly affective experience, racism leaves long lasting affective impacts, shaping women's sense of safety and belonging. This study suggests the gendered digital intimacy of these cafés as online 'intimate publics' allows for such painful experiences to be witnessed and heard, producing possibilities and practices of solidarity between Korean women migrants. Thus, these spaces provide a base to relieve their wounds, helplessness, and frustration, and enable virtual 'being together' and mutual respect through speaking their voice out.

Clare Southerton and Naomi Smith (online)

What do you mean they're thirst traps?: Queered by #ForYou

Encounters with TikTok are filtered through content management algorithms that present users with videos that are relevant to their interests to keep them engaged. As public discourse regarding these algorithms grows, users also encounter these recommendations within an assemblage of their beliefs, intimacies and imaginaries. TikTok has, in particular, become the subject of algorithmic folklore surrounding its 'supernatural' ability to know the user and present them with niche content relevant to their interests. Memes on the app remark

on TikTok's insight into their unrealised sexual and gender identities through the content presented to them on their #ForYou page. TikTok 'outs' the user to themselves, and reinforces discourses of 'all knowing' algorithms. Often neglected from these accounts, however, are the moments of failure and misfire that happen when content is recommended that does not suit the user's preferences. We examine TikTok's misfires with an autoethnographic case study from one of the authors. After using the app for several months Naomi noticed that the videos she was suggested largely featured queer women doing domestic activities. In conversation with Clare, it was revealed to Naomi that these were queer thirst traps that Naomi had been misreading as instructive of common household tasks. Taking up Halberstam's provocative question '[w]hat kinds of reward can failure offer us?', we consider what failure offers in Naomi's encounters with TikTok's algorithm. Though algorithmic personalisation is often imagined to operate with dystopian precision, we consider the generative possibilities of a playful interrogation of moments of failure.

Federico Lucchesi, Seraina Tarnutzer and Katharina Lobinger (online)

Let's play together: fostering intimacy through playful visual practices in close social relationships

Playful interactions are part of everyday communication in close social relationships (e.g., Betcher, 1987). Play is a safe communication strategy that serves several social functions, such as easing tension and conflicts, promoting spontaneity, or increasing bonding (e.g., Proyer, 2014). Particularly, playful activities and interactions help cultivate intimacy (Baxter, 1992), which is fundamental for relational maintenance. Through empirical evidence from an ongoing qualitative study on visual communication in close social relationships, we highlight the particular role of playful visual communication in fostering intimacy. We argue that close social relationships are increasingly visualized and maintained through visual media and visual communication practices (Lobinger et al., 2020). Due to the idiosyncrasies of the visual modality, visual practices are particularly suitable for creating playful situations, e.g., when people are performing in front of the camera (Schwarz, 2010), experimenting with pictures, or engaging in a shared visual activity (Prieto-Blanco, 2016). For instance, couples and friends spend time together playing analogue or digital visual games; they have fun taking pictures together, create playful outcomes by editing visuals, or are in a playful mood when sharing or talking about pictures they are looking at together. Overall, our findings show that playful visual communication occurs in many different forms, and that visual elements play a crucial role in creating unique suitable occasions for reconfirming closeness and social bonds.

Closing remarks and announcing Digital Intimacies 2022

1715-1730

Performance with drinks & canapés

1730-1800

Daniel McKewen: Stop the ride, I don't want to get off: our digital adolescence (online)

Introduced by Anna Briers and Nicholas Carah

Like that cool friend our parents warned us about, we know the Internet's a bad influence, but we don't want to stop hanging out. And like adolescence, if we don't collectively get on track, our future doesn't look so bright. This desktop lecture-performance won't have any answers. Employing found online images, video and text, it draws together a disparate array of pop-cultural and academic references. As an exploration of digital-adolescence, the performance operates from McKewen's position as a visual artist-educator-academic – waist-deep in a cultural ocean, alongside a younger generation who are neck-deep and learning to swim, and an older one letting the current take them out to sea.

Thank you for attending Digital Intimacies #7

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