Annual graduate student conference & art symposium

Intersections | Cross-Sections 2025

Interrogating the Lifeworld: Critical Futures and Ways of Being

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YORK UNIVERSITÉ UNIVERSITY
Joint Graduate Program in Communication and Culture
Toronto Metropolitan University
IS CS Intersections Cross-Sections
Graduate Conference & Art Exhibition

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About Us

Land Acknowledgement

Intersections|Cross-sections acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of multiple Indigenous Nations.

Toronto is in the Dish with One Spoon Territory. In acknowledgement of the land treaties of this territory, we recognize and thank the Anishnaaabe, Missisaugas, Métis and Haudenosaunee Nations. We also recognize the treaties' spirit to protect and care for the Great Lakes Region.

Intersections|Cross-sections (IS|CS)

Intersections|Cross-sections (IS|CS) is an interdisciplinary conference and exhibition organized by and for graduate student scholars, artists and activists. We aim to provide a platform for meaningful exchange across disciplines and borders to foster intellectual development between undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, and the community beyond.

Interrogating the Lifeworld: Critical Futures and Ways of Being

This year's conference explores the concept of the lifeworld—the social, cultural, and political structures that shape our everyday experiences. Inspired by Jürgen Habermas' work, we seek to critically examine how these structures influence our ways of being and consider alternative futures beyond the dominant frameworks of power, media, and technology. As we navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, this theme encourages discussions on resistance, transformation, and speculative possibilities for more just and inclusive ways of living.

The 2025 IS|CS Team

Conference Co-Chairs:

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Maria Fernanda Rodríguez Hernández

Planning Phase Co-Chairs:

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Parastoo Mazaheri

Moderators:

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Aidan O'Toole
Dr. Dana Osborne
Dr. Jan Hadlaw
Katayoon Salehi
Dr. Paul Moore
Taeja McKoy

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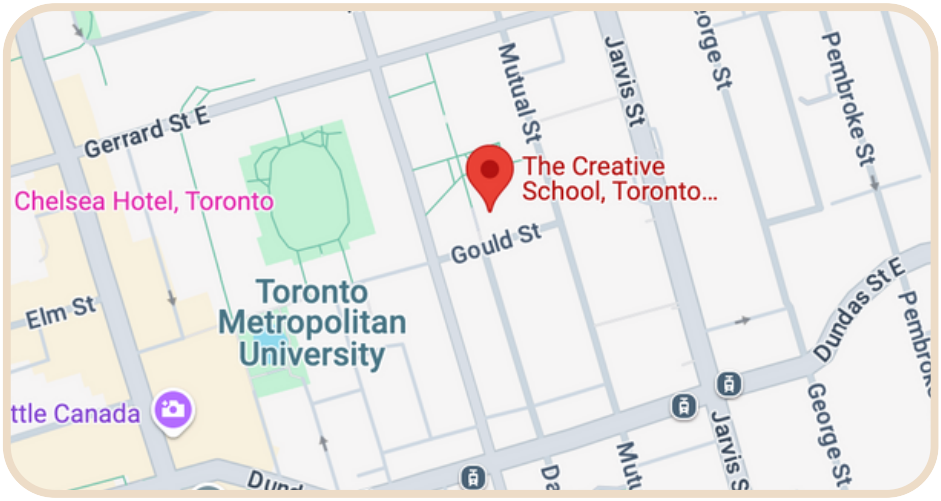
Thank you!

Venue & Directions

The Creative School Catalyst

Second Floor, Toronto Metropolitan University
80 Gould Street, Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2M7





Opening Keynote



Dr. Jason Boyd

Dr. Jason Boyd is a scholar in **Digital Humanities**. His work examines both the creative and critical applications of digital media in literary studies, including digital scholarship, literature, and games. His academic background spans nineteenth-century studies, queer studies, and early modern theatre history.

A leading collaborator in the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project, Dr. Boyd has contributed to the development of essential online theatre history research tools, such as the Patrons and Performances database, Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT), and The Fortune Theatre Records: A Prototype Digital Edition. He is currently **leading the Texting Wilde Project**, funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), which applies computer-assisted methods to the analysis of large collections of life-writing texts.

Dr. Boyd is the **Director of TMU's Centre for Digital Humanities** and serves as an Assistant Director of the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) at the University of Victoria. He is also a member of several advisory boards for large-scale digital humanities projects.

Special Collaboration: SORCE Collective

SORCE Collective (Supportive Organic Reflexive Community/Creative Empowerment) is a research-creation group at T'karonto Metropolitan University and York University, dedicated to justice-driven, creative, and transformative approaches to structural change.

Embracing diversity and inclusion, SORCE explores transverse politics and liberatory methods to cultivate grassroots power and agency. Through a blend of deep philosophical inquiry and hands-on, community-driven action, the collective bridges theory and practice, fostering collaborative, experimental, and participatory engagement.

By centering collaborative meaning-making and grassroots agency, this experience aligns with ISCS's commitment to critical inquiry, artistic expression, and transformative engagement.

We are excited to close the conference with this unique event, offering attendees a space to not only discuss new ideas but to actively participate in shaping them.

IS|CS 2025 Schedule

Time	Room A	Room B
9:00 - 9:45 AM (ET)	Introductory Remarks and Keynote from Dr. Boyd	
9:45 - 10:00 AM (ET)	Snack break	
10:00 - 11:20 AM (ET)	1A: Haunting, Memory and Affect in the Digital World	1B: Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability
11:20 - 12:40 PM (ET)	2A: Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era	2B: Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World
12:40 - 2:00 PM (ET)	Artist Talks	
2:00 - 3:20 PM (ET)	3A: Platforms, Politics and Power	3B: Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration
3:20 -3:40 PM (ET)	Networking and Snack Break	
3:40 - 5:00 PM (ET)	4A: Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks	4B: The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture
5:00 - 5:30 PM (ET)	Closing Remarks	
6:00 - 8:00 PM (ET)	SORCE Collective Closing Event	

Join Us Online!

For virtual attendees, you can watch the panelists live via Zoom.

Click **here** to join on Zoom

Zoom Link:
https://torontomu.zoom.us/j/99005202806pwd=UVzUZrb9twE8Xee8QW9eQnfbXYXfly.1

Panel 1A 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Haunting, Memory and Affect in the Digital World.

You Have a New Memory: On Hauntology, Mnemonic Implants, and the Problem of Memory in the Digital Age By William T Jennings

The ubiquity of the internet since the dawn of the 21st century has fundamentally restructured our relationship to time, history, and memory. Motivated by fetishistic logics of obfuscation and illegibility, digital mass media has externalized our processes of memory and turned them into synthetic, uncanny mnemonic implants — artificial memories collated and re-presented to us by ghostly algorithmic forces lurking deep in the alien machine conscious of cyberspace. Beginning with classical theories of memory by the likes of Henri Bergson, and with contemporary cultural and political theory by Jodi Dean, Mark Fisher, and others, I outline a new philosophy of memory to account for a widespread alienation of the digital subject from both individual and collective histories; subsequently, I argue for the emergence of an alternative temporality - a concept I call slowtime - to counter the internet's logics of speed and simultaneity. Slowtime, which I define as the mediated ontological privileging of the now over the next, owes an enormous debt to slow cinema and ambient music. Considering a predominantly online form of emergent slowtime media that found a quiet popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic (colloquially known as 'slowcore' and 'emptycore'), I aim to build a theoretical framework to account for the digital simulation of Deleuzian 'any-place-whatevers' in the wake of a total existential crisis of consensus reality. Through a dialectics of temporality, slowtime media uses slowness to interrogate speed, to resist the overburdening of time by late-capitalist temporal structures, and to reclaim the memory-image through a synthesis of slow cinema and hyper-nostalgia.

The Enduring Hauntings of Horror By Ken Hammond

My paper explores our societal relationship with "horror", and how it manifests in our daily lives through a non-linear historical narrative. Some parts of my essay are fictional, and some parts are based on my personal reflection on the horrors of being LGBTQ+. I believe the abject and homoterrorism intersect in our daily lives particularly through popular culture conventions of "horror" and news consumption. I explore popular films and TV shows like Nightmare On Elm Street 2, The New Mutants, Get Out, Lovecraft Country, Crimes of the Future, and Candyman. I take appropriate time to discuss how queer neighborhoods are haunted by the ghosts of violence inflicted in the past. I discuss a couple examples of homoterrorist acts on the Toronto LGBTQ+ community, such as the bathhouse raids in 1981, and the terror Bruce McArthur inflicted in the village. My essay uses the theoretical frameworks of abjection, homoterrorism, hegemony and intersectionality to argue horror can be sites of oppression, but also liberation. We can use storytelling and media activism to reclaim past narratives and challenge hegemonic constructions of power.

Panel 1A 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Haunting, Memory and Affect in the Digital World.

Emotions in the Digital Age: Understanding How Affect Influences Media Literacy and Critical Engagement By Julianna Kowlessar

Over the years, media literacy has grown in importance for its ability to help counter instances of misinformation and disinformation that emerge from everyday media materials (Cruz & Dorsch, 2019; Kellner & Share, 2019). Moreover, a critical media literacy approach deepens fundamental media literacy aptitude and skills, as it encourages individuals to "critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 59). A key distinction of critical media literacy, however, is that it "is not 'media bashing' and does not tell students what to think" (Butler, 2019, p. 159). Butler's (2019) point emphasizes that critical media literacy is not meant to influence adolescents' points of view or create further biases, but instead, is used as a way to promote critical thinking skills when considering media-based interactions and relationships. This aspect of critical media literacy can be applied to notions of affect theory, as it describes an intersectional amalgamation of human and non-human senses impacted by lived experiences and everyday interactions (Pedwell, 2023; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). Yet, affect is an intricate subject, which makes it difficult to define straightforwardly. Linking this with critical media literacy and the crucial necessity for encouraging individuals to become apt digital users, who are inclined to constructively and meaningfully engage with everyday media (Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007, 2019), it is valuable to consider how AI and new media technologies regularly impact users' digital experiences.

Memento Mori Digitalis: Archival Reflections on Mortality in the Digital Era By Zhino Yousefi

This research investigates the evolution of memento mori, from its roots in medieval art and vanitas paintings to modern reinterpretations in digital media, specifically within Virtual Reality (VR). The project draws from existentialist thinkers like Heidegger, Sartre, and de Beauvoir and critically examines how artistic representations of mortality shape our understanding of life and identity. It explores how confronting death through digital media can encourage authentic living, help individuals strengthen their sense of self, and reduce existential anxiety. In this context, digital media serves as a platform for questioning societal assumptions about life, identity, and death, sparking a conversation that challenges the values imposed by political and economic systems. This study focuses on the intersection of interaction, experience, and media in constructing narratives about mortality and identity. It analyzes how VR art, such as the award-winning "Gumball Dreams" from SIGGRAPH 2023, can provide transformative experiences that reframe existential questions. Through immersive environments, these works challenge traditional representations of death, creating spaces to explore identity in the context of mortality. They offer new media flows, streams, and spheres where digital tools expand our understanding of life's temporality and invite participation.

Panel 1A 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Haunting, Memory and Affect in the Digital World.

Excavating Lifeworlds through Fossilized Media By Suarjan Prasai

In recent times, the study of new media has largely focused on technical developments that align with a Western, teleological, and futurist view of technological novelty. New media is often understood in terms of innovations such as AI language processing and art (e.g., ChatGPT, Midjourney), Extended Reality technologies (e.g., Apple Vision, the Metaverse), decentralized blockchains and Web 3 (e.g., cryptocurrency, NFTs), and Social Media 2.0 (e.g., Instagram Reels, TikTok). In my proposal, I aim to challenge this dominant narrative of technological progress by examining the 'technological' and its 'development' from a decolonial perspective, which complicates the relationship between progress and the temporal distinctions of old versus new.

From the perspective of colonized epistemologies, these new technologies might indeed appear as forms of progress. However, from a minoritarian, decolonial lens, the situation is more complex. Technologies that are often regarded as 'futuristic' or 'advanced' can, in fact, be seen as repeating old forms of domination. Conversely, older, seemingly outdated technologies—whether analog or pre-industrial—may hold the potential for decolonial resistance. My proposal will explore these 'reservoirs' of decolonial potential, seeking to develop a notion of technological development that accounts for the paradoxes of time and progress.

Panel 1B 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability

Manufacturing a Pandemic's "End": The Biopolitics of "Immunity" and Long COVID By Kayli Jamieson

Despite over four years of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, there remain limited public health guidance and societal protections. Although deaths and disability continue to rise amid warnings from the WHO of the ongoing pandemic, there is a pervasive sense of societal apathy and lack of urgency to address transmissions amid a failed herd immunity strategy. Using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), this work interrogates socio-political relations present in British Columbia's public health statements and Canadian newspapers in their discursive construction of a hegemonic normalization of a 'back to normal' that 'others' populations deemed as vulnerable.

I analyze the ideologies and meanings conveyed about COVID-19 through this media discourse and ask which populations these narratives serve and harm. For a patient-centered analysis on these news representations, I interviewed British Columbians with Long COVID, a chronic and disabling illness that 1 in 9 Canadians have experienced. This study aims to center the lived experiences of Long COVID patients—also known as longhaulers—on their experiences of being confronted by such "post-pandemic" narratives or any virus-minimizing occurring in the news media they consume.

Drawing on Foucault's work on biopolitics, Butler's precariousness/vulnerability/grievability, and Thrasher's 'viral underclass', this work also outlines the intersections of ableism, disablism, social disparities, and stigma being faced by Long COVID patients and disability communities, as well as parallels to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Why are some groups deserving of access to life and others not? What discursive choices are being utilized to imply the pandemic is over (or reinforce a "post-pandemic" narrative)? How have these gained the status of 'truth', as applied from Foucault? The troubling resilience of eugenic ideology that categorizes specific populations into 'acceptable losses' or 'disposables' must be confronted by labour, anti-racist, feminist, and queer movements alike.

Panel 1B 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability

When Lifeworlds Collide: Problems of Intersubjectivity Between Autistic and Neurotypical Lifeworlds By Esther Sampson

As described in this conference's call for papers, Habermas' lifeworlds (or lebenswelt) represent the "taken-for-granted, common sense knowledge, values, and attitudes that form the basis of human interaction." But what happens when different lifeworlds collide? Whose world comes out on top? Whose taken-for-granted is, well, taken? When it comes to Autistics and Neurotypicals, the answer is evident in the terms. A Nuerotypical by its definition is the typical (most common) way of being embodied and experiencing the world. As such, Neurotypical lifeworlds are the dominant lifeworld, and Autistic ones forever attempt to navigate them. But why is all the onus on Autistics to navigate the difference in lifeworlds? Perhaps a bit of mutual understanding can go a long way in easing these differences.

To this end, this paper illustrates ways in which Autistic and Neurotypical natural and cultural lifeworlds differ and why problems may arise when lifeworlds collide through intersubjectivity. In addition, this paper will argue for a move away from insisting that Autistics navigate the difference alone, and support arguments that Autistic/Neurotypical intersubjective breakdowns stem from mutual misunderstandings – and, as such, both parties need to be working toward mutual understanding. This paper will pull from Biosemiotic and Cognitive Semiotic theories (particularly, the umwelt, and Semiotic Hierarchy Framework – which includes lifeworlds, respectively) to support discussions on how lifeworlds are developed and how the collision of lifeworlds occurs between Autistics and Neurotypicals. By looking at the natural deviations in how Autistic/Neurotypical lifeworlds develop, this paper will close with suggestions for moving forward together toward mutual understanding.

Panel 1B 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability

Magic Pill: Lithium Consumption by Humans and Vehicles By Alba Clevenger

A pill is a pile, a heap of material in a capsule. A pile is a battery (French, pila in Latin). The first battery, a voltaic pile of copper and zinc. Pilul (French), pilula in Latin meaning a small ball, a medicine easy to swallow.1 Like vehicles, some psychiatrized bodies are 'made better' with lithium. Backed by the scientific belief that it is the optimal choice for the perpetual forward motion of these human and vehicular bodies, lithium consumption enables some futurities while foreclosing others. This is an exploratory paper that investigates the material-affective affinities of humans who consume lithium pharmaceutically, electric vehicles powered by lithium-ion batteries, and the ecologies from which the chemical is extracted. Through material tracing, this research broadly seeks to understand what cultural understandings and assumptions are activated by lithium in these contexts. How is it shaping human and non-human bodies and how they shape it in return. I ask how is this chemical in the world? And under what conditions is it enabling, disabling, healing, toxic, conductive, destructive, or simply ambivalent. This paper moves through multiple field sites in Quebec, from open pit mining to microscopy, while remaining anchored in the researcher's body, in her everyday practice of lithium consumption. Employing critical disability and feminist STS frameworks, this paper traces lithium consumption in three principal interrelated contexts: (1) extraction in which mining radically alters landscapes and social relations (2) technological innovation as the new 'white oil' powering the green economy, (3) pharmaceutical intervention where mad and disabled bodies engage in a plurality of practices of lithium consumption and rejection. Drawing on Mel Y. Chen's theories of intoxication and chemical intimacy and Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter, this paper seeks out points of affinity, contradiction, and ambivalence while staying attentive to relations of power.

Panel 1B 10:00 - 11:20 AM
Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability

"Who is System and What is he So Nervous About": Cripping mHealth Technologies By Maggie Mills Calderon

Mobile application disease management is a burgeoning field of study in medicine, behavioural science and communication. Disabled lifeworlds are increasingly structured in dialogue with available digital tools, including mHealth technologies. I analyze the adoption of mHealth as an extension of the cybernetic turn, enumerated by scholars like Joshua St. Pierre, alongside Lauren Berlant's conception of desire as an orienting force rather than a lack and Eve Tuck's work on resisting damage-centred research on marginalized groups in favour of desire- centred frameworks. Drawing from a multivalent conception of desire within medical humanities and health communication research, I pair my theoretical framework with desire paths: an analytical tool that illuminates the ways in which users engage with existing technologies, including the possibilities they open onto as well as the risks. Users are remade into data citizens through their engagement with mHealth technologies and the risks associated with even pseudonymous identification on such platforms. Desire paths are a literal enaction of these theoretical constraints, as users move through and engage with the app's interface. Apps structure and are structured by multiple and multivalent forces and enactments of desire, including the desire for privacy. Commercial mHealth application Bearable realizes the nuance and complexities of "grappling with cure," which Eli Clare describes as a necessary and deeply complex part of disabled life. As St Pierre suggests, critical posthumanism allows us to incorporate imperfect technologies in imperfect conditions and attempt to parse and measure their impact and meaning, with an appreciation that abstractions and notions of purity are anathema to the theory and practice of cripping mHealth. I contend that a lived experience digital methodology for researching mHealth's impacts should remain open to futurity as it takes shape on through these systems.

Panel 1B 10:00 - 11:20 AM

Navigating, Depicting, and Empowering Dis/Ability

"The Fat Flaneur" By Elizebeth Thorkelson

When a person is fat, their every move is dictated by the size of their body. Whether that be in the familiar squish of a too-small chair or in the omnipresent frustration of fellow commuters when you try to squeeze into the already packed bus. To explore the embodied experience of fat (im)mobility, I turned myself into a fat flâneur. Using the act of flânerie as a research collection tool, I explored my everyday surroundings and took photographs of myself in spaces where I visibly didn't fit. In doing this practice, I was overwhelmed by the frequency in which I faced obstacles due to my fat body. Using this feeling of overwhelm and frustration, I then created a scrapbook where I combined the photos of my body in these spaces with ephemera that I have collected through the act of journeying in my fat body.

The book became an external manifestation of what it is to exist in a fat body that is often in motion, illustrating the discomfort, the awkwardness, the pain, and the beauty. Ultimately, my time as a fat flâneur helped me better understand the cumulative trauma that is living in a world where you simply do not fit; of living in a world that is made, I argue, in hopes that fat people do not try to fit at all. This project intends to highlight the role our built surroundings have on influencing the physical and mental well-being of fat people, inviting new and brave ideas that move us towards creating a more safe and accessible world for everyone, including fat people.

Panel 2A 11:20 - 12:40 PM
Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era

Transforming Cultural Spaces: The Role of Digital Humanities Practices in the Construction of Narratives By Marianne George

This qualitative research aims to use digital practices as a tool for transformative learning while also subverting traditional learning approaches. It explores the ethnographic social and cultural institutional spaces by engaging international students in digital humanities practices activities geared towards learning through the hands-on activities, art-making process, communicating meanings, and translating students' lived experiences. It delves into multi-layered digital humanities methodologies and explores the liminalities of cultures within the context of migrant students in higher education and their rapidly evolving learning journey, by examining both theoretical and empirical applications, connects digital pedagogical practices such as photovoice, digital storytelling, arts workshops as a process for communication in a classroom setting in Canada.

This creative pedagogy approach purposefully practices social interactions between diverse students to build more socially, educationally, and culturally connected communities of learning. A key question explored is how various creative arts methods help immigrants find their suppressed narrative voices within experiential learning, contributing to transformative practices that reshape collective consciousness and challenge the struggles faced by international and newcomer students entering Canadian institutions. These students often face difficulties in reaching a harmonious understanding of themselves, their liminalities, and their group dynamics (Wang, 2023).

Panel 2A 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era

Everyone Archives: Building a Community Archiving Project By Ben Compton

This presentation provides an overview of the programming and beginnings of Everyone Archives, an Ontario-based organization supporting people in their archiving projects outside of major institutions. We provide entry-level training in archival preservation, resources like sound recorders and scanners for digitization, and social opportunities for people preserving public/personal history. Core to the mandate of EA is a belief that everyone has a relationship to archiving. Whether someone is organizing a photo album, recording the story of a grandparent, mapping the history of their neighbourhood, or simply reckoning with the limited storage on their phone, they are an archivist. However, archiving has historically been considered the domain of major galleries, schools, and governmental bodies. With little diversity within the archival field, this has sometimes resulted in the misrepresentation or omission of certain histories from institutional collections, namely the stories of marginalized folks. Our presentation considers ways to equip people with the skills and tools to preserve history on their own terms with the cultural sensitivity and care that it deserves.

Through a brief history of our organization and initiatives, this presentation positions archiving at the nexus of issues around representation, technology, history, and memory. We hope to lay out some of the principles that guide our organization, as well as highlight like-minded initiatives that we look to for inspiration in the field of public history, community organizing, and memory work. This presentation is also grounded in the practical. How much money did it take to launch the organization? How are we becoming financially sustainable? What are the major hurdles we have faced in getting EA off the ground? We hope this generates discussion around how to support everyday forms of archiving, but also a larger conversation around what it means to preserve history and where that history is held.

Panel 2A 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era

Never-Ending Stories: Recent Advances in AI-Generated Interactive Fiction

By Jeremy Andriano

In the whirlwind of excitement surrounding generative artificial intelligence (GAI) and its rapidly expanding capacity to model meaningful, coherent exchanges in natural human language, there have been several studies investigating the potential for AI-generated interactive fiction (IF) that responds to textual prompts provided by the reader (e.g., Kumaran et al., Taveekitworachai et al.). However, the storytelling abilities of large language models (LLMs) such as OpenAI's ChatGPT have always been limited by "context memory," causing responses that are often hallucinatory or internally inconsistent in narrative detail (Buongiorno et al. 158). The LLM might never respond, "I don't understand that," but it also has a tendency to lose the plot rather quickly. This paper presents two recent demonstrations that seem to successfully mitigate such memory woes, using distinct methods to produce text-based interactive games that offer surprisingly coherent and structurally-consistent narrative responses. First, I will introduce PANGeA, the "Procedural Artificial Narrative using Generative AI" system proposed by Buongiorno et al., and its prototype game, Dark Shadows GPT, in order to demonstrate how the system uses "modern LLM frameworks" to overcome narrative challenges caused by limited context windows (Buongiorno et al. 158). Next, I will discuss Steven Johnson's November 2024 essay, "You Exist in the Long Context," which begins with a playable 10-turn interactive fiction based on Johnson's recent book, The Infernal Machine. Rather than working around memory limitations, Johnson's method takes advantage of Google Gemini Pro 1.5's greatly-expanded context window; he provides a 400-word prompt capable of turning any written work into a playable IF, complete with its own goals and puzzles for the reader to solve. Generative AI has already proven its ability to turn human prompts into meaningful text, image, sound, and video (Cao et al.). The examples here demonstrate a potential to turn human prompts into interactive fictions themselves—generating not only the content, but also the underlying systems, structures, and rules. By investigating these attempts at automating the IF writing process, I hope to illuminate the process itself, and to better understand the role of the human IF writers of the future.

Panel 2A 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era

Bridging Worlds: Teaching and Ties through Oral History By Sahra Barre Mohamud

This paper explores the significance of oral history in understanding the experiences of Black educators through a semi-structured interview with ""Konjo,"" a Black Muslim educator of Ethiopian descent. It highlights storytelling as a powerful tool for bridging cultural divides and fostering meaningful relationships within educational settings. The study delves into themes of representation and mentorship, emphasizing the positive impact of having educators who share similar cultural and experiential backgrounds with their students. Conversely, the absence of such representation can lead to feelings of isolation, particularly for Black Muslim women navigating the challenges of intersecting racial and religious identities.

The research also addresses advocacy and the di culties Black educators face in confronting systemic inequities within schools. Many feel hesitant to challenge injustices out of fear of being perceived as disruptive. Furthermore, the study examines how raciolinguistic ideologies perpetuate biases, disproportionately a ecting marginalized students. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to support Black educators and students alike. Recommendations from the study include establishing mentorship and support networks for Black educators, particularly within predominantly white institutions. Professional development focusing on intersectional identities and empowering educators to advocate for meaningful change are also emphasized. Additionally, the research calls for curricula and pedagogical approaches that reflect diverse experiences and promote inclusivity. Personal reflections from the author highlight the transformative power of engaging with oral history. These experiences deepened their understanding of systemic barriers and strengthened their commitment to equity and justice in education. The study ultimately calls for a greater commitment to representation, inclusivity, and advocacy within educational spaces.

Panel 2A 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Transforming Education, Research, and Knowledge Production in the Digital Era

‘How Do We Know?’: A Reflection, a Communal Experience, a Spontaneous Act of Research-Creation By SORCE Collective

Reflecting on the process of communing the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Conference and Party, in this presentation we will explore the process of establishing an anarchist collective, able to engage in a collaborative creative process. Approaching our meetings as artistic forms enabling us to access specific types of knowledge, through iterative processes of “deep hanging out” we actively engage an exploration of the question ‘How Do We Know?’ The Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Conference was an experiment in anarchist community building, using an open, reflexive, iterative organizational approach, and decision-making process based on a quaker consensus model. In our deep questioning of the nature of knowledge, our skills and strengths organically arose as emergent challenges and opportunities lead to our final meeting.

The result was an experience for nearly 30 individuals who each shared a common space, each moving through it in a different way. In each of us seeking to open up the question: ‘How Do We Know’ we came to understand and share how our paths of inquiry did not answer the question, but rather created open-ended possibilities enabling us to continue our experiences beyond and outside of this meeting and into our daily lives and academic research. This presentation will trace the journey from coming-together as a community, to proposing the idea of a ‘happening’, all the way to the planning and final realization of our experiment. The outcomes of such a process involve deepening our collective knowledge at the intersections of anarchism, research creation, project management theory, and relational aesthetics. The final form of our event was ultimately built by those who attended, from the energies and stories able to emerge at various stages throughout the process.

Panel 2B 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World

Sovereignty Education in China: TV Dramas under the Global Anti-Terrorism Discourse By Lucas Long Hin Wong

Following the 9/11 attacks, a global discourse of anti-terrorism emerged. Judith Butler (2004) argues that this discourse, driven by the rise of governmentality, has enabled the reassertion of state sovereignty. Since the 2010s, China has adopted this narrative, framing domestic unrest as "terrorist activities." However, it is only recently that Chinese scholars have begun aligning this framing with the concept of biopolitics. Pang (2024) develops the concept of "sovereigntism," describing China's efforts to promote ethnic harmony under the supreme doctrine of sovereignty. However, how China uses popular culture to educate its people the logic of sovereignty remains a critical question for media scholars, particularly in Hong Kong, which is often framed as a site of political turmoil driven by "terrorist activities."

This paper examines the concept of "sovereignty education" as propagated through popular culture, particularly TV dramas. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of sovereignty, biopolitics, governmentality, and soft propaganda, it also incorporates insights from cultural studies of education to explore how media texts cultivate a nationalistic subjectivity aligned with state power. The central research questions address the roles of TV dramas in this process and the specific propaganda tactics employed. Methodologically, the study utilizes textual analysis, focusing on plot structures, dialogue, character portrayals, and emotional appeals in two TV series: The Invisibles 《隱形戰隊》 and Flying Tiger III 《飛虎3》. It argues that these TV dramas embed Chinese anti-terrorist measures within the global anti-terrorism discourse. By exploring the interplay between governmentality and sovereignty in contexts where the rule of law is suspended under national security emergencies, the paper identifies a unique form of sovereign power within a "state of exception" (Agamben, 2004). The resulting propaganda fosters a national identity tied to state sovereignty, emphasizing individual responsibility in counter-terrorism and moral compliance with state narratives. By analyzing these dynamics, this paper contributes to understanding the intersections of media, sovereignty, and biopolitics in contemporary China's nation-building projects and engages broadly with the conference theme on the role of popular culture in social critique——while popular culture may generate power of resistance, it may also reinforce the state ideology.

Panel 2B 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World

Decoding Neo Capitalism from Studio Ghibli: Spirit Away in Neoliberal Childhoods By Peiqing (Grace) Gu

This paper examines Hayao Miyazaki's Spirited Away as a framework for analyzing the socio- economic effects of neoliberalism and Westernization while exploring the broader role of Studio Ghibli in shaping the influence of new media. Drawing on critical media theories and the works of scholars like Henry Giroux and David Harvey, I situate Spirited Away within broader debates on neoliberal cultural production and its effects on youth. The film's symbolic representations—such as the bathhouse economy, the commodification of identity, and environmental degradation—illuminate real-world dynamics of labor exploitation, ecological crises, and cultural homogenization. I will also analyze how Spirited Away, as a global cinematic phenomenon, reflects and contributes to the evolution of new media's role in shaping cultural and economic discourse.

By leveraging its richly symbolic narrative and universal themes, Spirited Away exemplifies how animation can transcend traditional media boundaries to influence global audiences, acting as a vehicle for critical reflection and collective imagination. This study will highlight how Ghibli's visual and narrative strategies critique neoliberal ideologies while offering alternative visions of care, reciprocity, and environmental renewal. Furthermore, I will argue that films like Spirited Away engage audiences with complex socio-economic critiques while fostering a participatory culture characteristic of new media, where stories are reinterpreted, shared, and integrated into global conversations. Ultimately, this paper contributes to critical media studies by situating Spirited Away at the intersection of traditional and new media, exploring its dual role as a critique of neoliberalism and a medium for cultural exchange. Through this lens, I aim to illuminate how animated films inspire dialogues about reimagining capitalism, resisting cultural homogenization, and addressing environmental crises in a rapidly digitizing world.

Panel 2B 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World

Penumbras of Resistance: Queer Heterotopias on screen (Online) By João Eduardo Peçanha de Freitas

Drawing from my analysis of Marcelo Caetano's ""Baby"" (2024), this presentation examines how contemporary cinema employs speculative fiction to document and preserve queer spaces that exist as heterotopias - sites that, as Foucault describes, function as ""counter-sites"" where real spaces are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Through its portrayal of São Paulo's center and its hidden geographies of desire, ""Baby"" illustrates how certain urban spaces persist as sites of queer sociability precisely because of their position as ruins or spaces of apparent decay, echoing Fiona Anderson's analysis in ""Cruising the Dead River"" of how queer communities historically reclaimed and repurposed abandoned urban spaces. The film's creative documentation of spaces like adult cinemas, bathhouses, and nightclubs demonstrates how marginalized communities construct and maintain heterotopic spaces that exist in parallel to, yet distinctly separate from, dominant social spaces.

This spatial dynamic resonates with Anderson's examination of New York's abandoned piers as sites of queer cultural production and resistance. Similar themes appear in recent productions like ""Fellow Travellers"" (2023) and ""American Horror Story: NYC"" (2022), which employ speculative elements to reconstruct historically threatened or erased queer spaces. This presentation argues that such cinematic works move beyond simple documentation, instead using speculation as a tool to preserve and reimagine spaces that function as critical heterotopias - sites that simultaneously reflect and contest the spaces that surround them. Through creative reconstruction of marginal urban spaces, these narratives expose how systems of power have historically shaped and constrained queer spaces while simultaneously revealing their persistent capacity to function as sites of authentic expression and connection.

Panel 2B 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World

The Doc(umentary) Told Me To Eat/ Not To Eat: Analyzing Media's Persuasion of Re-thinking Food Choices Through Creative Narratives About Animal vs. Plant-based Diets By Antara Dey

Food documentaries use creative narratives about food choices and nutrition to persuade audiences to change their beliefs about food and adopt plant-based diets. While food is a pervasive ingredient in the lifeworld of all humans, food knowledge is still an evolving theme in popular media. Food documentaries unpack myths, fads, and fetishes by demystifying the truths about food production, consumption, nutrition, preparation, and social movements by providing agency to the audiences through food knowledge. This knowledge is curated using overarching themes linked to human food choices and their impacts on personal wellness and the environment. Using thematic analysis, the presentation will analyze how food documentaries, including Forks Over Knives (2011), Food Choices (2016), The Game Changers (2018), and Hack Your Health (2024), re-construct narratives about human food choices to motivate audiences to change their eating habits and diets. The presentation will identify the recurring themes, patterns, codes, elements, and representations of food knowledge in the four documentaries.

It will examine how these four popular media documentaries persuade audiences with narratives about health and nutrition, sustainability, social movements and diet cultures, and historical and gendered notions about food while enabling food-based cultural citizenship. Additionally, it will expand on Christie and Anderson's (2021) work on popular media documentaries by highlighting production elements, including infographics, animations, voiceovers, and expert opinions, to accentuate the resistance towards animal-based diets and the benefits of adopting plant-based diets. The thematic analysis will build upon Linedfield's (2010), Flowers and Swan's (2011), and Vezovnik's (2024) works on the growing importance of popular food narratives, representations of food knowledge and social movements, and romanticization of plant-based diets in food documentaries. Focusing on the relationships between cultural citizenship and food media, the analysis will also underline how the documentaries communicate ideas about food and its linkages with wellness, diseases, animal activism, and climate change. Ultimately, the presentation will enable a discussion on how food documentaries mobilize the power of collective intelligence, cultural awareness, and social action through curated narratives about the well-being of the living world, including humans, animals and the planet, by just changing what one chooses to eat or not eat.

Panel 2B 11:20 - 12:40 PM

Screening Power, Resistance, and Consumption: Media Narratives in a Globalized World

North York Recipe for Healing: Food as a Community Care Langauge during COVID By Jingshu Yao

Food is connected with individuals' cultural identities and lived experiences. Food studies scholars established that recipes can be analyzed as an embodiment of information to reveal knowledge about their producers and users (Leonardi, 1989; Cotter, 1997; Tippen, 2014; Mihalache, 2018). "North York Recipes for Healing" (2023) reflects on the experience of East Asian immigrants in North York through recipe sharing and storytelling. The 15 oral history interviews were then curated and presented in an online archive through ArcGIS Story map for public access. The research shows that adapting and changing recipes is a common practice among immigrants, which can be used as a pivot point to encourage community storytelling. Recipe adaptation led to discussions in which culinary innovation is seen as a method for personal expression of cultural identities, a tool for community building, and a way to create a sense of belonging. In addition to sharing the research findings, the presenter reflected on the experience under Morse's (2021) framework, where she approaches community-centred museum practices through the notion of care. Conducting community-based research is both a rewarding and challenging process. The project provides two key learnings in research design: 1) Benefits to the community: It was a time-consuming process to gain trust and establish relationships with the community, especially with food business owners who are occupied with daily operations and don't see much value in academic research. 2) Scope: It was also difficult to capture the diversity within the community with a limited sample size and increasing the level of specificity in research design is helpful in avoiding misrepresentation and overgeneration.

Artist Talk 12:40 - 2:00 PM

VR Storyliving as a Medium for Emergent Narratives: The International Student Experience in Canada By Karina Viella Darminto

In conjunction with its innovative provision to the gaming world, Virtual Reality (VR) has often been praised for its unprecedented storytelling capabilities. It is deemed the solution to the demand for empathy and is often called the “ultimate empathy machine."" However, scholars argue that the conversion from VR content to empathy to human behavior is not that simple. Game studies scholar Bon Ruberg (2020) argues that empathy in VR provides an unearned ""feel good"" emotional reaction in consumers following a fleeting experience from another's perspective, devoid of the necessity to engage in genuine societal change. In the case against empathy, Wendy Chun (2016) also contends, ""If you’re walking in someone else’s shoes, then you’ve stolen them.” Consequently, as an alternative to empathy through storytelling, some scholars (Maschio, 2017; Jones, 2021) advocate for ""storyliving”.

Academics in diasporic and immersive technology studies have been separate in their discussions despite their shared emphasis on storytelling and empathy. My project aims to bring together these two conversations through my identity as an international student and my affinity for emerging technologies. This project aims to explore alternative applications of VR beyond its traditional role as an empathy tool. By transitioning from “storytelling” to “storyliving”, it will aim to create an open-ended, non-directive, immersive short game capturing the international student experience in Canada. Through mechanisms such as environment storytelling and non-linear exploration, the VR environment will allow players to engage in an emerging narrative and connect their own experiences to unfamiliar ones without appropriating or misrepresenting those experiences. The hope is to invite the players to craft their own shoes in someone else’s world.

Artist Talk 12:40 - 2:00 PM

Speculative Journeys: Reimagining Pakistan By Hazem Asif

My project reimagines Pakistan's landscape through a series of four non-linear sci-fi visual narratives that delve into the unintended consequences of modern technology, energy crisis, ecological collapse, and political corruption. Through the speculative nature of these narratives, I aim to provoke questions around sustainability, identity, traditonal structures of power and technology's role in shaping the socio-political dynamics of future Pakistani society.

What is Home By Hannah Tough

We say homelessness as if these people are missing something integral to being alive - a home. Something we all crave and are raised to believe is basic to our identity. Where are you from? Where did you grow up? Where do you live? are some of the first questions we ask humans when we meet each other. I have yet to be asked my definition of home or what it means to be living. Subjective Western perspectives of living or being a part of this lifeworld do not include residing on the street, in a homeless shelter or being labeled an addict. Through poetry and my own lived experience as a homeless addict and adhering to the theory of communicative action, I argue a redirection to the linguistic structure established by mass media, specifically tv and radio news outlets surrounding the conception of homelessness, unhoused, and addiction.

Artist Talk 12:40 - 2:00 PM

(A speculative and incomplete) Jamming Playbook: (Non)human strategies for survival in the Anthropocene By Michelle Bunton

The strange, abject allure of slime mold creeps across fields, sporulating into science fiction, artistic practice, architecture and city planning, mathematics, computing and network design, planet colonization, and beyond. Slime mold has become entangled in human systems of speculation. But what values contextualize these speculative relationships? And how might we engage with the nonhuman beyond a passive fascination toward a fleshy fabulation, and better yet, a reciprocal co-fabulation? And so, like a plasmodial cluster of slime mold in the embryonic stages of aggregation, my playbook might prepare us to navigate across the weirding terrain of (non)human entanglement and responsibility in the Anthropocene.

In her book, Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing creates a textual woodland, narrating the story of the Matsutake trade through both macro and micro “polyphonic assemblages” (24) of humans seeking freedom, holobionts and interspecies interconnection, shifting landscapes in ruins, and culturally saturated economics and politics translated across (non)human bodies. Tsing furthers her critical speculation on capitalist narratives of progress and alienation, which “turn both humans and other beings into resources” (19), by calling attention to the commoditization of scholarship (285). Through surveillance, privatization, and competition, scholars are forced into intellectual silos that value product and success over process and collaboration. And so, Tsing puts forth an invitation to design “research that requires playgroups and collaborative clusters” (286; emphasis added).

Panel 3A 2:00 - 3:20 PM
Platforms, Politics and Power

Put a Little Love in Your Post: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study of Central Albertans feelings in response to polarizing content on Facebook By Joan Owen

Affective polarization has become a growing problem in Canada (Boulianne & Belland, 2022; LaFleche, 2023; Marchand et al., 2020; Milloy, 2023; Spicer, 2018) . Despite this, most studies examining digital polarization look at the content, or technologies driving the polarization rather than the lived experience of a person interacting with polarizing content (Boccia Artieri et al., 2021; Brady et al., 2017; Goldenberg & Willer, 2023; Suhay, 2015) . To address this gap, the key question guiding this research is: What are the lived experiences of Central Albertans of encountering different examples of polarizing content on Facebook? Facebook remains the most popular social media platform in Canada with 80% of online Canadian adults report having a Facebook account (Mai & Gruzd, 2022) . Recent literature has shown that Facebook users tend to form echo chambers (Del Vicario et al., 2016) and they then seek and share information that tends to reinforce existing beliefs (Cinelli et al., 2021; Dubois & Blank, 2018; Flaxman et al., 2016) . In the literature, the effect of polarizing Facebook content is largely discussed via affect (Suhay, 2015) ; and what inspires a user's decision to post a response (See: Au & Chew, 2017; Boccia Artieri et al., 2021; Cinelli et al., 2021; Quattrociocchi et al., 2016) . However, a deeper dive into how Facebook users make sense of their feelings while experiencing polarizing content is still understudied. Of interest to this research is affective polarization, which can be explained as a phenomenon of animosity between, rather than differences in ideology or material interests (Ahn & Mutz, 2023; Baldassarri & Page, 2021; Druckman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019) . I am seeking to identify the emotions that influence people's experiences of polarizing content on Facebook; how people are making sense of their emotions; and what explanations people give for these emotions, and the behaviors they engage in in response to those emotions. By exploring the emotional liminal space between reading polarizing content and choosing to respond Intersections | Cross-Sections Graduate Student Conference 2025 to such content, the subsequent understanding and sense-making of the emotions experienced could help people understand why they are being driven to be polarized and how they might resist it.

Panel 3A 2:00 - 3:20 PM
Platforms, Politics and Power

Elon Musk and Power in the Networked Society By Jocelyn Martin

This project analyzes Elon Musk's usage and his acquisition of Twitter (now X) to understand the role of digital platforms in facilitating power. Elon Musk is one of the wealthiest individuals in the 21 st century with an individual wealth that is comparable to that of entire nation states. During an era of intensive wealth disparity and political polarization, conservatives have had to modernize to shape public opinion toward their inherently elitist goals. This has involved a discursive effort to obscure class issues in favour of neoliberal ideologies and culture wars that support deregulated markets, meritocracy, and distrust in vital government institutions. Like many conservative thinktanks, Elon Musk forefronts concerns surrounding individual liberties – namely freedom of speech. Yet as I will demonstrate, Musk himself is able to utilize the affordances of X to govern political debates, broker breaking news events, and to shape public discourse. He is also able to foster relationships with politicians toward geopolitical goals through the platform.

During the 2024 American election cycle, Musk used X and millions of dollars to incentivize conservative American voters in swing states to register while donating large sums to Trump's campaign. These acts subsequently led to his appointment to the Department of Government Efficiency. By applying the 'switching and programming' framework from Arsenault & Castells (2008), I demonstrate how Musk can achieve functional sovereignty. To illustrate these processes, I ask: How has Elon Musk used X (formerly Twitter), and what changes has he made to the affordances of the platform to what effect? As well as: What gaps in regulation or characteristics of neoliberal capitalism make this possible. My analysis contributes to the growing body of literature connecting digital platforms with material articulations of power fostering interdisciplinary discussion toward political or legal ramifications.

Panel 3A 2:00 - 3:20 PM
Platforms, Politics and Power

The “C” Word: Cultish Behaviour in Digital Media Networks
By Graham Caldwell

There is a compounding problem with how the term “cult” is not only pejorative (and therefore unacademic), but also conjures up images of groups with a spiritual or religious focus, limiting the study of “cult” behaviour to spiritual communities. By using the term “high demand group” it becomes possible to expand the study of these kinds of organizations into fields such as fandom or political extremism. By applying the study of HDGs to the platform economy, many new avenues of research are made possible, specifically in how the affective experience of group members becomes a means to for digital creators to centralize power and produce revenue. In accordance with the conference’s themes of interrogating the “common sense” which constitutes the lifeworld, this presentation will highlight an emerging and increasingly common business model that concerns itself with exerting centralized control over an audience through the use of affect and feeling.

This “audience control” model arises as a result of how a networked society values information amid an info-surplus, with information that is able to foster intimacy between creator and audience becoming valued for its ability to make relationships profitable. Businesses that use this model tend to only be described as “cults” (or cult-like) when their behaviour is perceived externally as harmful or destructive, but as this model becomes more prevalent, the likelihood of abuse increases. What’s more, the ubiquity of digital platforms and their affective affordances have made the mechanisms of this model widely available, with many of these creators now incentivized to increase their revenue through the degree of control they exert over their following. Subscription based services, affiliate marketing programs, and premium content producers are all examples of this “control culture” model that is becoming increasingly common as a means of revenue for digital creators.

Panel 3A 2:00 - 3:20 PM
Platforms, Politics and Power

Evolving Subcultures in the Era of Social Media: Redefinition, Categorization, and Influence By Nancy Jin

Subcultures have long served as community of resistance and identity formation, defined by shared ideologies, aesthetics, and practices that challenge mainstream norms. The understanding of subcultures often becomes a subject of debate due to interactions with different groups of people. In the era of social media, the landscape of subculture has undergone significant transformations. The boundaries of subcultures, once rooted in physical spaces and face-to-face interactions, have shifted to digital platforms where algorithms, virality, and globalization play pivotal roles. This research investigates how subcultures are categorized and redefined in the digital age, focusing on the evolving relationship between subculture and social media.

From Design to Dwelling: Lived Space as a Medium of Everyday Experience By Antoine Dalterio

Henri Lefebvre's 1974 book The Production of Space brings forward that space is not a passive backdrop to human activity but a medium through which both space and social life are co-constituted. Architects, planners, or platform designers may conceive spaces based on desired functions, but the act of dwelling or inhabiting these spaces also contains a strong creative dimension. Lefebvre's notion of "lived space" foregrounds the ways everyday users fill spaces with new meaning, contesting or reshaping initial intentions. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model can help us see how spaces (both physical and digital) are "encoded" with ideological scrips, norms, and flows. Still, the act of living in or navigating these spaces is akin to "decoding", as users can accept, negotiate, or reject the official blueprint. In doing so, they enact a form of spatial appropriation. Using cases from sensor-quipped urban infrastructure to algorithm-driven social media, this presentation highlights the dynamic interplay between conceived/perceived environments and their lived appropriation. Examining how everyday practices subvert, personalize, or repurpose the encoded designs of such spaces, I argue that space operates as a foundational medium of experience, one which is constantly remade by collective and individual acts of meaning-making. This brings insight into the tensions (and possibilities) that arise when top-down attempts at regulation intersect with bottom-up acts of dwelling, living, and being.

Panel 3B 2:00 - 3:20 PM

Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration

Constructing Citizens: A Critical Examination of Knowledge-Based Testing in Naturalization Procedures By Luisa Cruz

Civics testing has become an integral, largely uncontested part of naturalization procedures in many countries. These tests, often framed as assessments of civic knowledge and language proficiency, are widely accepted as necessary tools for evaluating potential citizens; however, most of them have been relatively recently implemented, with the practice becoming widespread and standardized amongst most European, North American and British Commonwealth governments (with few other exceptions in other geopolitical regions, such as Central America) only at the turn of the 21st century. Despite such ubiquity, the historical origins and implications of citizenship testing remain under examined in public discourse.

This presentation thus investigates and problematizes the links between knowledge testing and citizenship, as well as the sociohistorical roots of civics testing for naturalization procedures: such threads can be traced back to the late 19th century, for instance, through policies developed by the Immigration Restriction League, a nativist organization from Boston which lobbied for mandatory literacy testing for immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, culminating in the Immigration Act of 1917. Here, historical analysis is coupled with more recent citizenship convergence theories from the 21st century (Bloemraad, Jopkke, Paquet, among others) to understand how these practices spread and became reified in many countries in recent decades. After all, as Paquet (2012) states, “citizenship tests neither objectively measure citizenship nor create it”, calling attention to the symbolic dimension of these practices. By examining these historical procedures, this presentation aims to critically evaluate the role of contemporary knowledge-based testing in the construction of citizenship, ultimately interrogating our current engagements with the narratives and representations of naturalized subjects amidst systems of governmentality, and probing into alternative dimensions of assimilation and belonging.

Panel 3B 2:00 - 3:20 PM

Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration

Global Threads: Exploring Cultural Hybridity in Westernized Indian Fashion By Noor Dhaliwal

This research looks at how traditional Indian clothing has been adapted for Western consumption, with an emphasis on how diasporic communities manage these changes by finding a balance between assimilation and cultural preservation. Indian fashion, which is recognized for its elaborate embroidery, luxurious textiles, and traditional draperies, has been reinterpreted for Western viewers to represent the intricacies of cultural hybridity, globalization, and identity. The two major questions being addressed here include: How does cultural negotiation express itself in the ways that traditional Indian clothing is altered for Western consumption? As they adapt to their new cultures, how do diasporic Indians use hybridized styles to stay connected to their roots?

The study examines how tradition, modernity, and lived experience interact in fashion, drawing on theories of fashion as a semiotic system (Roland Barthes), cultural hybridity (Homi Bhabha), and identity formation (Stuart Hall). Methodologically, this study investigates how westernized Indian fashion is portrayed and consumed through the use of visual and media content analysis. With an emphasis on how traditional components like embroidery, patterns, and draping are modified to suit Western preferences, the visual analysis examines ads, editorials, and lookbooks by designers including Masaba Gupta, Anita Dongre, and Falguni Shane Peacock. In order to comprehend how diasporic groups engage with these hybrid styles, the media content analysis explores hashtags like #IndoWesternStyle on social media sites like Instagram and Pinterest. Patterns of cultural resistance and negotiation in digital settings will be identified by this research.

Panel 3B 2:00 - 3:20 PM

Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration

Passports as Barriers: Gendered and Racialized Struggles of Filipino U.S. Visa Applicants By Winona Arador

Passports and visa restrictions are important tools of “modern regime” used to control human mobility. This paper examines the experiences of Filipino applicants navigating the U.S. tourist visa process, with a focus on how systemic biases and structural barriers disproportionately affect individuals from countries with “weaker” passports. Drawing on narratives shared in a Facebook group, the findings reveal that visa applications, particularly the interview process with consular officers, are deeply gendered and racialized, with young, single women of color encountering heightened scrutiny and suspicion.

This study also interrogates the emotional and financial toll of visa applications, from the emotional labor performed in interviews to the financial costs of repeated rejections. Finally, it raises questions about the arbitrariness of visa decisions, which often lack transparency and consistency as reflected in the experiences of many applicants. By foregrounding the experiences of individuals with “weaker” passports, this paper critiques the broader frameworks of global mobility and calls for the urgent reassessment of visa policies.

Panel 3B 2:00 - 3:20 PM

Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration

Media discourse and Canadian migration policies By Jodi-Ann Francis

Since Confederation in 1867, Canada has worked to increase its immigration numbers to build a sustainable economy and grow its population. Early efforts, which began around 1869 and lasted until 1967 with the introduction of the Points System, were overtly discriminatory, or simply put – racist. Policies were developed that excluded various racialized populations, such as the Chinese, who made significant contributions to the Canadian Pacific Railway, among other populations over the following decades, such as Black people and Japanese, to name a few. A lot of the policies from the earlier periods were embedded in discourse about the presence of various unwanted populations, such as the Chinese in British Columbia and Black people in Alberta.

The main question for this presentation focuses on migration discourse: How do the discourses in journalism influence public opinion on migrants in Canada? Through critical discourse analysis and the application of critical race theory, I examine discourses in journalism and their influence on public opinion and policies that directly impact migrants, particularly temporary migrants such as international students and temporary foreign workers. The discourse around immigrants has long been a part of the approaches by which migration policies have been developed and implemented. This, in turn, influences several factors, including where newcomers decide to resettle permanently, the welcoming communities that help encourage their retention, and the economic diversity and growth within the regions of resettlement.

Panel 3B 2:00 - 3:20 PM

Borders and Belonging: Critical Imaginings of Space, Place and Migration

Decolonizing "Canada's Game": Exploring the use of personal, arts-based media archives to explore identity and meaning in the women's division at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC) By Jaydlin Spooner

This study aims to explore how Indigenous female hockey athletes navigate their intersectional identities through arts-based media elicitation methods. Hockey has been studied as both a tool of dominant colonial hypermasculinity (Allain, 2015; Szto, 2020) and a contested site for decolonization through 'dual-track' Indigenous hockey tournaments such as the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC), which intertwines Indigenous cultural events and practices with elite competition (Forsyth et al., 2021; Hauck, 2020). However, existing research has largely focused on the men's division of these tournaments, leaving a gap in understanding how athletes in the women's division negotiate their identities in such contexts. Utilizing Indigenous feminist methodology, this research thematically analyzes the personal media archives of four adult Indigenous women's experiences of identity and meaning at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships through semi-structured, conversational interviews. As a former player in the women's division at the NAHC, I believe my own lived experiences will help build trust and rapport with the participants, who may be anywhere from one to several years removed from their experiences. Through McLuhan's (1964) theory of media as extensions of human capabilities, I argue that the long-term management of personal media archives reflects the emphasis placed on event experiences. Implementing a participatory photo-elicitation approach, participants are invited to delve into their personal media archives and share photographs or videos that evoke meaningful, long-lasting memories and embodied experiences. Through this process, I aim to counterweight the mainstream emphasis on athletic, quantitative success with participant-led stories that underscore the cultural impacts of the tournament. Along with addressing archives of Indigenous stories, this work supports the growing body of literature on arts-based media methods as a powerful means to understand embodied experiences at sports events and their capability to elicit meaning, past experiences, and negotiations of intersectional identities.

Panel 4A 3:40 - 5:00 PM

Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks

The "Foreign-tuber" and Digital Contact Zones in Chinese Cyberspace

By Evan Liu

In 1991, critical theorist and cultural scholar Mary Louise Pratt introduced the concept of “Contact Zone”, a conceptual space where cultures interact, converse, and construct the concept of one another. This idea was intimately employed within Pratt’s dissection of European imperialistic powers and their effects on the construction of “others” of the world, and vice versa – how they are also influenced by the “others” in this space where different languages and beliefs come to learn of each other’s existence. Pratt highlighted that, while cultural relationships in the contact zone are rarely symmetrical, the dominant and the subordinated cultures negotiate each other’s existence in the process of transculturation. This presentation seeks to expand upon Pratt’s concept of Contact Zone to the 21 st century cyberspace. In particular, how domestic Chinese Web 2.0 media websites like Bilibili can be seen as contemporary examples of “Digital Contact Zones”. Foreigners who wish to engage with a Chinese audience selectively construct their profiles to highlight their nationalities and behave in ways that align with the expectations of a “Waiguoren” (lit. “Foreigner”), thereby constructing an identity in the Digital Contact Zone while developing a following of domestic Chinese users that seek to engage in an uploader-viewer relationship that conforms to unspoken rules of the Digital Contact Zone. Such identities are, as I will argue from an ethnographic standpoint, fruits of transculturation and potent carriers of intercultural messaging. In fact, the idea of Digital Contact Zones are not isolated to within Chinese social media, but can be seen in other countries’ web communities, too – even on the “cosmopolitan” YouTube. I will further highlight that, in an era of heightened global interconnectivity by the internet, it is important for cultural scholars to pay additional attention to the effects of Digital Contact Zone as ways through which grassroot cultural exchanges may take place.

Panel 4A 3:40 - 5:00 PM

Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks

Mormon Momfluencers: Exploring the Tensions Between the Influencer Economy and LDS Women's Divine Calling By Madison Picard

The ongoing rise of the influencer economy has been heavily researched as a site of performative labour where influencers work to showcase a crafted authenticity to maintain their audience. However, these works have not yet delved into the surge in religious 'momfluencers', and how they grapple with maintaining their spiritual identity while performing such labour. Specifically, how women who are not encouraged to work justify their employment in content creation within their values. This paper addresses such a justification by examining the prevalence of mom influencers who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, since doctrine specifically states that a woman's divine calling is to raise children rather than pursuing work outside of the home. Specifically, LDS mom blogging is analyzed to show the popularity of Mormons working in the attention economy and how they maintained their religious identity. It is compared to the current state of influencers and then contrasted against religious doctrine that outlines their hesitation toward women working.

The paper examines the techniques of content creation that allow Mormon women to bring in money for their family, such as sponsorships that are 'on-brand', yet continue to satisfy their spiritual responsibility of motherhood. I argue that by maintaining a level of calibrated amateurism (Abidin, 2017) while focusing their content on their children and experiences as a mother, LDS women can portray that they are simply documenting their lives, rather than explicitly performing paid labour. Additionally, they can pursue the overall goal of the Church through their content, that of sharing the gospel with their followers, which fulfills their God-ordained responsibility. This paper reveals how the aspects of performative labour employed by influencers contrast with the spiritual purposes of Latter-day Saint women, and how they account for this tension in their content.

Panel 4A 3:40 - 5:00 PM

Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks

Inside the Influence: A tri-entry point encounter with social media influencing

By Hannah Block

This thesis acknowledges the depth and complexity of social media and social media influencing and its embeddedness and integration in society and the lifeworld by engaging with the dynamic, perpetually progressing, and proliferating industry through a multi-modal tri-entry point approach. Endeavouring to unpack the often dismissed and discredited profession of social media influencing, this study offers a vertical and horizontal examination of the modern phenomenon – developing a deeper understanding and awareness of the dominating field. Exploring lived experiences and the social construction of the world around us – how we work within and against different social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of everyday life – through survey and synthesis of various streams of Communication theory literature and mainstream texts, an argument for the paradoxical nature of social media influencing is made. By closely attending to cases of social media influencing where scandal and failure are present, this thesis demonstrates the ways in which social media influencing is both an inescapable part of contemporary market society and a fundamentally paradoxical communicational practice. Conscious of social media's perpetual progression, this thesis serves as a snapshot of the field laden with dialectical tension arising from the value of social media influencing and the societal implications, while concurrently foregrounding the need to challenge (and at times, resist) the assumptions that underpin society as a whole. With social media and social media influencing fundamentally engrained in modern society, this thesis inherently interrogates the lifeworld – investigating how the lifeworld is impacted and altered by societal systems (in this case, social media influencing). This survey and synthesis of social media influencing in practice, as it pertains to critical futures and ways of being, concludes with questions regarding objectivity, while further highlighting the vast realm of outstanding considerations – opportunities for further study, investigation, and interrogation – leaving the reader asking: “what’s next?”, similar to the question this conference aims to pose.

Panel 4A 3:40 - 5:00 PM

Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks

Digital Well-Being and Youth: The Development of a Holistic Conceptual Framework By Ana Kubrusly

As digital technologies increasingly permeate everyday life, digital well-being — i.e., a subjective experience that reflects a balanced relationship to the impacts of digital technologies — has become a topic of interest among scholars (Dennis, 2020). Nonetheless, this field of research lacks methodological and theoretical consensus and has gathered mixed empirical results (Meier et al., 2020). As a group, young people have often been protagonists in narratives about digital media. On the one hand, they are seen as 'digital natives', on the other, they are portrayed as powerless 'digital addicts', vulnerable to the risks and dangers of online life (Livingstone & Bober, 2006). To make sense of this fragmented field of study dedicated to youth's digital well-being, this paper proposes a critical review of the literature to create a conceptual framework for individual digital well-being. Through a uniform research protocol, two databases — Scopus and Web of Science — were consulted to find references that answered at least one of these research questions: (1) How is the digital well-being of youth studied? (2) What is known about the digital well-being of young people? After careful assessment, a total of 361 references were considered suited and were systematically read, allowing six core themes to be identified: digital dis/connection; sociocultural vs. clinical approach; responsibility and agency; individual characteristics; risk, opportunities, and ambivalences; and discourses and narratives. Based on this review, a conceptual framework for youth digital well-being is developed. In it, digital well-being is understood through three dimensions: narratives (social discourses and personal beliefs), practices (digital cultures and individual practices), and material conditions (digital political economy and personal media ecosystems), which interact with the users themselves, as well as the personal and social contexts that surround them. This original and holistic conceptualization aims to provide a youth- centered theoretical contribution to this emerging field of research.

Panel 4A 3:40 - 5:00 PM

Entanglements of Influence, Identity and Relationality in Digital Networks

The Production of Traumatic Affects Through Video Game Mechanics

By Shadea Nance

When used as an algorithmic tool, trauma is precisely positioned to manufacture powerful and personal affective responses for video game players. In the video game, Watch Dogs 2 (Ubisoft, 2016) a Black man named Marcus Holloway is the main playable character. Holloway undergoes a series of police chase challenges that add both realism—and consequence—to player actions. The police chase is rooted in a long and traumatic history dating back to slave patrols established in the Carolinas in the early 1700s and were used to return runaway slaves to their owners. By situating Watch Dogs 2 within this longer history linking Black people and policing, the intersections of trauma and player affect come into focus.

Accordingly, this paper asks: how is racial trauma used to produce affect in video games? What are the consequences of playing with racially traumatic storylines? How do game mechanics and game design manage players' affective responses? Arguing that playing video games with racially traumatic narratives generates powerful—and personal—affective responses in video games, I explore the consequences of playing with racially traumatic narratives in video games by investigating how the affective positionalities of players produce divergent ways of engaging with these challenging affects. To analyze the divergent affects produced by playing Watch Dogs 2, I focus on three videos from TikTok that depict the police chase challenges which players must pass to continue playing the game. Methodologically, I utilize a visual analysis and a walkthrough method of the video game's mechanics to show how trauma is both a narrative device and built into the game's algorithm. By examining the signs and symbols Watch Dogs 2 uses to make claims about race, I explore the cultural value of pain and suffering as it is extracted and commodified.

Panel 4B 3:40 - 5:00 PM

The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture

A Workers' Inquiry into the Philippine Virtual Assistant Industry

By Diana Limbaga

The emergence of the virtual assistant (VA) industry in the Philippines during the early 21 st century sits at the intersections of globalization, the development of communication technologies, and the rise of outsourced labour. VA workers locate prospective employers (typically from the United States) by working with local agencies or using digital platforms and work for clients in industries including marketing, healthcare, and customer service (Westerman, 2023, para. 9). The industry reflects a continued colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States, as many employers often hire Filipino VAs to save on labour costs and take advantage of culturally specific affective capacities and uneven development (Harvey, 2005; Wood, 2003). While these jobs are attractive for offering relatively high wages (in a Filipino context), this enables an environment where workers are isolated from their peers and are incentivized to offer lower and lower wages (Fuchs, 2016). Additionally, workers cannot access to traditional benefits or legislative protections as they are usually categorized as "freelancers." As this industry only recently resurged in popularity amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a lack of scholarship on VA work specifically – although researchers have studied the analogous business process outsourcing industry in countries like India and the Philippines to consider its troublesome labour process, and opportunities for collective action (Brophy, 2017; Padios, 2018; Woodcock, 2017). This research seeks to expand scholarship on the VA industry by conducting a preliminary workers' inquiry, where VAs can discuss their lived experiences and prominent issues within the industry. These discussions will reflect on how resistance is fostered and hindered by employers, and the potential for future collective action for VAs in the Philippines.

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The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture

Musicians and Locality: A study of music industry migration from Toronto to Hamilton By Lisa La Rocca

The findings I will be presenting will look at how musicians and music industry members who have moved from Toronto to Hamilton over the last 10 years navigate between their former music scene and their new one. It will look to identify how they create connection to their new community and whether they retain connection to their old community. Music scenes, consisting of a concentration of musicians, industry and infrastructure, have a strong connection to place and space, which can grow, transform, or diminish based on the conditions of the geographical location they are in. When a city and music scene become oversaturated, unsupportive, or undergo rapid gentrification resulting in higher living costs, creative communities are often the first to relocate.

These relocations may be to a different location within the city, or often, to nearby cities which are deemed to have better living and working conditions for the creative community. There are a number of conditions which make a new city attractive for musicians and music industry personnel to live and work: affordable housing, progressive municipal policy, existing community/music scenes and industry infrastructure. Over the last decade, the City of Hamilton, Ontario, has seen an influx of new residents moving from the GTA (Greater Toronto Area), due to high living costs and housing, causing many to relocate. In the case that these residents are members of the music community, this movement has the potential to impact the growth, maintenance, and strength of the music scenes in both cities. As part of my dissertation research, I have conducted a case study including in-depth interviews with 18 musicians and music industry members who have moved from Toronto to Hamilton over a ten year period, 2013-2023. During my presentation, I will present my initial findings on how new community members navigate and contribute to music infrastructure within a music scene and how these individuals exist within these structures in- between their new and old localities.

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The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture

The Indie Game Production: An Industrial Practice that Cannot be Independent

By Peiqing (Grace) Gu

This paper examines how the business model of indie games is constrained by the current market structure of the video game industry, focusing on the challenges these limitations create in the consumer-studio relationship, particularly due to the scarcity of operational capital. Using Thatgamecompany as a case study, the analysis explores these dynamics through the lens of audience commodity theory. The constraints faced by indie developers often lead to reliance on alternative revenue streams, such as crowdfunding, early access models, and player monetization.

These practices reshape the relationship between studios and consumers, positioning players as both customers and contributors to financial and promotional success. While these models foster community and support for creative projects, they also impose significant pressures on developers to sustain engagement and meet expectations, often at the expense of creative freedom or project timelines. In recent years, indie games have become a vital force in the global gaming industry, offering innovative and experimental content that contrasts with mainstream productions. However, indie developers face significant structural challenges, including limited funding, market visibility, and distribution networks, which place them at a disadvantage in an industry dominated by major publishers. By examining the business strategies and audience engagement practices of Thatgamecompany, this paper illustrates how indie developers navigate these constraints while striving to balance creative innovation with economic sustainability. In the end, the analysis situates the indie game industry within the broader context of cultural globalization and media convergence. It explores how indie games promote cultural diversity and challenge dominant narratives, even as they contend with global market pressures. This analysis highlights the dual role of indie games as cultural artifacts and economic commodities, revealing the complexities of their position in the global gaming industry.

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The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture

Cool, Capital, Clairtone By Rosalind Sweeney-McCabe

The cultural significance of Clairtone Sound Corporation, a Canadian high-fidelity stereo and media technology company active from 1954 to 1972, has long outlasted the company's years of operation. Clairtone's trail-blazing has been celebrated far and wide, commonly retaining a specific "cool" reputation, exemplified in the opening line of a 2008 CBC's The National feature celebrating the 50th anniversary of the company's launch: "It so represented the future, and the future was cool." This paper will track the construction and perpetuation of this narrative through a historiographical analysis of one of the company's most iconic products: the Project G stereo, released in 1964. Reflecting on this artifact more than 60 years later, I explore how the Project G remains a potent signifier of "cool" within the broader narrative of Clairtone. First, using Jim McGuigan's account of the tactics of "Cool Capitalism", I explore how the initial ad campaign and promotional material for the Project G harnessed design, marketing, and celebrity endorsements to craft a "cool" product. Employing a critical discourse analysis of the stereo's cultural capital—which draws on exhibition catalogues, press coverage, and scholarly publications—I track the primary figures associated with the product's success: the stereo's designer Hugh Spencer (1928–1982); and Clairtone's co-founders, Peter Munk (1927–2018) and David Gilmour (1931–2023), who both went on to great financial success after the failure of Clairtone (Gilmour as founder of Fiji Water bottled water company and Munk as founder of Barrick Gold). Directly responding to the ISCS 2025 Conference theme of "Interaction, Experience, and Media in the Construction of Narratives", this work considers who benefits most from the "cool" effect of the Project G to explore how social and political capital operates in the construction of Clairtone's common institutional narrative. Ultimately, this study provides a critical lens for understanding how select interpretations of events become concrete narratives within Canadian design history and what this might say about how this history is constructed, framed, and consumed.

Panel 4B 3:40 - 5:00 PM

The Past, Present and Future of Creative Industries: Critical Perspectives on Capitalism and Culture

Critical Perspectives: Investigating Contact Zones in Composition and Rhetoric Programs Reliance By Chekwubechukwu Enwerem

The concept of contact zones stands out to me as a way of organizing English and Writing Studies, integrating differences, negotiating meaning, and equitable collaborative learning. Here, difference is visible, valuable and not considered an aberration to the norm. I became interested in the contact zones theory following our class readings and how it relates to my position as an international student in the University of Alabama's Composition, Rhetoric, and English Studies (UA CRES) program. Understanding composition and rhetoric programs as contact zones will enable us to explore and appreciate their valuable role in fostering inclusive learning environments that promote academic scholarship while including the diverse voices and experiences of all students within the program and the university community. Many graduate programs are comprised of diverse individuals, making space for diverse nationalities, genders, languages, races, etc. to clash, negotiate meaning and identity and exist as allies, eliminating systemic ideologies and power dynamics. The spaces created enable students to engage in diverse interactions and writing practices, shaped by their personal, educational, and cultural experiences. Rhetoric and Composition programs make space for diverse students, varied across national, race, gender, and linguistic lines, to engage with and teach writing within the curriculum and outside of the curriculum through the writing center. Situated within interdisciplinary scholarships in rhetoric and composition, writing across the curriculum (WAC), and writing center studies, this paper explores how graduate programs in rhetoric and composition (Rhet/Comp) are evolving. Using the UA's CRES program as a case study, I investigate Rhet/Comp programs as a contact zone with intersecting contact zones that students encounter in graduate classrooms and the writing center. I further propose pedagogical strategies for the conscious development of contact zones within a first year (undergraduate) composition program.