digital intimacies 9: life among the ruins

14 - 15 december 2023

Welcome

The University of Queensland's Digital Cultures and Societies initiative and Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre welcome you to the 2023 Digital Intimacies 9 symposium

Date: Thursday, December 14th and Friday, December 15th 2023

Time: 8:30 a.m. arrival for registration and 9 a.m. welcome and keynote speech

Venue: QUT Gardens Point campus, S Block, Level 12 in the Owen J. Wordsworth room (map)

This year's symposium is a collaboration between UQ's Digital Culture and Societies initiative and the Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre.

We invited our participants to think through the provocation of cultural anthropologist Anna Tsing (2015) who reminds us that ruins are lively places where new multi-species and multi-cultures thrive. From a flattened out, ruined landscape, new possibilities grow. Ruins can be enclaves of hope as much as mourning, loss, and longing: they not only invoke nostalgic reflections, but open up space to dream and imagine the future.

Digital intimate publics share the affective experience of life amid the ruin. They are formed in circumstances of something being 'off', of being squeezed, constituted from positions of non-dominance. Digital intimacies come to be not in the gleaming corporate towers and cathedrals, but in the messy in-between spaces where resilient, creative practices of 'making do' emerge.

For Digital Intimacies 9 we asked in what ways are digital intimacies reckoning with the ruined structures they find themselves in? Our program this year showcases over 30 insightful, creative and exciting interdisciplinary contributions from scholars in Australia and abroad, who critically engage with, interpret, locate, theorise, or dissect the notion of life amid the ruins.

The organising committee of Digital Intimacies 9 acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands on which QUT now stands. We pay our respects to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

– The DI 9 Organising team: Andrea Alarcón, Maria-Gemma Brown, Meg Herrmann, Lucinda Nelson, Samantha Vilkins, Sebastian Svegaard

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Accessibility

Although masks are no longer mandatory in Queensland, we encourage you to wear an effective (N95 or similar) mask if you are able while at Digital Intimacies 9. We believe this is an important part of caring for our communities.

There is lift access available at QUT Gardens Point campus.

We want this event to be accessible to all, so please let one of the organisers know if there is anything else we can do to assist you.

Ground rules

We have zero tolerance for harassment and discrimination. We will be moderating both the panels and the Zoom chat, but we may not catch everything, so please inform us if you encounter something we miss.

We want Digital Intimacies to be a safe and supportive environment, and we ask that you are mindful of the people around you. In particular, we expect participants to:

- Prioritise marginalised voices
- Respect others' lived experiences
- Ask *relevant* questions of presenters (not just thinly-veiled comments!)
- Practise consent – respect any requests to not share slides or other information

Schedule

Day 1 – Thursday 14th December 2023

8:30 to 9:00 – Registration

9:00 to 10:00 – Welcome & Keynote

10:00 to 10:15 – Break

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AI, algorithms and linguistic subterfuge on TikTok – Erynn Young

Love amongst the ruins: Reflections on a 💕✨Towards a Positive Internet✨💕 workshop – Aleesha Rodriguez, Naomi Smith, and Clare Southerton

Share an Orange With Me: Quotidian Hope and Relational Imaginaries in Tumblr and TikTok's Web Weaving – Niamh White

Iranian humor influencers and digital resistance on Instagram – Samaneh Koohestani

Growing out of the online ruins of the *Depp v Heard* trial – Lucinda Nelson

12:00 to 1:00 – Lunch

1:00 to 2:45 – Session 2: Influencers, Advertising, and Consumer Culture

Mr Beast's Giant Hole – Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness

A critical exploration of identity through digital advertising on social media platforms – Lauren Hayden

The Nesting Strategies of e-Commerce Wanghong: Promotional Temporalities in Online Shopping Festivals on Chinese Platforms – Ruohan Li and Crystal Abidin

Barbenheimer Summer: The Hottest on Record – Anna P. Wald

Chinese Women's Affective-Discursive Constructions of Surgical Beautification on RED – Xiaowei Liang

2:45 to 3:00 – Break

3:00 - 4:30 – Session 3: Interspecies Encounters: From Pets to Bots

Multispecies Justice in 'Smartified' Urban Ruins – Hira Sheikh

"We make them our kin": Older adult's sharing rituals of animal images in Australia – Caitlin McGrane, Peta Murray, and Larissa Hjorth

Future/Pets: Intimacies with animal robots – Megan Rose

The robotic ruination of restaurant service – Chris Chesher and Justine Humphry

Day 2 – Friday 15th December 2023

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10:00 to 10:15 – Break

10:15 to 12:00 – Session 4: Public and Private

Eternity in a millisecond – Nikhil Dharmaraj

(In)visibly queer: British South Asian Instagrammers – Priya Sharma

When Personal Data Isn't: Toward a Concept of Entangled Data – Tama Leaver

Material publics: small museums and digital collections as disruptive heritage spaces – Lisa Enright

Traces in ruins: methodological challenges of working with digital resonances – Suneel Jethani and Dale Leorke

12:00 to 1:00 – Lunch

1:00 to 2:30 – Session 5: Death, Aging, and the Archive

Living in the web's ruins: exploring affective experiences and encounters in web archives – Kieran Hegarty

The Heaven's Gate Cult Website as a Study in Internet Abandonment – Oscar Nearly

Aging bodies, aging technologies: Making care and making do – Lisa Vonk

Contrasting life / death: Instagram self-portraits at New York City's 9/11 Memorial – Amanda Burgess

2:30 to 2:45 – Break

2:45 to 4:30 – Session 6: Emotional Labour, Care, and Dating

Versions of Intimacy: Chatting To And About CarynAI – Leah Henrickson

Exploring selfie-editing practices with young people: contextualising narratives of self(ie)-awareness, self-care, and mental health in postfeminist neoliberal social contexts – Amy Shields Dobson

Identity and love - How Brazilian teenagers try to fashion normalcy through social media in a context of precarity – André Cardozo Sarli

Trusting a Dating App: A study on Bumble's disruptions and negotiations in India – Benson Rajan

Only a man can talk with a man": Divisions of emotional labour between performers and ghost-writers in live sexual entertainment – Hanne Stegeman

Keynote speakers

Dr Zahra Stardust

Zahra Stardust is a sexualities scholar at the intersections of culture, media and law. Her research focuses on the production and distribution of queer pornographies, the relationships between law and social movements, and the role of digital technologies in facilitating sexual health. Her monograph Indie Porn: Revolutionary Promises, Regulatory Fantasies, Resistance Politics will be published by Duke University Press in 2024 and her co-authored book Sextech: A Critical Introduction is under contract with Polity Books. Stardust is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society at QUT and an Affiliate at the Berkman Klein Centre at Harvard.

Abstract: Sex Tech Among the Ruins

Forecast to become a US$122bn industry by 2024, the sextech industry is growing at a faster annual rate than drone manufacturing. In its popular use, ‘sextech’ is often used to describe technologies that enhance sexual pleasure, from biometric vibrators to AI chatbots to sex robots. However, sextech does not operate solely in service of pleasure or health – sex technologies have historically developed in pursuit of colonial, carceral, surveillance and biopolitical purposes. From airport body scanners to nudity classifiers

to genetic screening, technologies continue to be deployed to discipline queer, disabled, fat, trans, intersex and racialised bodies and maintain oppressive socio-sexual orders.

At a time of both hype and inequity, in a dystopian landscape where apps promise that extracting personal data will improve user experience, or that partnerships with police will make users safer, this talk invites audiences to re-imagine sextech futures. It draws upon research conducted among sextech users and developers, including speculative design workshops involving the Oracle Cards for Transfeminist Tech, a Public Interest Sextech Hackathon exploring sextech for social justice, a workshop with prospective sextech entrepreneurs at the Sextech School, and interviews with LGBTQ sextech users in Australia.

Sextech design, data and governance is rife with messy tensions. But within this weedy territory, communities in the margins scrap, hustle, hack and experiment to create savvy workarounds to existing technologies, find enjoyment in off-label use, and craft means of generative resistance. Users contest the binary gender embedded in facial recognition technologies through drag, artists reverse-engineer porn detectors to create machine learning pornography, designers create reflective anti-paparazzi to refract up-skirt photographs. These kinds of anti-surveillance sextech study up rather than surveil down, they target systems rather than individual pathology, and they use the resources, relationships and ruins around them to produce new forms of life, possibility and pleasure.

Talei Elu

Talei Elu is a proud Saibai Koedal woman from Seisia – a small Torres Strait Islander community in remote Cape York. Talei worked in Canberra for six years in roles at Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. In 2021, Talei returned home to Seisia to focus more of her time on community-based initiatives that tackle structural issues through action and storytelling.

Abstract

Talei will be discussing her experiences of moving back to her community during the Covid-19 pandemic and how she utilised her government and media skills to ensure her community of Seisia was well equipped to assess online information and misinformation about Covid and the vaccines, and how this collective community effort evolved into securing a telecommunications tower for the Northern Peninsula Area region and investment into community based projects.

Abstracts

Session 1: Solidarity, Resistance, Love

AI, algorithms and linguistic subterfuge on TikTok

Erynn Young, University of Amsterdam

With digital platforms' increasing reliance on algorithmic systems to moderate content and enforce user behavior guidelines, users adapt their language to evade detection, censorship, and/or deplatforming. This study explores the phenomenon of deliberate linguistic manipulation in response to algorithmic content moderation on TikTok, called algospeak, to develop an emergent taxonomy of linguistic manipulation strategies users deploy to evade algorithmic scrutiny and navigate visibility. This study uses a bottom-up, emic process of data collection and categorization in concert with analysis-by-synthesis of algospeak forms in user-generated linguistic data to identify the various manipulation mechanisms deployed and subsequently generate categories of algospeak strategies that group similar manipulations together. The resulting taxonomy is contextualized within broader considerations of deliberate linguistic manipulation as a strategic communicative resource, differently applied in response to variable affordances, constraints, and perceptions of content moderation threats. This study addresses some implications of content moderation on communication and expression on TikTok, highlighting limitations of current content moderation practices when faced against user creativity and adaptability. The study contributes to ongoing discourse surrounding digital language and the difficulty of moderating language-as-content by illuminating the dynamic relationship between algorithmic content moderation and deliberate linguistic manipulation.

Love amongst the ruins: Reflections on a 💕✨Towards a Positive Internet✨💕 workshop

Aleesha Rodriguez, Queensland University of Technology (QUT); Naomi Smith, University of Sunshine Coast; and Clare Southerton, La Trobe University

Amongst general calls that 'the internet is trash', exists a love for an internet of old and a hope towards the internet of the future. In July 2023, scholars and practitioners across eastern Australia joined us in Meanjin/Brisbane for a two-day workshop called💕✨Towards a Positive Internet✨💕. This workshop emerged through a shared desire to move away from 'big critique' (Burgess, 2022) and generate creative responses to the perceived internet 'crisis'. In designing the workshop, we took inspiration from bell hooks' (2000) ode to love, to strategically and playfully lean into kitsch and femme aesthetics; a juxtaposition to the monochrome and masculine logics that dominate the imagined internet ruins. In practice, these considerations materialised through confetti, stickers, references to fandom, and tactile activities involving colour, glue, clay, blocks, and collage. The workshop activities scaffolded from reflections on past practices (what did we love about the internet of old?) and then moved to present observations (what do we love about the internet now?), before asking the group to engage in speculative design and 'backcast' from the future, how we get to a positive internet. Participants were generative and generous and offered critical reflections: asking what even is a 'positive' internet? for whom? and through what means? Emerging through these engaging discussions were emphatic descriptions of internet nostalgia, intimacy with strangers, desires for customisation, the value of interoperability, the counterintuitive joy of the slow and purposeful, and a fierce passion in identifying that a positive internet is not only possible, it presently exists amongst the trash.

Share an Orange With Me: Quotidian Hope and Relational Imaginaries in Tumblr and TikTok's Web Weaving

Niamh White, Monash University

Web weaving, a practice that first emerged on tumblr and has since become popular on TikTok, is a form of digital collaging that collates fragments of poetry, song lyrics, visual art, social media posts, and quotes from fictional works and presents them under a

single theme. Recurrent threads of nostalgic longing for childhood, cherishing platonic relationships, and the sensory delights of food and nature run through these posts, binding seemingly unrelated pieces of media together to produce “archives of feeling” (Cvetkovich 2003) where culture and emotion collide. This paper utilises queer affect theory to read web weaving as a practice of quotidian hope, a mode of meaning-making that enacts a transformative relationship with the everyday, and explores how it constructs relational imaginaries dependent on the appreciation and savouring of ordinary pleasures and intimacies. In doing so, it reflects on how hope is “often a fracturing” (Sedgwick 1997), experienced not as a coherent pull to the future but through repetitions and reorientations, constellatory connections, and fields of possibilities that redefine the present as it unfolds. I place web weaving in conversation with “sad girl” online aesthetics (Thelandersson 2018), considering both similarities in how pathos and loneliness are mediated and where web weaving departs to advocate for more optimistic, mindful ways of being, enacting alternate ways of performing emotion online. Examining this practice attends to the dense saturation of affect in digital cultures and facilitates a deliberation on the limitations and possibilities of social media’s capacity to attune us differently to the world around us.

Iranian humor influencers and digital resistance on Instagram

Samaneh Koohestani, Guilan University

With the emergence of social networks and specifically Instagram, users are not only consumers but also creative producers of social networks. Users can share their ideas and express their views on various subjects including political, economic, social, etc. This is considered a special opportunity in authoritarian societies like Iran, which has an Ideological system and limited public sphere. In this regard, Instagram users in Iran advantage of this digital space by generating content in the form of posts and stories. They represent their desired meanings and opinions that are not allowed to be expressed in the real space of society. In other words, Instagram has created an alternative public space for users to demonstrate their attitudes. Also, Instagram has a resistive dimension in Iran, besides the consumption and entertainment dimensions. It’s worth mentioning, Instagram is not a free area for the users' presence and activity due to filtering and governmental surveillance. Nevertheless, by doing "tactics" as described by Michel de Certeau, users "making do" with the current situation and simultaneously show their resistance against the political structure. For instance, humor influencers

mock political and social issues and convey their meanings by creating humorous content and thus they appear as "textual poachers" on Instagram. In this way, they display their symbolic activism and resistance against the political structure that tries to overcome its dominant meanings and narrative.

Growing out of the online ruins of the *Depp v Heard* trial

Lucinda Nelson, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

The online response to the *Depp v Heard* trial was ‘an orgy of misogyny’ (Donegan, 2022). From the explicit abuse of Amber Heard and her supporters, to rape jokes, to the parroting of longstanding myths about rape and domestic violence, it was hard to escape the overwhelming backlash against Amber Heard, the #MeToo movement and feminism more broadly. But there are glimmers of hope among the ruins. This paper explores the sites of feminist solidarity, connection and resistance in online discourses about the *Depp v Heard* trial, and discusses some of the lessons we can learn from what went wrong.

This paper presents some of the early findings from an analysis of Twitter data relating to the trial. First, I explore discussions of feminist topics like the #MeToo movement in the context of the trial, identified using innovative digital methods for the topic modelling of over 10 million tweets. I find that, while the majority of content reflected antifeminist views, some users also used Twitter in acts of feminist resistance, to express support for Amber Heard and other survivors and to challenge myths about violence against women. Next, I explore the use of community notes in relation to the trial, finding that they were used by some to correct misogynistic disinformation about the trial. Finally, I reflect on the need for platforms to learn from their failings in this case, to ensure that the next survivors who speak out about male violence are not subjected to the same treatment as Amber Heard. In particular, I emphasise the need to address more normalised forms of misogyny, expressed through ‘humour’ or ‘civil’ debate, alongside the more extreme and explicit forms of abuse.

Session 2: Influencers, Advertising, and Consumer Culture

Mr Beast's Giant Hole

Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, University of Queensland

In the video 'Train Vs Giant Pit', from 8 July 2023, Jimmy Donaldson, better known as the massively popular YouTube influencer MrBeast, engages in a rapid-fire sequence of destruction, blowing up a house with fireworks, crashing cars into school busses, setting stacks of cash aflame with dynamite, and, finally, running a functioning locomotive into an abandoned mining pit, watching as it falls and crashes into the bottom. All the while, mannequins dressed as Donaldson's friends are destroyed, locked in the house as it burns or attached to the train as it falls. Drawing on arguments developed in our forthcoming book The Influencer Factory, we use this case to develop two claims: First, the demands of 'elite' social media celebrity and luxury demand an ever-increasing amount of excessive waste and destruction, in which the pleasures of social media intimacies are intertwined with perpetual desire for excessive material annihilation. Second, this includes a libidinal desire to witness one's own destruction through the uncanny doubling of oneself as an inanimate dummy. The destruction of oneself and others is, we argue, mitigated through a context in which one imagines oneself not as an individual, but as a vertically-integrated corporation, a moment we term the corpocene.

A critical exploration of identity through digital advertising on social media platforms

Lauren Hayden, University of Queensland

An intimate version of ourselves emerges in collections of our digital ads. Social media platforms convert our self-expressions, interactions and relationships into data models that serve to predict our desires and interests which appear in the form of recommended content and digital advertising (Davis, 2022). As platform users, we are reflexively implicated in this process by producing a version of ourselves legible to advertising data models and consuming the digital ads that are the product of these models. As illustrated by Wernick (1991) and Banet-Weiser (2012), this reflexive relationship with advertising is neither new nor confined to social media platforms.

Advertising and brands have long reflected dominant cultural values and suggested the use of these symbolic resources in identity construction. However, I argue that digital advertising models on social media platforms intervene on identity construction practices in unfamiliar ways. Not only does the composition of advertisements and brands suggest whom we could or should be, the ad model shapes these possibilities through the unique set of ads shown to us. In this presentation, I reflect on my experience using a novel mobile app that extracts images of all Facebook advertising viewed over a one-week period. I explore what it means to see oneself through the funhouse mirror of algorithmically targeted advertising on social media platforms and consider the affective, political, and ethical tensions that arise in the process.

The Nesting Strategies of e-Commerce Wanghong: Promotional Temporalities in Online Shopping Festivals on Chinese Platforms

Ruohan (Rebecca) Li, Chinese University of Hong Kong and Crystal Abidin, Curtin University

Influencers contribute to over-consumerism and its resulting ruins by promoting fast fashion, materialism, and enviable lifestyles. The Chinese influencer market is a digital intimacy business, which evolves distinctive monetized models ranging from virtual gifts, social tipping, advertising, and more increasingly, e-commerce. In recent years, the intersection of wanghong cultures and online shopping festivals further fuels the prevalence of consumerism. A typical example is the extension of a one-day shopping event into multiple stages of promotional activities – since 2020, the e-commerce giant Alibaba has implemented several temporal stages during its signature shopping festivals for providing vendors with an expanded window of business opportunity. These new promotional temporal designs on e-commerce platforms have also influenced wanghong's strategies on social media to cultivate intimacy among their audiences and to design activities for audiences to participate in online shopping festivals. On Weibo, one of popular social media platforms in China that alliances with Alibaba to promote commercial activities, e-Commerce wanghong who focus on pushing e-commerce sales have employed their vernacular creativity and media savviness to make preparation for different stages of promotions, such as teasing campaign, lottery draw games, monetary incentives through red envelope (hongbao) and cash back after purchase (huixuejin). However, some have criticized the overtly long-running promotions rendering the meaningless consumerist trends across China. Given the culture of

materialism and conspicuous consumption led by wanghong, it also demonstrates an important perspective for scholarly consideration on how to navigate digital intimacy within the exhaustive consumerism society. To research the dynamic interplay between e-Commerce wanghong and online shopping festivals, we draw on digital ethnography to reflect on how wanghong's nesting strategies interweave with promotional temporalities in online shopping festivals on Chinese platforms. Our findings shed light on the importance of influencer culture in modern business strategy, and in particular help to understand the relationship between e-Commerce wanghong and audience engagement in the context of highly commercialized online shopping festivals.

Barbenheimer Summer: The Hottest on Record

Anna P. Wald, University of Notre Dame

Record temperatures, wildfires, and arctic sea ice melts defined the summer of 2023 perhaps less so than the social media attention garnered in anticipation of competing summer blockbusters. The concurrent release dates of Greta Gerwig's Barbie and Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer provided internet memes and discourse that served not only as viral marketing material, but comedic relief which for some offered a brief respite from the continued climate catastrophe related doom scroll. Within digital attention economies that depend on continued scrolling, the oscillation between the information internet inhabitants wish to see and information that reflects the current terrifying realities of the planet compete for engagement. If information shared on digital platforms has a differing consumption model from (now outdated) news media models, how does doom compete with humor? Affective whiplash is induced by the constant shift between "feel good" vs "feel bad" content upon the shared 'location' of these alternating messages on one's phone/feed. Is distraction within the digital a coping

mechanism, a band-aid, or an evolution of the compartmentalization necessary to 'make due' at an increased speed and cycle of circulation? By analyzing the affective dimensions and circuitry of digital discourse surrounding topics of climate disaster in contrast to content which ironically indulges in the frivolous, nostalgic, and absurd, this paper looks to memetic sites to locate resistance strategies and subversive expressions of disgust and anger within the ever-present "doomscroll".

Chinese Women's Affective-Discursive Constructions of Surgical Beautification on RED

Xiaowei Liang, University of Melbourne

This paper explores Chinese women's affective and discursive constructions of feminine beauty ideals in discussing cosmetic surgery on RED (XiaoHongShu), a popular e-commerce and lifestyle platform in China. It investigates 'bodily modification' blogs on RED as a microcosm of digital makeover culture in contemporary China, which is characterised by beauty-oriented femininity. Drawing on my empirical work on the platform, this paper examines how social media makeovers adapt the genre conventions of makeover TV to construct the body as a site for producing authentic selfhood. Here, authenticity is a key theme throughout the textual construction of bodily transformation in two aspects. First, both makeover TV and makeovers on RED construct a sense of realness through their mediated visibility of the ordinary, inviting the public gaze to regulate and validate individual transformation into the extraordinary. Second, following its television precedent, social media makeovers code the pre-makeover body as flawed and abject, thereby necessitating cosmetic surgery as a means to attain an outer physicality as an ideal signifier of one's inner, 'true' self. I argue that these two manifestations of authenticity, together with the cultures of surveillance and selfhood they echo, are intensified in the social media context of RED. RED's values of self-representation resonate within the broader neoliberal-style ideologies of post-socialist China that celebrate consumerist individualism and gender essentialism as a gesture towards modernity. In the case of RED, beauty is presented as an aesthetic/style choice, which obscures the structural gender, class, and ethnic systems informing the construction of normative femininity on this platform.

Session 3: Interspecies Encounters: From Pets to Bots

Multispecies Justice in 'Smartified' Urban Ruins

Hira Sheikh, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Environmental change is giving rise to multispecies justice thinking/practice about ruined urban spaces. At the same time, 'smart' thinking/practice about urban spaces driven by technocratic approaches has been critiqued for reinforcing human exceptionalism. That is, nonhuman nature in urban areas is increasingly perceived and governed via digital technologies that rarely account for limits to human perception. Given the rise in Australia's biodiversity and habitat loss and the increased use of 'big data' to inform biodiversity conservation, in this presentation, I talk about how urban governance—specifically smart urban governance—might move beyond its more human-centred focus on citizens, civic institutions, and the urban environment to address multispecies justice. In this presentation, I will report and discuss findings from my doctoral study conducted in Brisbane, Australia, where I (co)produced knowledge with policymakers, environmental lawyers, scientists, urban planners, and climate activists. The study led to the identification of four human-centred barriers within Brisbane's smart urban governance: (1) property ownership, (2) green spaces, (3) lobbying and donations, and (4) lack of environmental integration. Further, the study imagined two possible futures where multispecies justice was realised in Brisbane's smart urban governance as a shift from ownership to stewardship and legislation to obligation: challenging human-centred urban ruins.

"We make them our kin": Older adult's sharing rituals of animal images in Australia

Caitlin McGrane, Peta Murray and Larissa Hjorth, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

Pets play important roles in people's lives. Pets are often integral family members and their very presence or existence can help create communities beyond the family unit. As Donna Haraway put it, dogs (and other companion species) are "not here just to think with", they "are here to live with" (2003, p. 5). Older adults can rely on their pets for emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing (and vice versa) and pet guardians often

wish to share glimpses or vignettes of these relationships with near and distant others through social media.

More-than-human relations have been the focus of several multispecies and animal studies scholars. This research challenges human-centric approaches to research, providing alternative ways of thinking about our being-in-the-world. For Haraway (2016), the complicity of science and technology in exacerbating ecological destruction challenges us to 'radically rethink' the relationship between humans and nature, dilating our sense of affinity, responsibility, and care to encompass animals as co-evolutionary 'kin'. According to Van Horn et al. (2021), this requires recalibrating the relationality between humans and more-than-humans in terms of kinship and 'kinning'.

In this paper, we explore the results of a study into the pet image sharing practices of older adults in Australia. Our study deployed ethnographic interview methods to explore rituals, practices and affects. In this presentation, we ask what the sharing of companion animals images online says about everyday enactments of kinship, storytelling, playfulness, reciprocity and care? How do these visualities represent the feelings, care practices and experiences of older adults and the value of the more-than-humans in their lives? By focusing on older adults' sharing of pet images online, we consider how we might incorporate more-than-human kinship in healthy ageing futures.

Future/Pets: Intimacies with animal robots

Megan Rose, University of New South Wales

This paper explores intimacies formed between robot pets and humans, and the imagined futures they encapsulate. Conceptualized as instruments for well-being and potential substitutes for animal emotional labour, robot pets are implemented in the home and healthcare settings for care and entertainment purposes. In this paper, I draw on case studies of AIBO, LOVOT and JoyForAll robots to explore the potential for intimacies with the more-than-human and the ways in which robotic design reflects our attitudes towards the animal. Animal robots provide an opportunity to reflect on encounters in what Donna Haraway (2008: 219) describes as 'contact zones', where 'transformative things in life happen' and 'current interactions change interactions to follow'. Intimacies with these robots are sustained through contact, play and animation, drawing on both nostalgic toy cultures and a promise of a playful robotic future. As part

of this interplay, these robots rely on cute aesthetics and affects to facilitate this intimacy. Movement, gesture, sound and soft tactility elicit emotions in users, and can encourage kindness and care for others around them. While cute engineering recognises reflects the positive impact animal labour has in the home, it also reproduces and amplifies patterns of dominance and possession that characterises cute pet ownership.

The robotic ruination of restaurant service

Chris Chesher and Justine Humphry, University of Sydney

The introduction of service robots into restaurants has become increasingly common, raising questions about the implications of this technology for the nature of human/non-human interactions in for public-facing service industries. We carried out ethnographic observations of restaurants in Sydney, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur that featured robotic waiters. Among 15 restaurants we observed, the most intensively automated was a café in Bunkyo, Tokyo, which had almost entirely dispensed with human contact. This eery absence of human service was compensated for by the activity of two Bellabots, which have cute, animated cat faces that serve to excuse themselves as they move through the restaurant, efficiently dodging patrons and delivering meals to customers, who carry out self-service by removing the food and drinks from the robot's trays. This evokes the human loneliness Turkle (2011) attributes to many robots. But other restaurants used robots in diverse ways. Some barely used the robot. Others used the robots to carry food, while leaving human waiting staff to serve it. These robots are not companions but specialised workmates with a role to play, even if they are attractions or even toys for some customers. But robots do not always run smoothly. We observed several robots malfunctioning, requiring staff to take care of them, performing maintenance or physically pushing them out of the way. Our findings suggest that service robots often do not simply replace human wait staff but rather augment them, ideally taking on much of the physical labour while leaving the social and performative aspects of service to human workers. In some restaurants the robots allowed a reconfiguration of spatialised work practices. By analysing the interactions between robots, human staff, and customers, we seek to understand the changing dynamics of service relationships in the age of robotic automation.

Session 4: Public and Private

Eternity in a millisecond (creative presentation)

Nikhil Dharmaraj, University of Cambridge

My project aims to interrogate how queer temporalities are refracted through/against contemporary “AI” surveillance technologies — as a continuation of my recent short film “ALL EYES ON US,” which aimed to problematize trans-of-color (hyper-)‘visibility’ as a fraught domain for digital surveillance and state monitoring. I conceive of this work as a video collage that will invite the viewer to sit in the space between the violently frozen moment of CCTV-surveillance capture and the infinite ways in which queer people experience time fluidly. What emerges when we pair that which aims to freeze us, with that which aims to free us? I draw my theoretical inspiration here from scholars such as Jasbir Puar, Eric Stanley, Mia Fischer, and more. Ultimately, holding the grief of this moment of anti-trans genocide, my piece aims to sit in the escapable space between the joy and violence of existing queerly within the eye of the state. The trans subject, and by extension, the viewer remains caught – suspended between the flash-frame of a biometric scan and the eternal cosmology of trans life in all its minutiae and infinitude. In so doing, this piece aims to offer an alternate understanding of trans life in its minutiae, in the smearing of a single stroke of mascara, the stain of an overzealous lipstick – rituals simultaneously so small and so infinite that perhaps they resist legibility and capturability in their own right amidst the “digital ruins” we find ourselves trapped in.

Tactically, this presentation will draw from my time as a HeyHuman! artist-in-residence at Domestic Data Streamers in Barcelona (Sep 2023), where I will be experimenting with various video formats that juxtapose queer joy with queer capture. I envision the final presentation of these experiments as a video collage of sorts, presented alongside written reflection, theoretical background, and provoking inquiry.

(In)visibly queer: British South Asian Instagrammers

Priya Sharma, University of Manchester

To be seen and heard on Instagram, a user must display a level of publicness that gives them visibility; posting up interesting and authentic content that will build them a following (no matter how big or small) can ensure that they are acknowledged and

validated online by other users. This default publicness on social media assumes 'that being-in-public is somehow neutral, low-risk, unraced, ungendered, and unsexed' (Cho 2017, p.3190). Built into the architecture of social media spaces, default publicness assumes the position of a white, cis-gendered, heteropatriarchal form of publicness that many queer diasporic bodies cannot display. How do you discuss queerness online if you are being tracked by conservative family and community members?

Drawing on interviews with queer British South Asian Instagrammers, this paper looks at how users subvert default publicness by keying into a queer optic, making them visible to those who matter and invisible to those who don't. Referring to this practice as (in)visibility, I maintain that users deploy a range of strategies, from displaying emojis and sending private message reacts, to creating safe online spaces through allyship, which all become ways to enact 'affective relationality' (Gopinath 2018, p. 129). In other words, if you are (in)visibly queer online, you can be affirmed in who you are and therefore can conceptualise yourself as a queer South Asian body whilst simultaneously avoiding homophobia from wider family and community. Whilst it is difficult for a default queer publicness to exist for users, they have developed an (in)visible queerness that simultaneously affirms and protects.

When Personal Data Isn't: Toward a Concept of Entangled Data

Tama Leaver, Curtin University

Social media data is rarely, if ever, personal in the sense of only being about one person. As the very name suggests, most *social* media is about interactions between groups small and large. Yet the myth that individuals are the responsible agent for managing their own presence and privacy online has been one of the great enabling factors in the enormous growth of large digital platforms. When questions of privacy arise, big platforms tend to respond by giving individual users more granular controls over where specific content appears, pushing responsibility back to individuals with ever more complex privacy control panels and features. However, this presentation will argue that data is never really personal, never about one person, and is in fact almost always intertwined with other people. If data tells stories – and it does – then it tells social stories about groups. One of the most pertinent terrains where the myth of individual data unravels is photos of young children posted by parents, usually dubbed 'sharenting'. Increasingly, posting about children publicly is a debated idea, sometimes

a source of public shaming, often in the name of children's future privacy. UN General Comment 25 on the Rights of the Child even enshrines a child's right to privacy in a digital word. And yet children's data is always entangled with their parents data, across a huge range of sources, including the big platforms. Stories, direct messages, Whatsapp groups might offer a level of control over public visibility, but the data remains entangled with the posting and presences of parents, larger families, schools, communities and others. Using the tension around sharenting as a case study, this presentation begins to ask how our ideas about presence and privacy shift if we treat all data as entangled, as always about multiple people, and how this might challenge the myth of individual privacy and individual responsibility in managing our ever-increasing entangled, extracted, data trails.

Material publics: small museums and digital collections as disruptive heritage spaces

Lisa Enright, University of Queensland

Across Australia, there is an array of over 1,300 small museums playing a pivotal role in collecting and preserving everyday heritage objects that are mostly overlooked by larger State and Federal collecting institutions. Through interviews with volunteers across the country who actively engage in the creation of these spaces, these small and "quirky" museums are identified as a conduit bringing together groups of people whose passion is to preserve these "un-museum worthy objects". Recognising that in the digital era, intimate publics such as these continue to coalesce around material culture and heritage objects on social media, this project utilises the vernacular ontologies created in these physical museum spaces to describe and understand their non-traditional collections to identify digital publics that connect with material culture objects in a similar way, but without the authoritative label of a 'museum'. Mirroring the communal connection over material culture through the creation of digitally networked object collections, this paper argues that these publics disrupt our understanding of the role of museums in both the physical and digital space. In doing so, these digital publics pose questions about power and hierarchies of value in how history, heritage, and culture are produced and preserved.

Traces in ruins: methodological challenges of working with digital resonances

Suneel Jethani, University of Technology Sydney; Dale Leorke, University of Sydney

In 2013, the authors published Ideology, Obsolescence and Preservation in Digital Mapping and Locative Art (Jethani & Leorke, 2013) in International Communication Gazette. The article argued that despite the celebratory framing of databases and digital sensor technology's capacity to challenge traditional paradigms of space, time and everyday life, it is important to recognise that in the context researching digital culture practices are subsumed by static materials left after lived moments have passed. Further, they become absorbed into the institutional and commercial structures that facilitate their archival. The past decade has seen digital data capture infrastructure thicken and intensify turning from the environment to the intimate confines of human biorhythms and behaviours. Reflecting on the methodological significance of our original ideas, we consider how the digital traces of human practices present to researchers as a depreciating asset. With this problem in mind, we discuss two dialectics which help researchers of digital culture anticipate and address archival decay as a methodological priority in research design: (1) Since their emergence, digital have been positioned as avant garde due to their potential to facilitate paradigmatic shifts in the mediation of everydayness. But this is offset by technology industry control of the stewardship and maintenance of data and data infrastructure; (2) Niche technologies once employed gradually become obsolete and are replaced by more standardised and centralised platforms. However, it is the resonances of diverse legacy practices that are critical to scholarly work.

Session 5: Death, Aging, and the Archive

Living in the web's ruins: exploring affective experiences and encounters in web archives

Kieran Hegarty, RMIT

The web is in a state of constant erosion, fragmentation, and dissolution—"404 not found" errors, failed business models, unsustainable infrastructure, obsolescent file formats, long-forgotten passwords and deliberate removal. From these ruins, what

forms of life emerge? This paper focuses on the Australian Web Archive (formerly PANDORA), a 25 year old project led by the National Library of Australia that has resulted in the archiving, preservation, and ongoing dissemination of millions of websites. Many of these websites contain evidence of digital intimacies, now long decayed. In their archived form, these intimate moments are—as Wendy Chun (2008, p. 169) has suggested—"not quite dead, but not quite alive either".

This paper considers the affective experience of living amid these ruins through a study of people whose personal websites, blogs, and social media traces have been preserved in the Australian Web Archive. It explores how people respond when evidence of their intimate lives become part of a nation's documentary heritage and how these responses change as the temporal distance between people and their online traces expands. By exploring the multiple meanings that emerge as people's digital traces live on in the Australian Web Archive, this paper illustrates the emotions, practices, and publics emerging among the ruins of the web.

The Heaven’s Gate Cult Website as a Study in Internet Abandonment

Oscar Nearly, Queen Mary University of London

This is an exploratory presentation discussing the ‘abandoned website’, an ontological and aesthetic category which has a great deal of cultural status yet little critical or academic presence. The abandoned website remains online far longer than would normally be expected, and is often characterised by ’90s design tropes and digital decay.

First, I outline some examples of ‘abandoned websites’ and affective and theoretical frameworks that offer useful approaches, such as Mark Fisher’s ‘eerie’, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun’s ‘enduring ephemeral’, and discourses surrounding hauntology. I then focus on the still-running website of ‘Heaven’s Gate’, an infamous UFO cult who committed ritual suicide in 1997, as a model abandoned website. After considering the ethics of analysing such troubling artefacts, I enact a close reading of a few key aspects of the site – including moments of ‘keyword stuffing’ and ‘link rot’ – as examples of how one might ‘read’ the abandoned website and ruination online.

I conclude by briefly comparing Heaven’s Gate to other ‘canonical’ abandoned websites, for *Space Jam* and the Bob Dole Presidential Campaign of 1996, especially

with regard to ideas of electronic presence and intimacy, and by highlighting recent discussions on Twitter/X regarding the social media site's (predicted) abandonment and decay.

In doing so, I make a case for an alternative hermeneutics of the internet which pays particular attention to gaps and remnants, and the abandoned website not only as deserving of critical attention in its own right but an important framework through which to understand challenges faced in contemporary internet culture.

Aging bodies, aging technologies: Making care and making do

Lisa Vonk, Massey University

Feminist, sociomaterial theories posit that care is a more-than-human practice involving the alignment of humans, discourses, spaces, and technologies inter alia to produce a sense of living well (e.g. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Hjorth and Lupton, 2020). Similarly, aging can also be understood as a co-constitutive process involving the entanglements of bodies, discourses, spaces, and technologies inter alia (e.g. Höppner and Urban, 2018).

Drawing from a study of 15 qualitative interviews with older people living in the community in Aotearoa New Zealand about the ways that they give and receive care with, through and to digital technologies, in this presentation I discuss 'technological ageing'. As with the aging body, the phenomena of technological ageing is distributed and co-constitutive: produced in uneven interactions. I found that planned obsolescence and the COVID-19 pandemic context were particularly consequential in producing ageing technologies.

I explore the ways in which the need to care for these aging technologies has practical and affective consequences for older people. When technologies cease to work properly, living well becomes harder to achieve and daily rhythms are thrown off. Care for the older person is destabilised. However, many of the study participants were aware of the enduring harms consumer technologies pose post-disposal and actively resisted the need to replace or dispose of these technologies. Care for technologies necessarily involves adapting and making do against the backdrop of consumer society norms.

Contrasting life / death: Instagram self-portraits at New York City's 9/11 Memorial

Amanda Burgess, Macquarie University

If you visited New York City's 9/11 Memorial, would you take a selfie? Visitors frequently use Instagram to document their experiences at the Ground Zero outdoor memorial pools through amateur photography and self-portraits. In shared public geo-tag archives, fragments of each visit come together to commemorate and witness the thousands of lives lost in the terror attacks. Through content analysis, this paper maps the patterns and repetitions of self-portraits shared under the 9/11 WTC Memorial and Museum geo-tag in 2022 to understand them more broadly as a cultural practice. This paper identifies that the majority of visitors who post self-portraits under the 9/11 Memorial geo-tag are highly reflexive, acknowledging the context of the space through imagery, captions, hashtags and emojis.

As one of New York's most popular tourist destinations, the memorial holds space around the void where the iconic Twin Towers once stood. Within these Instagram posts, we find striking visual contrasts between life and death in the ruins. This paper suggests that visitors seek closeness in a space of absence – to the memorial, to each other and to their unique personal experiences – through language, posing and photographic framing. These findings are in direct contrast to discourse in news and opinion articles that position memorial selfies and social media posts as disrespectful or narcissistic. Ultimately, this paper argues commentators often seek out the most polarising examples of a few self-representations at memorials to shame visitors rather than considering them as part of a broader, nuanced and intimate act of witnessing that allows people to connect to places of trauma, pay respect and acknowledge their experience.

Session 6: Emotional Labour, Care, and Dating

Versions of Intimacy: Chatting To And About CarynAI

Leah Henrickson, University of Queensland

If you could date anyone in the world, who would you choose? With current AI technologies, we may not be able to set you up with your dream date, but we can set you up with a simulation of that date. This is the emerging space of digital human versioning: creating digital replicas of embodied humans, living or dead, that convincingly mimic textual, visual, and/aural habits of those being replicated.

Users have long engaged in human versioning through various means. However, as AI technologies like large language models (LLMs) become increasingly accessible and adaptable, users will more easily be able to customise their chatbot experiences, fine-tuning models according to their own interactional desires. LLMs are already being fine-tuned to version people in chatbot and other forms. For example, internet celebrities have recently released text and audio chatbot versions of themselves, advertised as being able to 'date' users (Clark 2023) or even be 'virtual girlfriends' (Hwang 2023). One such celebrity is Caryn Marjorie, who in May 2023 was the consenting subject of a commercial chatbot called CarynAI (https://caryn.ai) that charges users $1 USD per minute for intimate – and sometimes quite sexual – multimedia conversations. In its first week alone, CarynAI apparently made more than $70,000 USD (Paris 2023).

Following an introduction to human versioning, this paper will offer a rhetorical analysis of marketing, journalistic, and public discourse about CarynAI. It will focus particularly on threads related to actual and anticipated user experiences, aiming to ascertain if and how users find love among the chatbot-shaped ruins of digital sociality. This paper will conclude with a set of questions to provoke further reflection and research about human versions ostensibly used for romantic and sexual gratification.

Exploring selfie-editing practices with young people: contextualising narratives of self(ie)-awareness, self-care, and mental health in postfeminist neoliberal social contexts

Amy Shields Dobson, Curtin University

Young people must navigate a rapidly changing digital landscape of self-representational and communicative social norms, practices, and digital platforms. Selfie-editing apps like Facetune and Faceapp have emerged in recent years, providing “professional-quality” photoshopping and airbrushing in-phone editing tools, promising users the ability to: “effortlessly enhance the attractiveness of their selfie”; “perfect” faces and bodies to mimic dominant cosmetic surgical alterations; as well “playful” features, such as “ageing” filters and “gender swap” tools. The new capabilities provided by these apps emerge at a time when body and image-based appearance pressures have been dominantly and materially-discursively framed as pervasive and enduring issues of concern for young people. In this socio-cultural context, research into young people’s use of facial editing apps has most often approached such apps from risk-focused, individualised, psychologically-oriented epistemologies. Critical humanities scholarship on digital intimacies has responded to media and public health panics about new technologies with nuanced and critical perspectives. As Feona Attwood notes, “critical” thinking here refers to the attempt “to avoid a binary approach” which sets up simplistic debates about the “good and bad”, the “healthy and unhealthy”, the “progressive and oppressive” (Attwood, 2018, p. 2) in relation to digital intimate media practices. This project mobilises more relational, social, and critical approaches (that is, what we like to call “digital intimacies” approaches) to explore how young people use selfie-editing apps, and the implications of such for subjectification processes, and understandings of subjects’ “health” and “well-being” in postfeminist neoliberal social contexts. Data is drawn in this presentation from the first phase of this research, for which we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews in person and over zoom with a diverse group of 33 young people aged 18-24 who take selfies, and use editing apps (all but 4 participants). We focus here on young peoples’ narratives around coming to selfies and selfie-editing, and relatedly, their narratives of progress, or lackthereof, towards “self-acceptance” and “mental health”. We comment on how selfies and

selfie-editing function within these narratives, as well as within broader social and cultural material-discursive constructs of “self-acceptance” and “mental health”.

Identity and love - How Brazilian teenagers try to fashion normalcy through social media in a context of precarity

André Cardozo Sarli, University of Geneva

This presentation seeks to explore how teenagers living in shelters in Brazil perform their strategies of making do in a context of multidimensional precarities. Living in shelters is a result of a "ruined" childhood and family life and it's an experiencing of life in the ruins of the Brazilian ideal of prosperity and the welfare state, scrapped off in the name of neoliberalism.

I will analyse data collected on a period of fieldwork in Brazil in 2022, in the context of my PhD research, when I visited 14 shelters in 7 different cities and spoke with 61 teenagers about their life and their use of the internet. Through qualitative analysis and making use of the concept of reflexive identity by Giddens (1991), I was able to identify that the activities of teenagers in social media was deeply connected with their personal histories of exclusion, such as abandonment, neglect or abuse; the removal from their families and communities, and the situation of living in shelters who themselves experience precarity with low funds, lack of staff, training and lack of will of the state. I argue that their endeavor is then to try to fashion some normalcy and have ontological normality through working on their identities and expressing forms of love.

Trusting a Dating App: A study on Bumble’s disruptions and negotiations in India

Benson Rajan, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

The concept of platforms has been the focus of much scholarship, with many considering it to be a significant break from traditional modes of communication and commerce. Platformisation of dating practices has brought forth modern forms of sociability and intimacies. Dating apps have disrupted the old matchmaking industry in India, bringing new forms of workings, significance, and potential disruptions to social relationships.

Dating platforms are part of an extensive evolutionary process, where technology and information are slowly harnessed to create new forms of market and social systems. In this paper, we examine the platformisation of online dating practices in India, considering the resistance and opposition to the more traditional social economies surrounding arranged marriages. The paper will reflect on a decidedly modern form of sociability in dating practices emerging with digital intimacy.

This study examines Bumble as a case study of a dating platform in India while exploring its domestication challenges in understanding local social dynamics. The focus is also on exploring online dating practices for Indian women on Bumble by analysing the platform phenomenon that reduces anxiety around safety for its users. This study pertains to the mechanisms adopted by Bumble to inculcate trust and how women navigate these mechanisms. The findings from this study could spark discussions on the unique features of Bumble and other dating platforms in India compared to those in other regions of the global South/North.

Only a man can talk with a man”: Divisions of emotional labour between performers and ghost-writers in live sexual entertainment

Hanne Stegeman, University of Amsterdam

“After they see how I talk to them and how I approach them, they learn, they copy my style really easy... at first they don’t know... because only a man can talk with a man” (Man, 28, ghost-writer). Drawing on in-depth interviews and participant observation with online sex workers and support staff in the large webcamming industry in Romania, I hope to further contribute to understandings the division of intimate labour in an age of platform-creator work. Webcamming, as a type of sexual gig labour, has so far primarily been examined as it has been undertaken by individuals engaging in the work flexibly from their homes. This literature, and sociological research on sex work in general, has emphasized the centrality of emotional labour in this industry (e.g., Bernstein, 2007; Jones, 2020). However, the webcamming industry in Romania presents a different context for these considerations. In Romania, a majority of online sex workers perform in studios: physical workspaces with managers, colleagues, support staff and set working schedules (Vlase & Preoteasa, 2021). Here, the work of webcamming is divided between webcam performers who engage in the performance aesthetic and sexual labour and support staff who, in ghost-writing the communication with clients,

covertly perform a large share of emotional labour. Three months of fieldwork in the ‘webcamming capital of Europe’ (Bucharest), inform a reconsideration the various types and divisions of work involved in online sex work. Based on 15 in-depth interviews with performers, 5 interviews with studio support staff, and 8 interviews with studio managers I complicate understandings of the individualized ‘entrepreneurial’ creator and gig industries. The division of (emotional) labour among various workers in the webcamming industry in Romania exhibits an intensification to the specialization of labour under capitalism.