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## MeCCSA PGN Conference

# Media and Instability

12 September 2025

Professor Stuart Hall Building
Goldsmiths, University of London

## Conference Programme & Book of Abstracts

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# Welcome

In an age marked by rapid technological advancements, ecological mutations, migrations and shifting socio-political narratives, the role of media and culture has never been more central. Whether reinforcing the hegemonic paradigms of uncertainty or contesting social orders through the creation of spaces of defiance and resistance, the conjuncture of media and instability requires a critical exploration for both its challenges and possibilities. Through the fresh contributions of PhD students and early career researchers, this year's MeCCSA Postgraduate Network (PGN) Conference aims to foster dialogues that investigate instability in media and culture from any disciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary perspective, and unveil new theoretical insights and practical methodologies for navigating our ever-evolving, highly-mediated cultural ecosystem.

*The 2025 MeCCSA PGN Conference Committee*

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# Keynote Speakers

## Professor Mirca Madianou

Mirca Madianou is Professor in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies and co-Director of the Migrant Futures Institute at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research focuses on the social consequences of communication technologies, infrastructures and artificial intelligence (AI) in a global south context especially in relation to migration and humanitarian emergencies. She is currently Principal Investigator on a British Academy grant on digital identity systems in refugee camps in Thailand which develops participatory methods to reimagine technologies together with refugee communities (https://www.redid.net/).




## Technocolonialism: When Technology for Good is Harmful

With over 300 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and with emergencies and climate disasters becoming more common, AI and data are being championed as forces for good and as solutions to the complex challenges of the aid sector. In this talk based on her new book, Technocolonialism: when technology for good is harmful, Madianou will argue that digital innovations such as biometrics and chatbots engender new forms of violence and entrench power asymmetries between the global South and North. Drawing on over ten years of research on the uses of digital technologies in humanitarian operations, she will unearth the colonial power relations which shape 'technology for good' initiatives as well as the practices of resistance. The notion of technocolonialism captures how the convergence of digital infrastructures with humanitarian bureaucracy, state power and market forces reinvigorates and reshapes colonial legacies. Technocolonialism shifts the attention to the constitutive role that digital infrastructures, data and AI play in accentuating inequities between aid providers and people in need.

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# Keynote Speakers

## Professor Nirmal Puwar

Nirmal Puwar has been an academic at Goldsmiths, University of London since 2004. Her classic book Space Invaders: race, gender and bodies out of place (2004), has been re-visited for a 20th anniversary issue. Live Methods (2013, co-edited with Les Back) has also just been re-visited. Her work is translated and presented internationally. She is co-Director of the Centre for Feminist Research and co-Convenor of the MA Gender, Media, Culture. Puwar is an incessant connector, seeking contact zones of exchange with and beyond academia, with an expertise in creative methods and spatial practice. For her British Academy Innovation Fellowship (2023-25), she has worked on 'Multicultural Lives in the Civic Life of a Cathedral'.



## Spatial Practices: Hear Here

Hear Here is a site-responsive podcast series hosted by Professor Nirmal Puwar, recorded in different parts of Coventry Cathedral. It focuses on listening anew to the space, with guests bringing their distinctive specialisms. Dialogue, listening and collaborative fellowship are central, as the public academic connects practices and values guests' knowledge. Archives and spaces are enlivened through wayward routes, call-and-response imaginings and experimental approaches that re-orient the site. The cathedral, often studied for its modernist architecture and artworks like Graham Sutherland's tapestry or John Hutton's "footballer angels," becomes a stage for emergent methods: re-routing familiar narratives, dwelling on difficult topics and experimenting with multilingual and spatial practices of listening. Puwar draws on heterodox spatial practices and smaller stories (Guha, 1994; Le Guin, 1989), troubling the "big H" of history with alternative detours. Inspired by global planetary experimental indexicality (Tsing et al., 2020), she re-hears what lies outside dominant frames. By rummaging through archives with care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), reading with and against the grain (Stoler, 2008) and activating minor figures, the project spirals in and around the cathedral through tentacles of creative collaboration.

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# Conference Schedule

## All day

### Exhibition room

*Location: PSH 102*

## 09:30 - 10:00

### Registration and Coffee

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, Atrium*

## 10:00 - 10:15

### Introduction

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

*Dr Daisy Asquith*, Head of School of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London
*Dr Milly Williamson*, Goldsmiths, University of London, on behalf of MeCCSA
*Simone Pellegrino*, Goldsmiths, University of London,
Chair of the 2025 MeCCSA PGN Conference Committee

## 10:15 - 11:15

### Keynote - Spatial Practices: Hear Here

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

*Professor Nirmal Puwar*, Goldsmiths, University of London

## 11:15 - 11:30

### Morning break

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, Atrium*

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# Conference Schedule

## 11:30 - 12:30

### Parallel Session A1

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

***The Instability of Gender: Symbolic Violence and the Reproduction of Inequalities***

Delilah Kealy-Roberts, University of Nottingham

"Framing Femicide: Exploring Sensationalism, Tabloidisation, and Representations of Men's Violence Against Women in UK News Media"

Maria Carbajales Sisto, Goldsmiths, University of London

"The Pocahontas Effect: Latinx identity and the Politics of Desire on Dating Apps"

Shao-Wen Lee, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Walking in the high heels of my trans* friend"

### Parallel Session A2

*Location: PSH 302*

***The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion***

Floriane Fo Misslin, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Taking the risk, or keeping it safe? Gender nonconformity in fashion photography"

Cara Xu, Loughborough University

"Emotional Labour as Normalised Survival: Navigating Precarity and Exhaustion in Platform-based Creative Work"

Laurel Rogers, Goldsmiths, University of London

"The Value of Confidence: Negotiating Assetized Work on OnlyFans"

Faye Hannah, University of South Wales

"Sustainable Futures? Re-imagining Cultural Labour in Post-devolution Wales"

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# Conference Schedule

## 11:30 - 12:30

### Parallel Session A3

*Location: PSH 305*

***The Instability of Migration: Plural Stories of Borders, Displacement, Belonging***

Haojie Fang, Loughborough University
"Small stories but valuable archives:
Ordinary Chinese people's pandemic (COVID-19) memory"

Xinyu Zhang, University of Southampton
"Migrant Workers in Danger"

Nam Joo Huh, Loughborough University
"Mapping the Unseen: ESEA Documentary, VR Storytelling, and Digital Diasporas"

Rong He, University of Glasgow
"Performing Authenticity in Instability: A Refugee Family on Douyin
and My Reflexive Engagement"

## 12:30 - 13:30

### Lunch

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, Atrium*

## 13:30 - 14:00

### MeCCSA Postgraduate Network Annual General Meeting

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

*Dr Emma Graves-Sandriman*, Canterbury Christ Church University,
on behalf of MeCCSA

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# Conference Schedule

## 14:00 - 15:00

### Parallel Session B1

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

***The Instability of Cinema: Shifting Gazes, Frames and Spaces***

Joel Blackledge, Birmingham City University
"Post-Cinema: The Hall of Mirrors"

Jie Huang, Loughborough University London
"Understanding the Role of AI: A Framework for Mapping Plausible AI Integration in Film Production"

Ellie Power, University of Gothenburg
"Droning Cinema: Conceptualising the Instabilities of Contemporary Urban Space on Film"

Katie Wrench, University of Cambridge
"Crimes of the Future and De Humani Corporis Fabrica: medical imaging as biocapitalist media, and forms of critical destabilisation"

### Parallel Session B2

*Location: PSH 302*

***The Instability of Digital Spaces: Data, Platforms and Fragile Architectures***

Liang Wei Jhen, Nanyang Technology University, Singapore
"Performing identity in digital spaces: Negotiating visibility and authenticity"

Debbie Ball, University of Westminster
"Auditing persuasive tech: to what extent are design features programmed to steer user behaviour in 'private' messaging apps?"

Mia Tuckey, Goldsmiths, University of London
"Transparency, Obfuscation and Control: Interrogating Content Governance Visibility in Meta's Transparency Centre"

Hongyu Teng, Canterbury Christ Church University
"The Interconnection of Aesthetic Preference, Interactive Digital Media, and Consumer Behaviour Among Chinese Generation Z"

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# Conference Schedule

## 15:00 - 16:00

### Parallel Session C1

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

***The Instability of Bodies: Vulnerability, Performance, Transformation***

Xiang Li, University of Leeds

"Exploring Women's Autonomy through Interactive Fanfiction Game Creation"

Rajsi Rajora, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Pharmacopornographic Capitalism, Body Genres, and Fan Service in a Transnational Media Context"

Pauline H Nottingham, King's College London

"A Search That Frustrates – Pornography, Psychoanalysis and The Destabilising Erotics of Scrolling"

Kseniia Sheveleva, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Pornography in fandom: consumption of affective media in participatory cultures"

### Parallel Session C2

*Location: PSH 302*

***The Instability of Remediations: Contaminations in Literature, Journalism and Music***

Chencheng Wu, University of Salford

"Writing in Unstable Times: Chinese Online Novel Authors Confront the Rise of AI"

Leo Watkins, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Explaining the contemporary crisis of journalism in Britain: a Marxist account"

Maham Sufi, Cardiff University

"Fractured Order, Diminishing Trust: Pakistani Journalists' Struggle with Visual Deepfakes and Disinformation"

Anders Bach Pedersen, University of Copenhagen

"There Are Two Forms Of Internet Music On TikTok"

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# Conference Schedule

## 15:00 - 16:00

### Parallel Session C3

*Location: PSH 305*

***The Instability of the Nation: Memory, Heritage and the Soft-Power of Preservation***

Chen Yang, Cardiff University

"Projecting China's idea of China: An analysis of international co-production documentaries as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, 1980 – present."

Weixuan Zhang, Canterbury Christ Church University

"City in Translation: How Social Media Tourists Reconstruct Beijing's Image"

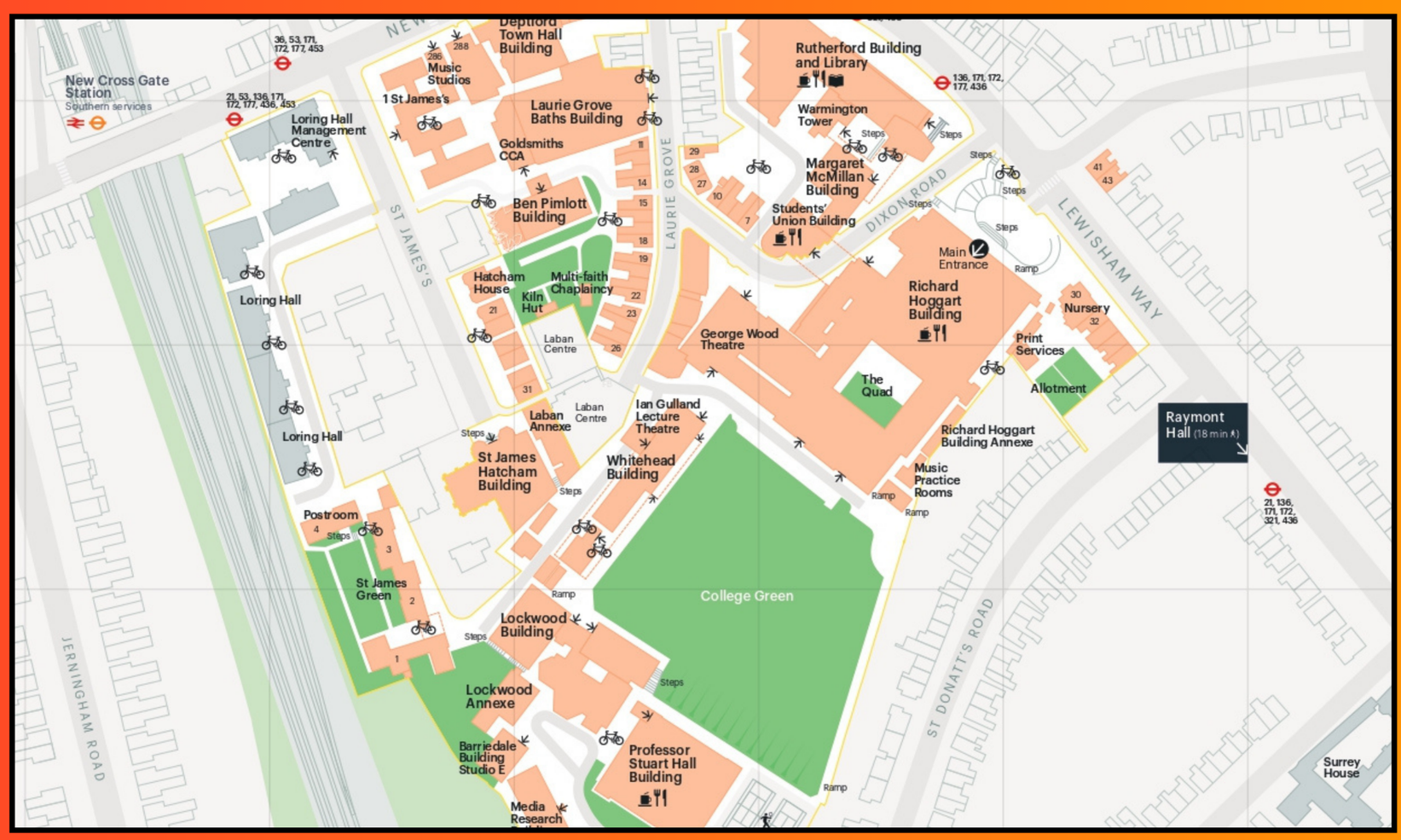
Wisarut Wongnom, University of Leeds

"Guarding the Nation's Heart: Exploring Symbolic Rituals of Thai Hyper-Royalist Vigilante Organisation during the Death of King Rama IX"

## 16:00 - 16:15

### Afternoon break

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, Atrium*




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# Conference Schedule

## 16:15 - 17:15

### Parallel Session D1

*Location: PSH 302*

***The Instability of Fandom: Desire, Communities and Cultural Power***

Zirui Chen, Loughborough University
"Chinese Virtual Idol Fandom: The Intersection of Fan Prosumption and Fandom Nationalism"

Ziman Li, University of Sheffield
"Aesthetic Affinities and Nationalist Pressures: Chinese K-pop Fandom in a Restricted Media Environment"

Lauren Johnson, Ulster University
"Do You Know Who You Are?: Identity Construction Through Participation in Pop Music Fandom on TikTok"

### Parallel Session D2

*Location: PSH 305*

***The Instability of Counter-Discourses: Negotiation, Defiance and Resistance***

Caroline Wintgens, Université de Liège
"Exploring the Discursive Instabilities of "Security": Notre-Dame-des-Landes and its Echoes in Mainstream Media"

Longlong Ge, University of Nottingham
"Demythologizing through Stable Diffusion: AI-Generated Visualizations in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve"

Xiaojing Mo, University of Leeds
"Postfeminist Sensibilities and the Platformisation of Chinese Wanghong Culture"

Srikrupa Raghunathan Vedal, Queen Mary, University of London
"Holding Pain, Making Space: A Crip-Feminist Approach to Documentary Practice"

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# Conference Schedule

## 16:15 - 17:15

### Parallel Session D3

*Location: PSH 326*

***The Instability of Propaganda: Populism and Persuasion at Times of Crisis***

**Dini Restyanti, Goldsmiths, University of London**

"The Narrative Battle in Indonesia's Media Landscape: Political Branding and Activist Resistance in the 2024 Election"

**Ioan Suhov, Dublin City University**

"Mapping Instability: Russian Propaganda and Narrative Warfare in Romanian Media Using Text-as-Data"

**Arlette Vasallo, Goldsmiths, University of London**

"Media and Right-Wing Populism: Amplification, Legitimization, and Democratic Implications"

**Paige Isaacson, Goldsmiths, University of London**

"Right-wing populist time shifting and the affective instability of temporality"

## 17:15 - 18:20

### *Keynote - Technocolonialism: When Technology for Good is Harmful*

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

***Professor Mirca Madianou,*** Goldsmiths, University of London

## 18:20 - 18:30

### *Closing remarks*

*Location: Professor Stuart Hall Building, LG01*

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## Parallel Session A1

### The Instability of Gender: Symbolic Violence and the Reproduction of Inequalities

***"Framing Femicide: Exploring Sensationalism, Tabloidisation, and Representations of Men's Violence Against Women in UK News Media"***

Delilah Kealy-Roberts, University of Nottingham

This talk introduces a doctoral research project exploring how femicide is represented in UK news media. The study focuses on three intersecting media dynamics – media framing, sensationalism, and tabloidisation – to examine how cases of men's violence against women are selectively amplified or dismissed. Drawing on Entman's (1993) theory of framing and distinctions between episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar, 1994; Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2024), the project investigates how framing contributes to the individualisation of structural violence. It also builds on scholarship on sensationalism and tabloidisation to explore how semantic and stylistic strategies heighten emotional appeal, often at the expense of addressing structural patterns of violence. Existing research suggests that white, young, middle-class women are more likely to be framed as "ideal victims" (Jewkes, 2015), while the deaths of women from marginalised communities are more frequently under-reported or framed through tropes of deviance or blame. These representational hierarchies reflect and reinforce broader social instabilities around race, gender, and class, revealing how media constructions of "newsworthy" violence are shaped by deep-rooted cultural biases. Currently in the early stages, this project will analyse a corpus of UK news reports spanning 2013-2023 through content analysis and multimodal critical discourse analysis. This presentation outlines the project's conceptual framework, evolving research questions, and proposed methodological strategies, offering a critical lens on how UK media mediates – and at times distorts – public understanding of men's violence against women.

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## Parallel Session A1

*The Instability of Gender: Symbolic Violence and the Reproduction of Inequalities*

### *"The Pocahontas Effect: Latinx identity and the Politics of Desire on Dating Apps"*

Maria Carbajales Sisto, Goldsmiths, University of London

My project analyses the experience of Latinx women on dating apps which include racialisation, being shaped into stereotypes and gendered violence. In particular, it shows how dating apps have become a space of instability and resistance, where Latinx women develop strategies to mediate intimacy. Drawing on the digital walkthrough method of dating apps interface (Light, Burgess, and Duguay, 2018; Duguay, 2017), critical discourse analysis of dating app messaging (Wodak, 2015; Fairclough, 2013) and in-depth interviews with 20 Latinx women who use dating apps in London, this article will provide insight into how Latinx women mediate intimacy on dating apps. It considers how both apps' messaging and Latinx women experiences are permeated by neoliberalism, individualism, lack of care and vulnerability. At the same time, it shows how Latinx women are vulnerable to experiences of gendered violence, racialisation and fetishisation.

### *"Walking in the high heels of my trans* friend"*

Shao-Wen Lee, Goldsmiths, University of London

In contemporary global and media contexts, opinions about transgender issues seem more and more extreme nowadays. The discussions around transgender people always focus on "the soul in the wrong body" discourse and connect to Western medical surgery. The representation of trans people is often from an outsider's perspective. How could a documentary creation bring real insights from transgender people to this gender-binary society? Trans theorist Jack Halberstam (2018) uses "Trans*" to suggest that we should think of "transgender" as a doing rather than being and emphasizes the political potential of trans/gender. Judith Butler's "Gender Performativity" theory (1990) analyses language restatements and citations having a performative force and argues that sex and gender are both constructed. However, transgender individuals still face significant stress and difficulties in their everyday lives when they want to undertake different embodied gender performativity. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session A1

*The Instability of Gender: Symbolic Violence and the Reproduction of Inequalities*

### *"Walking in the high heels of my trans* friend"*

Shao-Wen Lee, Goldsmiths, University of London

[Continued from previous page] By extending the concept of "gender performativity", I combine the theories of Jay Prosser, Karen Barad and Julie Hanson to think of the "embodied" relations of trans body and materiality. Through a participatory documentary, I used my body to explore this embodied feeling through makeup and cross-dressing, then walking on the street with my trans friend R.E. I understood the dangerous but free feeling of trans* gender performativity during this process. This embodied method can help people and audiences "walk in the high heels of trans friends", understand and break the gender structure in our society, and bring new perspectives and possibilities of gender.

## Parallel Session A2

*The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion*

### *"Taking the risk, or keeping it safe? Gender nonconformity in fashion photography"*

Floriane Fo Misslin, Goldsmiths, University of London

[The creative labour of making queerness "explicit" in fashion photography reveals various tensions exposing a cis-heteronormative infrastructure of fashion production. This paper examines the standardised processes through which the fashion industry manages representations of gender nonconformity and queer sexualities in editorial photography. In contrast with representation studies that analyse images already in circulation, my research brings attention to the production processes prior to the publication of images. Drawing from interviews with 21 practitioners such as fashion directors, press officers, stylists, casting directors, I discuss how the industry approaches gender nonconformity both as a "risk" and an "opportunity", which heavily impacts negotiations at the production stage. The paper highlights the paradox of fashion being perceived as a queer hub whilst an ambiance of both moral panic and tokenism shapes cis-heteronormative regulations, standardised processes, and policies of various scales. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session A2

### The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion

***"Taking the risk, or keeping it safe? Gender nonconformity in fashion photography"***

Floriane Fo Misslin, Goldsmiths, University of London

[Continued from previous page] For instance, systems such as gendered sizing or policies that regulate the use of womenswear and menswear hinders possibilities in casting and styling trans and gender nonconforming models. Fashion workers — many to whom queerness is central to their lived experiences — respond to the industry's limitations by developing alternative ways of styling and casting. Practices that are eventually integrated into more inclusive processes of image production. Yet these alternative models emerge from experiences of discrimination, marginalisation, and exhaustion of LGBTQ+ workers navigating a cis-heteronormative system of fashion production. Bringing together literature on creative labour, fashion studies, and queer theory, the paper thus examines the backstage of queer representation. By doing so, I expose the emotional and creative labour provided by queer communities in resisting and actively transforming an industry established on the distinction between menswear and womenswear. Taking editorial fashion photography as a case study, the paper establishes key aspects of the processes shaping representations of gender in visual culture at large.

***"Emotional Labour as Normalised Survival: Navigating Precarity and Exhaustion in Platform-based Creative Work"***

Cara Xu, Loughborough University

This paper examines how Chinese women content creators on Xiaohongshu (RED) navigate the contradiction between the promise of entrepreneurial success and the everyday precarity of platform work shaped by neoliberal values and gendered expectations. While existing research on creative labour has highlighted precarity, emotional labour and neoliberal selfhood in Euro-American contexts, less is observed about how women internalise and negotiate these dynamics in China's platform economy. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session A2

### The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion

***"Emotional Labour as Normalised Survival: Navigating Precarity and Exhaustion in Platform-based Creative Work"***

Cara Xu, Loughborough University

[Continued from previous page] To address this gap, this study draws on a feminist cultural studies perspective, integrating Foucauldian ideas of self-governance and subject formation, as well as concepts of emotional and affective labour. It also engages with studies that view care, endurance, and self-exploration as women's everyday strategies to manage structural precarity. Rather than resisting precarity, they emotionally adapt to it, framing ongoing anxiety, income instability, and overwork as integral to a gendered journey of self-improvement and future possibility. This condition is sustained by gendered cultural expectations that valorise quiet endurance, reflected in the socially constructed ideals of the 'independent woman'(独立女性) and the hyper-productive 'slash youth'(斜杠青年). Based on digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews, this study explores how gendered subjectivities are shaped through the interplay of cultural narratives, moral expectations, and the structural logics of platform capitalism. It argues that content creation is not simply serving as income generation; it emerges as a culturally sanctioned space where women cautiously navigate questions of selfhood, aspiration, and life direction, within, rather than outside, the constraints they inhabit. This research contributes to debates in feminist media studies and digital labour scholarship by theorising precarity as a lived and emotionally mediated condition, through gendered moral expectations and cultural norms.

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## Parallel Session A2

### The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion

***"The Value of Confidence: Negotiating Assetized Work on OnlyFans"***

Laurel Rogers, Goldsmiths, University of London

With the rise of platform capitalism, the figure of the sex worker—particularly in its digitally mediated forms such as porn worker, cam model, and content creator—has become a recurring symbol of neoliberalism's deepening commodification of human experience. This dissertation contends that while platform-based sex work remains a highly relevant instantiation of labor under declining neoliberalism, the traditional Marxian framework of "commodification" is increasingly inadequate for capturing the evolving dynamics of labor, sexuality, and intimacy. Instead, it advocates for the concept of "assetization" as a more apt theoretical lens—one that better accounts for speculative relations of debt and credit, the importance of reputational capital, and the entwinement of the personal, social, and economic. Focusing on the lived experiences of sex workers on OnlyFans, this paper investigates the everyday texture of assetized labor. It begins by outlining how assetization is embedded in the platform's architecture, business model, and branding, then turns to examine how sex workers negotiate the various forms of self-assetization afforded by the platform. Particular attention is given to the cultivation of self-confidence, which participants frequently described as a form of "empowerment." Building on these insights, the paper argues that the neoliberal self-help ethos has permeated the sphere of labor, positioning platform sex work as a form of self-investment and as an emotional, though not necessarily material, bulwark against mounting economic precarity. Finally, this paper reflects on how platform sex work appears to foster a post-work sensibility that is not necessarily anti-capitalist and does not necessarily result in collective, organized action.

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## Parallel Session A2

*The Instability of Creative Labour: Precarity, Flexibility, Exhaustion*

### *"Sustainable Futures? Re-imagining Cultural Labour in Post-devolution Wales"*

Faye Hannah, University of South Wales

The conditions for cultural labour are evidenced globally to be largely sustained through widespread inequalities and project-based precarity, and these conditions were amplified after Covid-19. Convincing critiques suggest that a neoliberal emphasis on productivity and growth contribute to systemic instability within the sector. Simultaneously, production risk (Eikhof 2017, 2021) and exclusionary hierarchies perpetuate inequalities for crew workers (Banks 2017), undermining sustainable employment progression. Wales presents a critical case study in decentralised regional screen production post-devolution (McElroy & Noonan 2019), with empirical findings highlighting these issues as particularly acute, exemplifying how post-industrial regions face compounded challenges around work instability and freelancer precarity. This paper interrogates potential alternatives for Wales's screen sector through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with key industry decision-makers and policymakers. The research is contextualised through comparative policy analysis of alternative models in small nations. Wales offers progressive policies and frameworks that support and facilitate intervention. These include the integration of creativity in the Welsh School Curriculum (2022), Fair Work (2019), and The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) with its emphasis on long-term sustainability. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations to inform further research and discussion related to sector-specific interventions that could address precarity while acknowledging Welsh cultural and economic contexts. By synthesising cultural labour theory with small nations screen industry development scholarship, this research advances critical debates around the intersection of precarity, devolution, and sustainable creative economies, contributing to emerging discussions on post-neoliberal approaches to cultural production and instability in peripheral regions.

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## Parallel Session A3

*The Instability of Migration: Plural Stories of Borders, Displacement, Belonging*

### *"Small stories but valuable archives: Ordinary Chinese people's pandemic (COVID-19) memory"*

Haojie Fang, Loughborough University

COVID-19, as a global event, has affected everyone's life. Museums and archival institutions have documented a number of images and physical objects (Roigé et al., 2024). However, ordinary people's personal "in-the-moment" memories (Annabell, 2023) about the pandemic have been understudied. This study collected 300 entries (posts) from one Chinese social media platform's (Douban) hashtag digital archive: #TheMemoryofCOVID-19, aiming to investigate how ordinary Chinese people engage with their personal COVID-19 memories. Drawing on the concept of "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2017; Giaxoglou, 2019), the inductive and deductive analysis reveals how ordinary Chinese people display significant personal feelings and experiences in the forms of "small stories". Preliminary findings first show that resigned magical realism is an important narrative for users. The pandemic profoundly influences ordinary people's everyday life such as how people buy groceries. In addition, as an important event that might cause cultural trauma (Demertzis & Eyerman, 2020), warm moments also provide mental relief in uncertain times. These warm in-the-moments to some extent strengthen people's confidence in defeating the pandemic. Furthermore, daily snaps of the desire to be normal represent ordinary people's lovely wishes for the future. This analysis contributes to relevant literature on digital memory and the pandemic by investigating how ordinary people narrate personal memories about COVID-19 through the lens of "small stories", which offers fresh insight by going beyond the institutional (such as museum) memory. As a public social crisis, the angle of this research helps visualize ordinary people's feelings of "the now" (Coleman, 2020) during the pandemic.

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## Parallel Session A3

*The Instability of Migration: Plural Stories of Borders, Displacement, Belonging*

### *"Migrant Workers in Danger"*

Xinyu Zhang, University of Southampton

This study focuses on the 'stigmatisation' of second-generation Chinese construction workers as new urban migrants in mainstream narratives and the resulting dilemmas of their social identities, and focuses on how participatory art practices can help them to actively construct and disseminate counter-narratives in order to challenge dominant representations of labour, identity, and sense of social belonging. Explicitly based on the framework of critical socially engaged art, this study explores how these workers become subjects of self-narratives within an 'aesthetics + politics' perspective. That is, in encouraging them to become agents of self-culture and to participate in the production of culture relevant to them, utilising currently available digital tools and social platforms to reconstruct the self-imagination through artistic means and to provoke new societal reflections on this group. Based on Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, this study explores how the collective identity of construction workers as an urban marginalised group is temporarily mobilised 'without breaking the law'. Without obliterating internal diversity, collective imaginaries are formed through shared interests in order to construct tactical media practices in the Chinese context, achieving political legitimacy and narrative visibility for the group's participatory art actions. This integration reveals how marginalised groups subvert hegemonic discourses of power through ephemeral, contextualised and low-cost artistic interventions. At the same time, by embracing the spirit of 'Doing It Together' (DIT) rather than isolated individualism, the political validity and autonomy of workers' artistic action is enhanced through co-creation between artists and participants. This will help workers to shape narratives of self-representation based on collective imaginaries under creative justice, while reducing the cost of their emotional labour to a manageable level. Taken as a whole, the purpose of this study is to discuss the role of participatory art in reshaping the subjectivity of migrant workers in the contemporary mainstream narratives of China in order to reflect on its transformative potential as a vehicle for social critique.

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## Parallel Session A3

*The Instability of Migration: Plural Stories of Borders, Displacement, Belonging*

### *"Mapping the Unseen: ESEA Documentary, VR Storytelling, and Digital Diasporas"*

Nam Joo Huh, Loughborough University

This paper explores how post-internet documentary practices by East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) creatives are shaping new modes of migrant storytelling in the UK. While London has recently seen a proliferation of ESEA visibility—through festivals, institutional exhibitions, and discourse across curatorial and academic spaces—these conversations remain unevenly distributed across the country. This research centres on artists and filmmakers working outside London, where ESEA communities are underrepresented and discursively marginalised, despite long histories of migration. Focusing on works such as In 1875 We Met at the Docks of Liverpool (Yarli Allison, 2021) and Tea and Sugarcane (Anti-Cool, 2023), the paper examines how hybrid documentary forms—found footage, AI-generated images, and VR environments constructed through 3D mapping—respond to the instability of diasporic identity and visibility. These works move beyond traditional modes of documentary to create affective, spatialised narratives that reflect the multi-layered, intersectional experiences of racialised, queer, and migrant lives. Drawing on theories of minor transnationalism (Shih), the third space (Bhabha), and collective memory (Halbwachs), the paper frames these documentaries as unstable archives and speculative sites of belonging. Of particular interest is how 3D-mapped VR spaces function as virtual third spaces—liminal, immersive environments that resist dominant historical narratives while offering new modalities of being, memory, and connection. This research contributes to critical conversations around Media and Migrant Futures, suggesting that experimental documentary can function as both a method of resistance and a tool for imagining alternative diasporic realities. It also advocates for interdisciplinary practice across media theory, curatorial strategies, and digital aesthetics that centre migrant agency.

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## Parallel Session A3

*The Instability of Migration: Plural Stories of Borders, Displacement, Belonging*

### *"Performing Authenticity in Instability: A Refugee Family on Douyin and My Reflexive Engagement"*

Rong He, University of Glasgow

Since the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, social media platforms have become key spaces for displaced individuals to reconstruct identity, maintain transnational emotional ties, and gain mediated visibility. This practice-led research focuses on a cross-national family—a Chinese husband and a Ukrainian wife—who relocated to Sweden through China's wartime evacuation policy. Before the war, they were already active on Douyin. However, their posts documenting the escape from Kyiv during the conflict went viral, rapidly expanding their audience and transforming them into full-time influencer family. Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the concept of authenticity labour, this research examines how they construct digital identities through short videos centered on food, parenting, and everyday life. In a platform environment shaped by algorithmic visibility and audience expectations, authenticity becomes a strategic, emotionally charged, and continuously negotiated performance. As tensions rose and the couple eventually separated, their once-cohesive "family theatre" began to fracture, and backstage emotions seeped into the frontstage. As a Chinese researcher and filmmaker, my initial aim was to access the backstage of their daily life in order to explore how they construct identity and intimacy beyond the performative surface. Yet in the filming process, these backstage spaces became part of my own frontstage. My camera not only mediated their self-presentation but also implicated me in the construction of visibility and meaning. This layered performance complicates the boundary between observer and participant, positioning me within the very instability I aim to study. Through this reflexive lens, the project explores how migrant families navigate instability through everyday digital performances of cultural resilience.

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## Parallel Session B1

*The Instability of Cinema: Shifting Gazes, Frames and Spaces*

### *"Post-Cinema: The Hall of Mirrors"*

Joel Blackledge, Birmingham City University

This presentation explores the challenges of studying film in a digital media landscape where previously stable categories of technology and ontology have broken down. It comprises a screening of my video essay Post-Cinema: The Hall of Mirrors along with an introduction. 'Post-Cinema' is used as a way to describe moving image media of the 21st century and an approach to that media that accounts for both consistency and disruption in the frameworks of film studies. The video frames cinema as a tendency that might be recognised in a media text according to the 'idea of cinema' that a spectator carries with them. This recognition is visually represented by a 'mirror routine': a kind of performance in which the performer faces a reflection that is almost, but not quite, perfect. This metaphor suggests that cinema is, and always has been, an unstable and shapeshifting form by nature. The video is a supercut of such scenes, culminating in the inclusion of online media as another variation on the theme. This approach draws out an affective and playful impact that demonstrates the affordances of videographic scholarship for this kind of research. As a methodological approach it aims to move scholarly focus away from both the text and the audience, and towards the encounter between the two. It asks: what 'ideas of cinema' are produced, maintained, and transformed by this encounter? The video also reflexively comments upon the nature of researching online and digital media from the perspective of film studies, where identifying media as cinematic is not a straightforward proposition. I suggest that creative practice offers useful and imaginative ways to form the question of what of 'cinema' survives the digital revolution, and in what forms. Ultimately it illustrates that cinema – as an idea, an institution, and a set of practices – is both plural and ever-changing.

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## Parallel Session B1

*The Instability of Cinema: Shifting Gazes, Frames and Spaces*

### *"Understanding the Role of AI: A Framework for Mapping Plausible AI Integration in Film Production"*

Jie Huang, Loughborough University London

As artificial intelligence (AI), especially machine learning (ML) techniques, gain increasing attention within creative industries, the film sector is navigating the uncertain landscape of these evolving technologies (Amankwah et al., 2024). This study investigates the plausible integration of AI across the film production pipeline, examining adoption patterns, technological underpinnings, and industry perspectives. The research first develops a comprehensive analytical framework mapping AI applications throughout pre-production, production, and post-production processes and then refines this framework through consultation with industry experts. The findings reveal that despite an increasing proliferation of AI tools with expanding capabilities, there remains a scarcity of film-specific applications and documented implementation in commercial projects. The distribution of potential AI integration appears uneven, with higher concentration in workflows where software use seems more central and intensive, while areas requiring physical on-set interaction show relatively limited exploration. Industry experts demonstrate a particular interest in specialised, context-specific AI models rather than general-purpose systems, recognising the potential of advancing ML techniques to enhance creative possibilities while expressing concerns regarding ethical data collection practices, intellectual property implications, and computational resource consumption. This research contributes to understanding AI's potential opportunities and challenges in filmmaking practices, supported by empirical evidence from industry experts' insights, aiming to inform future AI adoption in ways that are both innovative and responsible within the film production ecosystem.

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## Parallel Session B1

*The Instability of Cinema: Shifting Gazes, Frames and Spaces*

### *"Droning Cinema: Conceptualising the Instabilities of Contemporary Urban Space on Film"*

Ellie Power, University of Gothenburg

A number of art films have examined issues of urban inequality in the 21st Century. Films such as Chain (2004), 24 City (2008), and Nowhere Near (2023) examine issues such as urban (re)development, precarious employment and living conditions, and migration. Although not attached to a singular film movement, genre, or national cinema, these films share a narrative and formal instability that shapes their approach to examining contemporary urban spaces. In my PhD project I propose examining these films as droning, as a way to think of both their formal filmic qualities, thematic concerns of drifting and violence, and their narrative style of suspension. Drawing on theory from musicology and sound studies, my project reworks droning as a cinematic concept, one that is particularly relevant for films about urban space. I examine droning as an arythmic form that highlights temporal aspects in the film and its narrative, the condensing of space, and the forms of instability of urban life that these films explore. As well as contextualising these films in film history I am using queer theory to examine how the formal elements of these films break with cinematic and capitalist notions of progression to discuss issues of urban (re)development, gentrification and migration. In this presentation, I will examine how droning emerges in various contemporary art films to address issues of instability, and ideas of absence and presence (Fisher 2016), particularly focusing on the representation of spaces that are between construction and reconstruction.

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## Parallel Session B1

*The Instability of Cinema: Shifting Gazes, Frames and Spaces*

### *"Crimes of the Future and De Humani Corporis Fabrica: medical imaging as biocapitalist media, and forms of critical destabilisation"*

Katie Wrench, University of Cambridge

This paper considers the relationship between what Michel Foucault labels the clinical gaze and our current state of biomedical capitalism. Reading medical imaging as the media through which this clinical perceptual method developed, I trace a lineage of sick bodies as they have been co-constituted alongside forms of medical surveillance and show how the sick subject becomes peripheral to biomedicine's wider technocracy. I turn to the 2022 Cannes-paired films 'Crimes of the Future' (Cronenberg) and 'De Humani Corporis Fabrica' (Paravel and Castaing-Taylor) as examples of critical destabilisation of biomedical perception, rejecting the hegemonic objectifying praxis within medical imaging media, and asking how cinema may expose and re-conceptualize its problematic political conditions. A fascination with the visible condensed across the twentieth century, when tools of medical imaging developed in parallel to early cinema technologies. Western medical epistemology sedimented through processes of visualisation; as Walter Benjamin wrote, the 'surgeon' and the 'cameraman' undertook similar functions. In contemporary biomedicine, and viewed through the technologised gaze of medical imaging media (X-ray, NMR, CT, MRI, PET, US), sick bodies become indexes, disembodied and sanitised information systems that can be divided, spatialised, and ordered, maps upon which information can be extracted and projected. The medical subject is thus rendered by this biomedical surveillance into DiGiacomo's oblique 'acted-upon object'. 'De Humani' conducts its critical destabilisation by disorienting the medical imaging media fundamental to its visual grammar. The film transforms surgeries into landscapes of corporeal uncanniness, disturbing the separation of bodily thresholds, and oscillating between imaging media. 'Crimes' sees surgeries performed as creative acts of cultural production, done by subjects that are the agents of their own medical self-articulation. I argue that both films call the act of medical perception into reflexive attention, offering a formal critical destabilisation of clinical perception and ultimately resisting a biocapitalist gaze.

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## Parallel Session B2

*The Instability of Digital Spaces: Data, Platforms and Fragile Architectures*

### *"Performing identity in digital spaces: Negotiating visibility and authenticity"*

Liang Wei Jhen, Nanyang Technology University, Singapore

In an era marked by socio-political flux, algorithmic governance, and shifting cultural landscapes, young people's digital practices offer a critical lens for understanding the role of media in shaping identity amidst instability. This paper explores how digital literacy practices are entangled with youths' ongoing negotiation of selfhood within a rapidly evolving, hyper-mediated environment. It argues that identity—far from being a stable construct—is constantly reconfigured through everyday digital interactions that are both enabled and constrained by media structures. Drawing on educational and sociological perspectives, this study integrates quantitative and qualitative methods within a larger research project focused on Singaporean university students. The quantitative phase employed a scenario-based digital literacy scale with 918 participants, revealing significant variations in digital literacy perspectives across gender and academic disciplines through one-way ANOVA and Scheffé's post-hoc tests. These findings highlight the instability and diversity of digital literacies, shaped by broader social and institutional contexts. The qualitative phase, based on interviews with 25 participants, provides nuanced insights into how young people use digital media to signal affiliations, assert agency, and navigate ideological tensions. Preliminary findings reveal that digital literacy is not merely about skills but is deeply implicated in identity work—mediating visibility, belonging, and self-presentation in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. By centering identity as a site of both vulnerability and possibility, this paper contributes to ongoing conversations about media's hegemonic and resistant capacities. It calls for an expanded understanding of digital literacy that addresses how young people engage with and contest unstable social orders through their digital practices. In doing so, it advances theoretical and practical approaches for fostering critical engagement in an era defined by media-driven uncertainty.

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## Parallel Session B2

*The Instability of Digital Spaces: Data, Platforms and Fragile Architectures*

### *"Auditing persuasive tech: to what extent are design features programmed to steer user behaviour in 'private' messaging apps?"*

Debbie Ball, University of Westminster

Despite the unabated rollout of 'revolutionary' AI products, scrutiny on the asymmetric relationship between Meta and their users' needs to be maintained, focused on flawed platform design. This study investigates the intersection of persuasive app design, user experience and datafication, using actor-network theory and critical political economy frameworks. The work examines four messaging apps - Facebook and Instagram Messenger, WhatsApp and Signal - comparing three Meta products with one independent, not-for-profit app. As deliverers of datafication, persuasive design features such as Like buttons, notifications and read receipts propel Meta's lucrative advertising models. It is proposed that the read receipt operates similarly to the Like button, keeping users online and influencing their communication habits. Persuasive technology techniques were propagated early 2000s by Stanford University's Persuasive Tech Lab, adapting behaviourist operant conditioning theory to app design (Fogg 2003, Skinner 1953). There, future Silicon Valley entrepreneurs learned how to make apps "stick" and adopted by users as everyday communication tools (Stolzoff 2018). Correspondingly, apps built with persuasive design features problematise the notion of 'private' messaging spaces. Is the privacy promised real or a socio-technical illusion of privacy? Or, per Zuckerberg's WhatsApp for Business vision, do Meta's expansion plans undermine the implementation of privacy through end-to-end encryption? (Johns et al 2024). It is important to move beyond the attention economy to define a concept of emotional privacy, a value that should be respected rather than mined by app design protocols.The Auditing Design Features Method has been devised to investigate this socio-technical dilemma, combining algorithmic auditing (Sandvig et al 2014), walkthrough method (Light et al 2018, Duguay and Gold-Appel 2023), semi-structured interviews (Bryman 2016) and media go-alongs (Jørgensen 2016). Insights into this contemporaneous field work will be included in the presentation.

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## Parallel Session B2

*The Instability of Digital Spaces: Data, Platforms and Fragile Architectures*

### *"Transparency, Obfuscation and Control: Interrogating Content Governance Visibility in Meta's Transparency Centre"*

Mia Tuckey, Goldsmiths, University of London

This research presentation interrogates the contents of Meta's Transparency Centre, using critical perspectives on Transparency and Dataism. Since 2021, the centre has allowed site visitors to view Meta's cross-platform content moderation policies and any changes that have been made to them over time, as well as periodic reports on the extent to which these policies are being enforced on Facebook and Instagram. The centre deploys data in unique ways to brand Facebook and Instagram's 'moderation regimes' (Gillespie, 2018) as being rooted in openness, user safety, and accountability. This research posits that rather than demonstrating a democratised, open and accountable model of content governance, Meta's Transparency Centre in fact, contradictorily, functions as a tool for systematic obfuscation of the political, economic and branding interests that shape the company's approach to content governance. As Claire Birchall describes, in a cultural context in which transparency is treated as a moral virtue, 'organisations [...] pledge to outbid each other in a kind of transparency auction that's yet to reach its price ceiling' (2011, p.1). But the presentation of knowledge is, as we know, never neutral. Through the Transparency Centre, I argue, Meta exercises its hegemony by controlling the circulation of selective information about itself. As in Marilyn Strathern's critique of the push for transparency within HE institutions, 'visibility as a conduit for knowledge is elided with visibility as an instrument for control' (2000, p.309). Despite this, I will argue that the Transparency Centre's tracked changes function – designed to show additions and redactions in each of Meta's policies – is ripe for analysis as an unintentional archive of ideological change and political instability, most notably in its recent swathe of Trump-administration-friendly alterations to the hateful conduct policy.

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## Parallel Session B2

*The Instability of Digital Spaces: Data, Platforms and Fragile Architectures*

### *"The Interconnection of Aesthetic Preference, Interactive Digital Media, and Consumer Behaviour Among Chinese Generation Z"*

Hongyu Teng, Canterbury Christ Church University

Due to the rapid digital transformation of China's commercial economy, Generation Z consumers are deeply embedded in interactive digital technologies and are actively shifting the market dynamics. Understanding the components and roles that Gen Z constitutes within this technology-driven consumer landscape is essential. This paper explores how aesthetic preferences, interactive digital media, and consumer behaviour intersect among China's Generation Z (born 1995–2010). Grounded in Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), this paper emphasised that Generation Z's consumer behaviour is shaped by media-based interactions, cultural influences, and the ongoing formation of self-identity, resulting in a fluid and diverse pattern of consumption. This paper adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus groups to explore both behavioural patterns and deeper cultural meanings. Quantitative data provided broad insights into Gen Z's preferences, while qualitative analysis, using thematic techniques, enabled a richer interpretation of how these behaviours are shaped by media engagement. Findings focused on three key areas: first, Generation Z's distinctive aesthetic preferences, blending commercial digital aesthetics with personal identity expressions; second, their unique consumer behaviours in online and media-driven marketplaces, shaped by both internal motivations and external influences; third, the dynamic interplay between Generation Z, the commercial design industry, and interactive digital media, where Gen Z act as active participants rather than solely consumers within the commercial ecosystem. This paper, conducted from a non-Western perspective amid rapid digital development, highlighted that interactive digital media brings young consumers a level of awareness and cognitive engagement that goes beyond mere consumption.

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## Parallel Session C1

### The Instability of Bodies: Vulnerability, Performance, Transformation

### *"Exploring Women's Autonomy through Interactive Fanfiction Game Creation"*

Xiang Li, University of Leeds

This project investigates a group of Chinese EXO fans who use the game platform Orange Light to develop interactive fanfiction games and operate cross-platform communities. Orange Light is a Chinese interactive fiction game platform that provides user-friendly tools for game development. It has become a space where Chinese EXO fans engage in digital storytelling to tell stories and navigate state power and patriarchy. Most Orange Light EXO users are women, and the games they have developed are predominantly in the heterosexual romance genre. However, with the rise of online engagement with feminist and gender-related topics in China, women's storytelling in Orange Light EXO games increasingly incorporates feminist discourses, which serve as a means of negotiating the conventions of heterosexual romance and rethinking established gender norms. In addition to game development, EXO fans build communities across multiple social media platforms and engage in various activities. Based on their familiarity with each platform, fans strategically leverage its affordances to compensate for the lack of community affordances on Orange Light. Their autonomy and creativity are reflected in the ways they build, sustain, and participate in these distributed fan communities. By examining how these communities operate and how feminist discourses are constructed and contested in women's digital storytelling, this research explores the conditions under what the games are developed and the means feminist discourses are negotiated within romance fanfiction gaming practices. To approach this, digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are adopted. This project offers a unique opportunity to examine both game production and consumption within a female-dominated creative environment, contributing insights into users' autonomy and creativity in contexts shaped by instability and constraint.

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## Parallel Session C1

### The Instability of Bodies: Vulnerability, Performance, Transformation

### *"Pharmacopornographic Capitalism, Body Genres, and Fan Service in a Transnational Media Context"*

Rajsi Rajora, Goldsmiths, University of London

Paul Beatriz Preciado first used the term "Pharmacopornographic Capitalism" to describe "a new kind of hot, psychotropic punk capitalism" that is "dominated by the industry of the pill, the masturbatory logic of pornography, and the chain of excitation-frustration on which it is based." This paper conceptualises the phenomenon of 'fan service' within this critical framework as the formulaic inculcation of gratuitous aesthetic, narrative, and performative elements signifying erotic potentialities into otherwise non-pornographic media texts of contemporary East Asian media industries. It further delineates how fan service is harnessed to 'reward' loyal consumer bases, especially through the transient and unstable commodifications of bodies and pleasures in the hyper-sexualised female bodies of the anime and manga industry and the strategic queering of male idol groups in the K-pop industry. While fan service in anime and manga can integrate erotic ideals of consumable ornamentalised femininity into hyperreal representations of wide-eyed 2-D girls with youthful bodies, fan service in K-pop can be imbibed in professional performances to queer and hybridise the masculinities of idols for producing celebrity spectacles that hold multifaceted erotic potentials. By adopting a "technopharmacological" perspective on fan service that emphasises its pharmakon-like nature, this paper maps how the prevalence of fan service imaginaries can impact and transform the affective, cognitive, and somatic capacities of their fans in both mundane and potentially extraordinary ways while also expanding and truncating their capacities to thrive. To theoretically anchor this investigation, this study draws on Koichi Iwabuchi's "brand nationalism", Paul Beatriz Preciado's "pornographic surplus value", Linda Williams's work on "body genres", and Bernard Stiegler's "psychotechnologies". Ultimately, this paper aims to critically evaluate the media logics and body assemblages of fan service within the paradigms of neoliberal media ecologies, post-Fordist fandom cultures, and the technologised media landscapes of the digital age.

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## Parallel Session C1

### The Instability of Bodies: Vulnerability, Performance, Transformation

### *"A Search That Frustrates – Pornography, Psychoanalysis and The Destabilising Erotics of Scrolling"*

Pauline H Nottingham, King's College London

Using recent psychoanalytic research into compulsive engagement with internet pornography, this paper proposes an overarching theory behind the impulse to 'scroll' not only on a pornographic site or app but more generally, the implication being that beyond the content of that which is 'scrolled', the very phenomenon of 'scrolling' can be imagined formally and is erotic, even fetishistic. This exploration is based upon the proposition that the 'search for something' when engaging with internet pornography is frustrating and gratifying in equal measure. The search for ultimate fulfilment, sexually or otherwise, is distressing on a psychological level whilst internet pornography itself – the actual content – delivers exactly what is expected with immediacy and without the need to engage with the subconscious in depth. This combination of frustration and surface satiation leads the scroller into a compulsive repetition of this search. To illustrate the ways in which this erotic or fetishistic 'searching' impulse could be understood as the drive behind the urge to scroll, this paper will combine close analysis of two texts – the homepage of the pornographic website Pornhub.com alongside the recent Hollywood feature film Anora (Sean Baker, 2024). In the inclusion of Anora within this analysis, an argument regarding convergence emerges in a suggestion that the medium of cinematic film, destabilised by social media and scrolling, contends with the phenomenon by 'enfolding' the aesthetics of scrolling back within the filmic form through editing, camera movement, style and narrative. This 'enfolding' goes further than remediation, as the filmic form has a reciprocal, mutually transformative relationship with the phenomena of scrolling. Film produces moving images which are remediated digitally and re-encountered whilst scrolling and this productive re-encounter is then enfolded back into film. Therefore, in an effort towards stability, the erotics of scrolling have become a prominent feature of contemporary feature films.

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## Parallel Session C1

### The Instability of Bodies: Vulnerability, Performance, Transformation

### *"Pornography in fandom: consumption of affective media in participatory cultures"*

Kseniia Sheveleva, Goldsmiths, University of London

This paper is an exploration of the ways in which affect, as both immediate bodily reaction and overarching lived experience of contemporary subjects, is mediated, retracted, and challenged online on the case study of fanfiction smut. Both pornography and fan studies acknowledge the crucial role of affect in audience reception of culturally 'alternative' media texts. Yet, despite the popularity of the explicit genre of 'smut' in fanfiction, the intersection of pornography and fandom is rarely discussed as mutually influential and productive in highlighting the nuanced and inherently flexible processes of subjectivity-formation as mediated, retracted, and framed by media structures and outputs. The paper thus researches 'smut' as a mirror of layered affect as manifested in readings of fandom-generated pornography by addressing key audience motivations behind the selection of explicit fan art, animation, and written fiction over their PG alternatives in online fandom spaces. This project positions itself within the intersecting fields of fan studies, affect theory, and digital pornography. While foundational work by Jenkins (1992) is used as a departure point of research on fan creativity, this research combined the subjective critiques offered by Hills (2002) in fan studies and Paasonen (2011) in online pornographies to foreground the volatile emotional economies at play in fanfiction erotica. Again, as the specifics of the intersection of the two is significantly under-researched in academic discourse, the paper primarily bases its findings on original ethnographic study. The 'double affect' found in readings of smut is discovered through a range of in-depth semi-structured interviews with female and non-binary queer subjects around motivations behind and pleasures derived from its consumption. Then, I employ thematic analysis to discuss each in terms of fan investment, arousal, subjectivity-formation, safety of sexual expression, and cultural resistance, finally drawing them back together under affective media practice as a vehicle of subject-formation in the volatile online space.

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## Parallel Session C2

*The Instability of Remediations: Contaminations in Literature, Journalism and Music*

### *"Writing in Unstable Times: Chinese Online Novel Authors Confront the Rise of AI"*

Chencheng Wu, University of Salford

The Chinese online novel industry is deeply embedded in platform-driven economies, where authors engage in continuous content production shaped by platform policies, reader interactions, and evolving technological infrastructures. As digital creators, authors operate within a social media-like ecosystem that thrives on serialized storytelling, direct reader engagement, and algorithmic exposure. However, recent shifts—particularly the rise of AI-generated content (AIGC) and changing platform regulations—have influenced traditional models of this industry, raising urgent questions about the sustainability of human authorship.This paper investigates how Chinese online novel authors experience and respond to growing instability within the platformized creative economy, particularly in light of AIGC and shifting platform-reader dynamics. Specifically, it reveals that while AI tools can enhance production efficiency, they simultaneously undermine the delicate relationship that authors establish with their readers—a bond often characterised by a sense of personal connection and emotional reliance. By weaving personal narrative with interviews and theoretical reflection, this paper reveals how instability in digital media production is not only economic or technological, but also deeply affective.

By exploring the mechanisms through which AI disrupts these relationships, it contributes to broader debates on media instability and offers insight into the future of creative production in digital environments.

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## Parallel Session C2

### The Instability of Remediations: Contaminations in Literature, Journalism and Music

***"Explaining the contemporary crisis of journalism in Britain: a Marxist account"***

Leo Watkins, Goldsmiths, University of London

Journalism in Britain has since the 2000s entered a period of profound and deepening crisis, at three distinct but interrelated levels: financial, professional and public legitimacy. This paper sketches the causes, phases and dimensions of that crisis, examining its intersection with the broader contemporary crisis of hegemony in Britain whose most visible manifestation is increasing political instability at Westminster. The paper argues that the real root of the crisis of journalism in Britain is in deepening contradictions of the capitalist basis on which it has predominantly been organised.

***"Fractured Order, Diminishing Trust: Pakistani Journalists' Struggle with Visual Deepfakes and Disinformation"***

Maham Sufi, Cardiff University

Deepfakes have emerged as a sophisticated form of disinformation, posing unique challenges to journalism globally. News organizations increasingly struggle to detect and debunk AI-generated visual disinformation, which threatens to erode public trust and distort factual narratives. The issue is particularly pressing because visual deepfakes exploit traditional markers of authenticity. As such, they mirror ancient disinformation tactics that embedded false narratives within trusted formats to make them more believable. Within Pakistan's already fragile media landscape, characterized by political polarization, institutional instability, and resource constraints, the rise of AI-driven visual disinformation has raised concerns. While deepfakes have been extensively studied in Western contexts, significant gaps remain regarding their impact on journalism in the Global South. Specifically, there is limited understanding of how Pakistani journalists perceive and respond to this evolving threat. This study addresses this gap by exploring: a) How do Pakistani journalists perceive and respond to visual deepfakes within a fragmented information landscape? b) What do their responses reveal about the shifting nature of journalistic credibility, responsibility and the use of deepfakes as a political weapon in Pakistan? [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session C2

*The Instability of Remediations: Contaminations in Literature, Journalism and Music*

### *"Fractured Order, Diminishing Trust: Pakistani Journalists' Struggle with Visual Deepfakes and Disinformation"*

Maham Sufi, Cardiff University

[Continued from previous page] For this study, 37 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom with journalists across various media sectors and geographic regions in Pakistan, selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, revealing that journalists perceive themselves as significantly ill-equipped to combat visual deepfake threats due to severe resource limitations, inadequate fact-checking capacities, limited technological literacy, and regulatory pressures (including political interference) that complicate efforts to counteract disinformation effectively. As AI-generated visual disinformation continues to evolve, this study provides the starting point for future research on journalistic responses and governance in similar contexts.

### *"There Are Two Forms Of Internet Music On TikTok"*

Anders Bach Pedersen, University of Copenhagen

This presentation seeks to historicize occurrent internet music genres on TikTok and asks: What is specific about the forms of internet music on TikTok in the present conjuncture? It joins conjunctural (Hall, 2018) and style (Kornbluh, 2023) analyses of contemporary music that is native to the internet and suggests two dominant aesthetic forms of nostalgia (Tanner, 2023) and abjection (Kristeva, 1980). Throughout the history of so-called "internet music" (Born, 2022) hundreds of aesthetics, subcultures and memes have converged and morphed into specific genres. From the e-mail newsletters of cd-skip-aesthetic microsound over the early YouTube nu- metal, chipmunky vocaloid in the genre nightcore to the capitalist realism of chopped-and- screwed vaporwave on Tumblr and Bandcamp, the first ten years of internet music were steadily platformized (Helmond, 2015), generic variations of postmodern interventions. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session C2

### The Instability of Remediations: Contaminations in Literature, Journalism and Music

### *"There Are Two Forms Of Internet Music On TikTok"*

Anders Bach Pedersen, University of Copenhagen

[Continued from previous page] Today, internet music is rapidly changing due to increasing platform specificity. Platform power is immanent in the all-encompassing proliferation of moods, vibes, flow and speed that permeate every music- facing platform today be it via playlists, reposts or the endless scroll, ever-present at "the end of the end of history" (Hochuli et al., 2021; Munkholm & Bach Pedersen, 2024). The circulation of these genres distills two essential aesthetic forms: the forms of nostalgia and abjection. No platform galvanizes this conjuncture in a more frantically accelerated manner than TikTok. The relations between production and distribution on TikTok clearly marks the "absorption of modes of circulation into modes of production" (Ngai, 2015). The "#manifest", immediatist style of TikTok oozes its per-video payment scheme, engaging creators, music producers and users to "Step on it!", and for the love of likes – and advertisers – share, share, share! TikTok's platformatting (Kiberg, 2023) congeals its internet music into these two aesthetic forms, and thus the shaping of nostalgic and abject aesthetics is enveloped in political economy (Attali, 1985).

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## Parallel Session C3

### The Instability of the Nation: Memory, Heritage and the Soft-Power of Preservation

***"Projecting China's idea of China: An analysis of international co-production documentaries as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, 1980 – present."***

Chen Yang, Cardiff University

This study investigates the strategic deployment of Chinese international co-produced documentaries as tools of cultural diplomacy and soft power, set against the backdrop of China's comprehensive state-driven ideological and propaganda efforts (Chan, 2007; Brady, 2009; Brady, 2017). China's cultural diplomacy is distinctive in that the mobilization of 'culture' closely aligns with Communist Party propaganda objectives, with all participating actors required to adhere to the official narrative (Edney, 2014; Brady, 2017). Despite significant scholarly attention to China's soft power strategies and the role of documentary filmmaking (Edney, 2014; Peng & Keane, 2019; Rawnsley et al., 2021), existing analyses rarely offer a systematic exploration of state influence on production processes or how these processes shape filmmakers' identities and perceptions. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) field theory, this research systematically examines the power structures, relational dynamics, and rules governing China's international documentary co-production subfield, highlighting interactions among various actors, including filmmakers, cultural institution representatives, and government policymakers. Through a comprehensive historical overview covering developments from the 1980s to the present, supplemented by selected case studies, the study demonstrates how co-produced documentaries serve as critical mediums for cross-cultural communication and national image construction. The unique contribution of this study lies in its innovative extension of Bourdieu's field theory (1996) to encompass the complexities of transnational cultural production. Unlike previous applications limited to specific national contexts, this research explicitly addresses transnational interactions, emphasizing ideological diversity among international participants and the subsequent impacts on their motivations and identity formation (Couldry, 2003; Vestheim, 2012). [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session C3

### The Instability of the Nation: Memory, Heritage and the Soft-Power of Preservation

***"Projecting China's idea of China: An analysis of international co-production documentaries as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, 1980 – present."***

Chen Yang, Cardiff University

[Continued from previous page] By conceptualizing international documentary co-production as a dynamic intersection of multiple fields, the study enhances understanding of how various forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—are negotiated and exchanged across national boundaries. This study expanded theoretical approach thus provides fresh perspectives on the multifaceted processes and impacts of China's strategic use of documentary filmmaking in global diplomatic contexts.

***"City in Translation: How Social Media Tourists Reconstruct Beijing's Image"***

Weixuan Zhang, Canterbury Christ Church University

In the era of globalisation and social media, tourists have become active producers of visual narratives that shape the worldwide perception of destinations (Song & Kim, 2016; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). This study investigates how international tourists construct, exoticise, or misread Beijing's city image through Instagram photos, and compares these narratives with those created by Chinese tourists on Xiaohongshu. Grounded in theories of the tourist gaze and mediatized visibility, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach. A qualitative visual content analysis is conducted on 300 Instagram and 300 Xiaohongshu images tagged "Beijing", manually coded for thematic content and focal elements. Python scripts are employed to extract dominant colour to support aesthetic comparisons. Semi-structured interviews with Chinese tourists and international viewers of Beijing images further explore differences in perception and imagined urban experience. Preliminary analysis suggest that international users tend to portray Beijing through historical landmarks—such as Tiantan Park, the Forbidden City, or the Great Wall—favouring exoticised, static representations that reinforce historical or orientalist imaginaries. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session C3

### The Instability of the Nation: Memory, Heritage and the Soft-Power of Preservation

***"City in Translation: How Social Media Tourists Reconstruct Beijing's Image"***

Weixuan Zhang, Canterbury Christ Church University

[Continued from previous page] While Xiaohongshu also features iconic landmarks, modern urban scenes—accompanied by cooler, lifestyle-oriented aesthetics—are equally emphasised, reflecting a more contemporised image of the city. Additionally, the same image may evoke divergent interpretations depending on the viewer's cultural background, prompting a negotiation of identity and meaning. Moreover, social media's algorithmic visibility amplifies tourist hotspots while marginalising everyday urban life, reinforcing narrow, marketable city images and limiting visual diversity. This compression of urban representation in global circulation contributes to the symbolic exclusion of Beijing's modernity. This paper highlights how cross-platform visual storytelling produces unstable meanings of urban identity and cultural representation, aligning with the conference's theme of media and instability.

***"Guarding the Nation's Heart: Exploring Symbolic Rituals of Thai Hyper-Royalist Vigilante Organisation during the Death of King Rama IX"***

Wisarut Wongnom, University of Leeds

The morning following King Bhumibol Adulyadej's (Rama IX) death demonstrates how hyper-royalist vigilante individuals and organisations have engaged in extralegal activities to prosecute perceived violators of the Thai lese-majeste law, or Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code. The Rubbish Collector Organisation (RCO), a hyper-royalist digital vigilante organisation, plays a significant role in producing emotionally charged rhetorical strategies to reinforce the existing ideological alignment with royalism. The Facebook page serves as a platform for gathering like-minded individuals based on their political viewpoints and attitudes, through the rhetorical strategy employed by group leaders who frame and reinforce shared beliefs and ideologies concerning the monarchy. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session C3

### The Instability of the Nation: Memory, Heritage and the Soft-Power of Preservation

***"Guarding the Nation's Heart: Exploring Symbolic Rituals of Thai Hyper-Royalist Vigilante Organisation during the Death of King Rama IX"***

Wisarut Wongnom, University of Leeds

[Continued from previous page] While these rhetorical strategies enhance the shared ideological alignment, they are not adequate to motivate people to engage in high-risk and violent extralegal activities, especially doxing, naming, and shaming. Thus, the core argument of the study is that symbolic rituals play a significant role in stimulating shared moral emotions, especially anger, in response to the perceived violator of lèse-majesté, leading individuals to sacrifice themselves to engage in violent extralegal activities. This study analyses how mediated symbolic ritual is stimulated based on two primary theoretical frameworks—Collins' Interaction Ritual Chains and Asif and Weenink's Vigilante Ritual Theory emotions among hyper-royalists, prompting them to act violently against the dissenters. Employing the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) from 1 to 31 October 2016 offers an in-depth understanding of how the hyper-royalist digital vigilante organisations function within a broader authoritarian context, where the royalist sentiment and ideology were notably heightened, and how the groups utilise the benefits from social media affordances.

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## Parallel Session D1

### The Instability of Fandom: Desire, Communities and Cultural Power

### *"Chinese Virtual Idol Fandom: The Intersection of Fan Prosumption and Fandom Nationalism"*

Zirui Chen, Loughborough University

Over the past decade, virtual idols have gained immense popularity among Chinese youth, with the core market size projected to reach ¥48.06 billion in 2025 (iiMedia Research, 2023). However, despite the rising cultural and economic significance of these 'novel' celebrities and the industry that supports them, there has been relatively little research on the topic. In order to address this lacuna, this study examines the case of Luo Tianyi, one of China's most prominent virtual idols, focusing on the practices of her online fan community. By integrating perspectives from digital fandom, prosumption, and nationalism, this research explores how fans engage in participatory activities, interact within online communities, and reproduce nationalistic narratives. As Peterson (2022) has argued, fandom practices have undergone profound changes in recent times and the virtual celebrity industry is a testament to some of these shifts. First, Luo Tianyi's fandom exemplifies the phenomenon of prosumption, as fans actively contribute to content creation while simultaneously consuming corporate-driven media. This participatory engagement fosters fan pleasures and senses of belonging but also reinforces hierarchical power structures that benefit media corporations. Second, the Chinese context can usefully highlight forms of fan activism in popular culture, perhaps best represented by "fandom nationalism" designed to promote specifically Chinese cultural products in opposition to those from perceived competitor countries e.g. Japan. Therefore, this case foregrounds the intertwining roles of fans, celebrities/corporations and the state in this increasingly profitable and high-profile sector. Furthermore, this study employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating interviews, media go-along, and online participant observation to map the dynamics of virtual idol fandom in China. By adopting a bottom-up approach, this research emphasises fan agency, particularly how individuals negotiate their fan identities within the broader framework of national identity and state-endorsed cultural narratives. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session D1

### The Instability of Fandom: Desire, Communities and Cultural Power

***"Chinese Virtual Idol Fandom: The Intersection of Fan Prosumption and Fandom Nationalism"***

Zirui Chen, Loughborough University

[Continued from previous page] However, existing literature on fandom and nationalism has been primarily developed about Western cases and histories, and therefore this study offers an original contribution by applying insights from the field to the Chinese case. In this study, I outline the main theoretical framework for my project, providing an overview of existing literature on fandom and celebrity studies and making a case for a novel approach that addresses the specificities of both the virtual celebrity industry and the Chinese case.

***"Aesthetic Affinities and Nationalist Pressures: Chinese K-pop Fandom in a Restricted Media Environment"***

Ziman Li, University of Sheffield

This paper examines the relation between transnational media, fans' identity, and state control through the lens of Chinese K-pop fandom, focusing on how fans engaged in "performative" practices to balance personal aesthetics with national expectations. Existing scholarship has examined aspects of fandom and identity in places outside South Korea (Laffan, 2020; Yoon, 2018; Maliangkay & Choi, 2015). However, there remains a gap in understanding how fan-driven subcultures adapt to restrictive cultural policies in some national contexts. The unique context of China's cultural restrictions on South Korean content after the diplomatic relations soured in post-2016 provides an essential backdrop for investigating the nuanced ways in which K-pop fan communities respond to political and societal pressures. The study highlights the strategies employed by Chinese K-pop fan communities to cope with political and social pressures during the restriction period. These fan-driven practices operate as both a form of performative compliance and a mode of soft resistance, revealing complex dynamics between personal aesthetic affinities and nationalist pressures. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session D1

### The Instability of Fandom: Desire, Communities and Cultural Power

***"Aesthetic Affinities and Nationalist Pressures: Chinese K-pop Fandom in a Restricted Media Environment"***

Ziman Li, University of Sheffield

[Continued from previous page] Drawing on digital ethnography conducted between the summer of 2025 and 2027, and focusing on Weibo (the primary social media platform for Chinese K-pop fans), this research analyses popular content and interactions within fan communities, investigates how this fandom constructs virtual subcultural spaces to maintain community, and resists marginalisation, as well as navigates conflicting mainstream cultural values. This study contributes to broader debates on media, youth culture, and transnational cultural flows under authoritarian governance. It also provides a fresh perspective on the complex interplay between transnational popular culture, politics, and identity formation in the digital age, offering insights into how fandom is not just a site of passive media consumption but an active space of meaning-making.

***"Do You Know Who You Are?: Identity Construction Through Participation in Pop Music Fandom on TikTok"***

Lauren Johnson, Ulster University

This paper presents preliminary findings from my ongoing PhD research, which explores how pop music fans use TikTok as a platform for expressing, exploring, and articulating identity. Drawing from sociological theory, feminist theory and critical cybercultures research, this project examines identity as a malleable concept, one that is inherently intersectional, unstable and in flux. While the connection between fandom and identity has been established in the fan studies field (Gray, et al., 2017; Seregina and Schouten, 2017; Hannell, 2021), this project places this within the context of contemporary online fan practices, exploring how fans use the unique affordances of the TikTok platform to experiment with self-presentation and identity performance. [Continues on the next page]

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## Parallel Session D1

### The Instability of Fandom: Desire, Communities and Cultural Power

***"Do You Know Who You Are?: Identity Construction Through Participation in Pop Music Fandom on TikTok"***

Lauren Johnson, Ulster University

[Continued from previous page] Combining textual analysis and digital ethnography techniques, this phenomenon is examined through the lens of three prominent pop culture case studies—Harry Styles, Taylor Swift and Beyoncé. The paper will present my analysis of each celebrity's unique 'star text' (Dyer and McDonald, 1998), with a consideration of how fandom engagement informs fans' self-perceived identities. This analysis will be supported by data collected during semi-structured ethnographic interviews with fans of each artist. Through these findings, I will illuminate how pop music fans explore identity online through fandom participation, and examine TikTok as an active force shaping identity, fandom and celebrity culture. The project has received full ethical approval from Ulster University's Communication and Media Ethics Filter Committee (FCCOM) and is funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE).

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## Parallel Session D2

*The Instability of Counter-Discourses: Negotiation, Defiance and Resistance*

### *"Exploring the Discursive Instabilities of "Security": Notre-Dame-des-Landes and its Echoes in Mainstream Media"*

Caroline Wintgens, Université de Liège

Drawing on both Feminist Security Studies (Wibben 2011; Stern 2005, 2006) and Media Studies (Callison and Young 2020; Deuze 2005; Durham 1998; Fraser 2001; Macé 2006), this paper explores the concept of "security" - or rather, "(in)security" – as a site of instability, particularly in an age of rapid technological and political change. Thinking of security "on the basis of (women's) everyday lives" (Wibben 2011) opens up new ways to interrogate the media and the role they play in legitimizing some definition of (in)security while marginalizing others. Defining security necessarily implies identifying threats and determining what—or who—is worth protecting. This process is inherently political. I aim to focus on the case of the ZAD [Zone à Défendre] of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. The expression "Zone à Défendre" both evokes and subverts the military language of security. The ZAD was a long-standing (2009-2018) occupation and protest camp in France, created to resist the construction of a major airport project. It became a key site of ecological resistance and political experimentation, where activists practiced forms of autonomous living and contested state authority. Zadists also developed their own autonomous media, the website zad.nadir.org. This paper examines how "security counter-discourses" emerged on this website, challenging dominant notions of security, territory, and identity. Through a discourse analysis of two corpora (76 texts from zad.nadir.org and 250 articles from the regional newspaper Ouest France), I will show how this redefinition both embraces and destabilizes hegemonic understanding of security, and therefore generates discursive instability. However, this instability is reabsorbed when echoed in traditional media, where norms of objectivity and immediacy tend to neutralize or depoliticize these counter-discourses.

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## Parallel Session D2

*The Instability of Counter-Discourses: Negotiation, Defiance and Resistance*

### *"Demythologizing through Stable Diffusion: AI-Generated Visualizations in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve"*

Longlong Ge, University of Nottingham

This project draws on Angela Carter's "demythologizing business," (2013, p. 46) a literary process through which dominant symbolic systems—especially those surrounding gender, sexuality, and identity—to explore how Stable Diffusion (SD), an open-sourcing latent diffusion model rooted in stereotypical, gender-normative dataset might be repurposed in service of feminist literature (Mehrabi et al., 2021). In The Passion of New Eve (1977), this demythologization is enacted through the character of Evelyn, a misogynist man who is forcibly transformed by a mythic Mother goddess into Eve, a woman with a "perfect" female body constructed according to gendered stereotypes. Through Eve(lyn)'s subsequent journey across dystopian landscapes and encounters with various ideological regimes, Carter critiques not only patriarchal constructions of femininity but also the very mechanisms by which identities—particularly gendered ones—are performed, imposed, and undone. In this study, using the original descriptions from the texts as prompts, we generate AI-generated images of female characters from The Passion of New Eve, each representing different configurations of gender, embodiment, and identity. Through careful textual interpretation and prompt engineering, we attempt to visualize characters such as Eve(lyn), Leilah/Lilith, and Tristessa in ways that align with Carter's anti-essentialist vision. By comparing the resulting AI images with both traditional gender iconography and Carter's own textual representations, we explore the extent to which AI visualization can serve as a critical extension of the novel's demythologizing project. Ultimately, we argue that feminist literary texts and generative AI can engage in a reciprocal symbiosis: literature can guide ethical and aesthetic interventions in AI, while AI can expand feminist narratives into new multimodal dimensions, enabling affective engagements beyond the limits of language.

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## Parallel Session D2

*The Instability of Counter-Discourses: Negotiation, Defiance and Resistance*

### *"Postfeminist Sensibilities and the Platformisation of Chinese Wanghong Culture"*

Xiaojing Mo, University of Leeds

In the context of China's rapidly evolving platform economy, my study investigates how global postfeminist values are localized and negotiated within the content and practices of Chinese female social media influencers. It further explores how their digital production and personal perceptions are shaped by intersecting forces of platform logics, gender politics, and broader socio-cultural dynamics. Through a digital ethnography approach, my study examines influencers' everyday practices and the meanings they attach to their work within a politically and economically unstable media environment. Postfeminist sensibility, which is characterized by individualism, choice, self-surveillance, and empowerment through consumption, has been closely tied to neoliberal capitalist values and digital self-branding practices. While previous studies have examined how these sensibilities shape influencer culture in Western contexts, emerging research shows that similar dynamics play out in China, albeit with distinctive local adaptations. In the Chinese context, state-sanctioned misogyny, censorship, and market-driven logics co-exist with neoliberal imperatives of entrepreneurial femininity, creating a complex terrain where postfeminist values are both promoted and constrained. This study investigates how influencers negotiate these tensions in their content, labour, and self-representation, asking not only what postfeminist discourses are present, but also what political, affective, and structural negotiations underpin them. It highlights the need to move beyond merely identifying postfeminist elements, and instead consider the contingent, situated, and sometimes contradictory ways influencers engage with values and constraints imposed by platform algorithms, moderation regimes, and gendered cultural expectations. By foregrounding negotiation and complexity, this research aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of postfeminist media culture in the context of China's digital platform economy.

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## Parallel Session D2

*The Instability of Counter-Discourses: Negotiation, Defiance and Resistance*

### *"Holding Pain, Making Space: A Crip-Feminist Approach to Documentary Practice"*

Srikrupa Raghunathan Vedal, Queen Mary, University of London

What happens when trauma in the body is not described—when it resists language, yet shapes how it moves, feels, and sees? Can a filmmaking process about trauma and body become a space where the participants can refuse to be defined solely by victimhood or pathology, and instead tell stories where the body holds pain but also becomes a site of desire, protest, and liberation? This paper explores embodied experiences of trauma and pain in the body through feminist and decolonial filmmaking, particularly using participatory methods in documentary filmmaking, drawing on doctoral research with women in Hyderabad, India. Through collaborative workshops, the women co-created narratives that rejected pathological framings of trauma. As a filmmaker experiencing pain and immobility, the process also became a space to unlearn internalised ableism and embrace a 'crip' approach to filmmaking. Centring care, slowness, and accessibility to rethink the film from crip space and time, this film and research reimagines documentary filmmaking not just as a representational tool but as a site of survivance, collective authorship and solidarity – mirroring the nonlinear, layered ways in which trauma lives in the bodymind.

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## Parallel Session D3

*The Instability of Propaganda: Populism and Persuasion at Times of Crisis*

### *"The Narrative Battle in Indonesia's Media Landscape: Political Branding and Activist Resistance in the 2024 Election"*

Dini Restyanti, Goldsmiths, University of London

This study examines the consequences of mediated political branding and communication in Indonesia through the case studies of Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto, situating their campaigns within broader debates on media, democratic fragility, and image politics in the Global South. Jokowi's rise as a political outsider—whose "Everyman" image and grassroots mobilisation propelled him from humble beginnings to the presidency in 2014—initially stood in contrast to Indonesia's entrenched political dynasties and media oligarchs. His populist persona resonated as authentic and relatable, boosting participation and triggering a disruptive shift in the country's campaign culture. However, this study interrogates the contradictions between Jokowi's branding and policy record, revealing how populist imagery can obscure elite alignments and controversial decisions, particularly as he increasingly aligned with political elites and ultimately endorsed Prabowo Subianto as his successor. Prabowo, a former military general during the Suharto authoritarian regime (1968–1998) and implicated in several human rights abuses in the late 1990s, rebranded himself in the 2024 presidential election through a "friendly grandpa" persona and populist messaging. Coordinated campaigns across oligarch-owned mainstream media and viral TikTok content helped him capture the youth vote, exemplifying how legacy and digital media converge to manufacture political legitimacy. Employing comparative discourse and media analysis, this study argues that mediated political branding in Indonesia has become a source of democratic volatility, amplifying image over substance and fostering engagement while enabling manipulation through disinformation networks, digital "buzzers," and algorithmic amplification. While centred on Indonesia, the study situates this within a broader Global South context. Parallels with the 2022 campaign of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. in the Philippines and the digital populism of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil illustrate a growing trend across transitional democracies, where media-driven branding increasingly shapes—and distorts—political legitimacy.

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## Parallel Session D3

*The Instability of Propaganda: Populism and Persuasion at Times of Crisis*

### *"Mapping Instability: Russian Propaganda and Narrative Warfare in Romanian Media Using Text-as-Data"*

Ioan Suhov, Dublin City University

This presentation offers preliminary findings and key theoretical insights from an ongoing doctoral project investigating how Russian propaganda narratives are reproduced within Romanian media. Using a text-as-data methodology (Maerz and Puschmann 2020; Baturo, Dasandi, and Mikhaylov 2017; Benoit 2020), I apply a dictionary-based analysis to a large corpus of Romanian-language press articles, tracing four core Kremlin-aligned narratives: (1) the persecution of Russian speakers in Ukraine, (2) repression of the Orthodox Church, (3) the portrayal of Ukraine as neo-Nazi, and (4) NATO's alleged encroachment on Russia's borders. The propaganda dictionary, adapted and translated from recent research on Russian political communication (Oleinik 2025; Oleinik and Paniotto 2024), allows for the identification of ideological patterns and disinformation strategies embedded in domestic reporting. The analysis is carried out using quanteda and spacyr in R, with particular attention to the linguistic challenges posed by Romanian as a morphologically rich, low-resource language in natural language processing. This paper situates the textual analysis within a broader discussion of journalistic pressures and the instability of informational environments in a highly mediatised context. By examining the circulation of propaganda narratives in a democratic media system, the project highlights how epistemic instability is not only produced externally, but internalised and normalised through local media practices. Theoretically, the research engages with debates around media, disinformation, and the instability of truth, showing how computational approaches can be used to operationalise narrative warfare. Methodologically, it contributes to adapting text-as-data techniques for underrepresented languages and contexts.

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## Parallel Session D3

*The Instability of Propaganda: Populism and Persuasion at Times of Crisis*

### *"Media and Right-Wing Populism: Amplification, Legitimization, and Democratic Implications"*

Arlette Vasallo, Goldsmiths, University of London

In recent decades, the rise of right-wing populism has been closely tied to the ways in which the media shape public discourse. Far from merely reporting the news, many media outlets act as platforms that amplify and legitimize populist rhetoric, creating the illusion of broader public support than actually exists. Topic selection, event framing, and the use of emotional or incendiary language all contribute to public polarization, undermining traditional parties and enabling the rise of leaders with simplified and confrontational narratives. Within this context, responsibility for social and economic crises is often redirected toward vulnerable groups, particularly immigrants, while an idealized national identity is promoted. This strategy not only channels public discontent but also reinforces exclusionary imaginaries that serve authoritarian agendas. In the United States, networks such as Fox News, Newsmax, and One America News have played a key role in this process during Donald Trump's campaign and presidency, promoting narratives based on fear, cultural supremacy, and the rejection of pluralism. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, media coverage of Brexit relied heavily on rhetoric focused on immigration control and the recovery of so-called lost sovereignty, helping to foster a hostile environment toward foreigners and diversity. The convergence between the media and right-wing populism is not accidental but rather part of a feedback dynamic in which media outlets gain viewership and profits through controversy, while populist leaders benefit from increased visibility and the normalization of their proposals. This interaction redefines the boundaries of acceptable discourse and deeply conditions the functioning of contemporary democracies.

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## Parallel Session D3

*The Instability of Propaganda: Populism and Persuasion at Times of Crisis*

### *"Right-wing populist time shifting and the affective instability of temporality"*

Paige Isaacson, Goldsmiths, University of London

Fear, especially fear of the future, is a highly motivating and pervasive force in what I term the Trump-Facebook assemblage: the assemblage of tech corporation Meta, the Facebook platform, users, bots and the vast array of affective content in support of Donald Trump and related beliefs, ideologies and orientations to being. Generalised fear, anger and a perception of injustice–known as ressentiment–as well as other sticky, temporally-infused affects of foreboding doom, of something impending, about to happen, pervade the Trump-Facebook assemblage and culminate in a powerful organising principle that shifts according to political circumstances. Ressentiment remains flexible in its generality, open to being channelled into particular political agendas while maintaining the integrity of the larger assemblage. This creation and channeling of temporally-oriented affective states, including generalised ressentiment, into politics, is what I call right-wing populist time-shifting. Time-shifting is sinuous, flexible and uses affective temporalities to achieve political ends. I define time-shifting specifically as the creation and co-opting of affective attachments to temporalities to achieve political ends. These political ends are affective in themselves; they maintain or intensify support for Trumpism and offer Trump-Facebook users a way of coping with an uncertain, fearsome future. In developing this concept, I draw on William E. Connolly's work on the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine which disentangles the perplexing affinity between cowboy capitalism, evangelical Christianity and the electronic news media in the United States. I argue this resonance machine is an important predecessor to the Trump-Facebook assemblage, looking in particular at its focus on the future and how fear associated with the rapture unites its diverse set of constitutive actors. Looking to Nietsche's Zarathustra and the concept of ressentiment, this paper highlights a persistent thread, a continuation of previous assemblages which have themselves shifted, connecting to and even contributing to the rise of Trumpism.

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