



# **Besides the Screen Ningbo 2026**

Audiences, Subjects & Agents

Besides the Screen Ningbo 2026: Audiences, Subjects & Agents  
University of Nottingham Ningbo China, June 4-6, 2026

Conference Organisers:

- Corey Schultz, University of Nottingham Ningbo China
- Virginia Crisp, King's College London
- Gabriel Menotti, Queen's University

In 2026, the Besides the Screen conference returns to the city of Ningbo to explore the ways audiences, subjects and agents are distributed and negotiated across borders - whether institutional, spatial, linguistic or technological. We begin from the premise that the concept of the passive media audience has always been a myth. Nowadays, it would be difficult to find a situation where viewers are not doing anything, even if it is just scrolling on their phones during a streaming marathon. Novel media forms are teeming with opportunities to participate, interact, share with our friends, and likely gamble. Audience reactions have become a popular genre in itself and just look at all the chaos fans make at movie theatre sing-alongs. Can these be spaces of solidarity and creativity? The same technologies that empower amateur filmmakers and influencers make each user a potential promotional node to be mobilized. If most internet traffic is automated, does it even matter if the content is tailored for bots and search engine optimization?

The conference was funded by UNNC's 2025-2026 RKE Conference and Event Organising Support Scheme (award: Corey Schultz 2025\_RKE Conference and Event Organising Support).

Locations:

- IEB 123 (Innovation & Enterprise Building, no. 30 on campus map)
- NICC (New International Conference Centre, no. 26 on map)
- IAMET 121 (Sir David and Lady Susan Greenway Building, no. 29 on map)
- Rooftop Restaurant (LA Hotel, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, C on map - 屋顶餐吧, 博雅酒店二楼)
- Staff Canteen Restaurant (2<sup>nd</sup> floor, no. 8 on map - 教工餐厅 (一食堂二楼))

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# SCHEDULE

## Thursday, June 4 - NICC

- 09.30 Registration opens
- 10.00 Conference welcome, by Corey Schultz
- 10.10 Keynote addresses, by Gabriel Menotti and Virginia Crisp
- 11.15 Panel *Reframing the Vernacular*
- 12.30 **Lunch**
- 14.00 Panel *Online Audiences*
- 15.40 Panel *Social Media Subjects*
- 18.00 Dinner - Rooftop Restaurant, LA Hotel

## Friday, June 5 - NICC

- 10.00 Panel *Theatrical Reception*
- 11.40 Panel *Four Facets of Global Gaming's Re-distribution and Re-negotiation*
- 12.30 **Lunch**
- 14.00 Panel *The Making of Chinese Audiences*
- 15.40 Panel *Spaces of the Public*
- 18.00 Dinner - Staff Canteen Restaurant

## Saturday, June 6 - NICC

- 10.20 Panel *Shifting Agencies*
- 12.00 **Lunch**
- 13.40 Panel *Modes of Address and Engagement*
- 15.20 Panel *Translating Gender*

## Sunday, June 7 - IAMET 121

- 11.00 Publication workshop

# PANELS

## **REFRAMING THE VERNACULAR (Thu June 4, 11.15)**

- Uneven visibility: Spatial asymmetry and embodied spectatorship in immersive media (Chutong Yu)
- Negotiating pre-AI visuality: Vernacular visual practices in mainland China (Stephen Connoly)
- Emerging death practices in China: Examining the growth of screen-based grief tech and AI resurrection (Jingkun Li, Gareth Schott)

## **ONLINE AUDIENCES (Thu June 4, 14.00)**

- Affectist spectatorship in Chinese smartphone cinema (Zhaoyu Zhu)
- Audiences as players: Examining stream humour in Twitch Plays Pokémon (Xin Pan)
- Active audiences in historical storytelling: *Danmaku* as viewer-generated discourse in Bilibili's historical documentaries (Zihan Zhao)
- Fuzai's rise to digital corgi star on Bilibili: Behaviour affordance, animal agency, and remix culture (Qi Ai)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA SUBJECTS (Thu June 4, 15.40)**

- *Homebound*: Caste, religion, and the question of belonging in "New India" (Vikrant Kishore)
- Jewish/Israeli trauma in the digital age: Absence and the re-insertion of suffering after October 7 (Mary Jane Ainslie)
- The filming crowd: Bolsonaro, smartphones and the co-production of far-right imagery (Miguel Antunes Ramos)
- Participatory media as post-truth sense-making (Hugh Davies)

## **THEATRICAL RECEPTION (Fri June 5, 10.00)**

- *Yellow Earth*: Audiences, reception and impact (Corey Schultz, Cecilia Mello)
- Assembling *yingzhan*: Themed film screenings, affective audiences, and platformed cinephilia in Shanghai (Yaping Xu, Yiming Li)

- Screening and dining: Cultural logics and promotional strategies of dine-in cinemas (Virgil Darelli, Luca Maria Francesco Fabris, Diego Terna)
- Driving, transcending, and empowering: The breakthrough path of Chinese films and television in cross-cultural communication on digital-intelligent platforms (Ning Zhang, Luming Chen)

#### **FOUR FACETS OF GLOBAL GAMING'S REDISTRIBUTION AND RE-NEGOTIATION (Fri June 5, 11.40)**

- Lars de Wildt, Gejun Huang, Bjarke Liboriussen, and Sunny Jie Yang

#### **THE MAKING OF CHINESE AUDIENCES (Fri June 5, 14.00)**

- Cross-border audiences and digital Silk Road media: How Chinese streaming platforms cultivate international viewership (Mahdi Yousefi)
- From "The People" to the platform masses: New mass literature and art and the paradox of transnational audiences in Chinese digital cultural exports (Zheng Yue)
- Make a fan out of you: Disney's Chinese audiences in Shanghai (William McCarthy)
- Youth as subject, youth as agent: Inventing and imagining futures in contemporary Chinese teen films (Ying Xiao)

#### **SPACES OF THE PUBLIC (Fri June 5, 15.40)**

- Beyond gaming: The historical interactions between the LAN scene and technology, media and gaming in Germany, 1993-2005 (David Betzing)
- Following its steps along the road: Tracing material entanglements of urban low-end advertising imagery (Yujing Ma, Yaohan Zhang)
- From public square to platform: K-pop random play dance and the mediation of audience (Yuki Watanabe)
- Negotiating datafied temporalities and the cultural-economic logic on streaming services in China (Elaine Jing Zhao)

#### **SHIFTING AGENCIES (Sat June 6, 10.20)**

- Beyond the passive audience: Structured agency in the digital media ecology (Sally Shangguan)

- From enclosure to rhythm: Recalibrating immersion in contemporary media design (Yuran Cai)
- The social life of audiences: Agency with and beyond the screen (Panos Kompatsiaris)
- Spectator, creator and/or scriptor: AIGC and search for own creation (Karolina Pawlik, Chen Wu-Wei)

### **MODES OF ADDRESS & ENGAGEMENT (Sat June 6, 13.40)**

- The screen viewing logic and visual effects of attraction films (Li Jingrui)
- Breaking the fourth wall as spatial reconfiguration: *Incantation* (2022) and the implicated audience (Jiawei You)
- New directions in vertical storytelling: Creative shifts in micro-drama for mobile audiences (Roy Hanney)

### **TRANSLATING GENDER (Sat June 6, 15.20)**

- Commercializing popular feminism in China's television industry: The case of big heroine dramas (Qi Ling)
- Queering femininity in globalizing China: Exploring willful subjects through *The Last Year of Darkness* (2023) (Anran Zheng)
- From web novel to stage play: The trans-media adaptation of Chinese feminist narratives in *She's Tired of It* (2023) (Xi Liu)
- Recontextualizing motherhood: Algorithmic redistribution and audience agency in Chinese short-video remixes (Zilu Yan, Chutong Yu)

# ABSTRACTS

## REFRAMING THE VERNACULAR

### **Uneven visibility:**

#### **Spatial asymmetry and embodied spectatorship in immersive media**

Chutong Yu (Queen's University)

First-person perspective in immersive media is associated with participatory spectatorship and enhanced audience agency. However, such claims often overlook how agency in virtual environments is spatially distributed; that is, users are granted different degrees of visibility and mobility depending on their spatial position. Participation does not eliminate asymmetry but reorganizes it. Spatial design determines who may observe and who may approach, and who must remain responsive.

This paper presents a virtual reality installation I am developing as a prototype to examine how spatial design structures agency in immersive environments. The project is inspired by the Chinese folktale *The River Snail Maiden*, traditionally understood as a narrative celebrating virtuous labor. The folktale stages a spatial asymmetry between the male observer and the female who performs concealed domestic labor. The project reinterprets this asymmetry within a shared virtual domestic environment.

Participants experience two first-person positions through separate VR headsets within the same spatial setting. Although they can choose the order of experience, each position operates under different spatial constraints and degrees of perceptual access. In the observer role, the user may approach but never fully enter the housework space. In the performer role, the user performs repetitive domestic actions and must react to approaching footsteps.

By placing participants in positions that differ in navigational constraints, responsiveness, and perceived access, the installation embeds asymmetry into the spatial logic of interaction. The project argues that immersive spectatorship is structured through uneven visibility, where participation is conditioned by spatial permission.

### **Negotiating pre-AI visuality: Vernacular visual practices in mainland China**

Stephen Connoly (ICI Xiamen)

Since the early 2020s, photo-realistic images generated by AI platforms have become an established feature of the global online mediascape (Wasielewski, 2024). They have fostered debate around issues of the 'real-fake' in representation, intellectual property, and privacy rights in the West (Paris and Donovan, 2019). Yet how are AI generated images received in specific geographic contexts, mainland China in particular? It is noted that AI is named human intelligence (*rengong zhineng* 人工智能) in Mandarin (Bratton 2025). Starting from a work-in-progress AI visual project, this presentation explores the non-digital preconditions of three examples of photo-realistic visual practices to explore the reception of AI images in China.

The in-progress project, *Migrating Archives* (2025), uses AI to re-imagine the evacuation of Xiamen University in 1937 for a museum exhibition context, provoking questions of the 'evidential' and the assumptions of public understandings of photo-realism. In the first example, the widespread visual practices of photo-retouching of vernacular photographs will be explored (Zhang 2023, Wu 2016). The second example centres on ancestor portraiture, a genre with a long history; in a modern vernacular mode, ancestor portraits created by photo-realistic charcoal painting are explored. Finally, an artist project exploring the media archive of manipulated news images is presented along with the details of the retouching artists (Zhang 2012, Wu 2016).

Wasielowski's claim that AI images, as derivatives of 'natural' photographic images in training media, can indeed be claimed as 'photography' if we attend to the reception of images rather than their methods of production. If placed in the context of visual practices, AI visuality can be seen as a normative development of visual cultures in mainland China. This specific local situation resists global claims (Mohamed et al 2020) and consensus in the specific instance of the "fakeness" of AI visual technologies.

## **Emerging death practices in China: Examining the growth of screen-based grief tech and AI resurrection**

Jingkun Li, Gareth Schott (University of Waikato)

The application of AI-powered technologies to sustain continuing bonds with the dead (via active, two-way screen-mediated communication) is attracting growing scholarly attention. Globally, the intensification of technological mediation in grief has prompted broad consideration of the psychological, social and ethical implications attached to a commercialization of grief beyond the invigilation of emotions found in traditional funerary rites and rituals in localized death cultures. To understand whether the impact of emerging screen-based grief practices on customary mourning processes is beneficial or harmful, we argue consideration must be given to how these technologies are shaped and received by/within specific social contexts, as well as by practices of design, imagination, and use. This paper adopts the distinction presented by Selvili and Klass (2025) between continuing bonds as 'compensatory adaptations' necessitated by the impossibility of reunion, on the one hand, and 'evolving extensions' of relationships, on the other. Crucially they understand the former as operating within an intra-psychic framework with the latter intersubjective incorporating cultural dimensions. In seeking to examine Chinese AI thana-tech relations this paper holds an interest in the particularities of screen-based grief-tech in China, and its particular blending of ancestral reverence and cultural predispositions (e.g. Daoist adaptability and Confucian ethics) toward techno-optimism, local innovation and development of grief-tech opportunities. In doing so, our paper also acknowledges Hui's (2020) cosmotechnics, and the proposal that technology is not a universal, mono-technological force, but rather diverse and deeply rooted in specific cultural, local, and cosmological contexts.

This paper situates AI thana-tech within a Chinese socio-cultural context, drawing on an integrated analysis of corporate discourse, platform interface design, and user responses. It begins to unpick the cultural motivations informing design logics and the broader social significance of emergent grief practices in light of China's modern abbreviated mourning rituals (Wen & Maercker, 2025) and endurance of Chinese death taboos (Bryant & Peck, 2009).

## **ONLINE AUDIENCES**

### **Affectist spectatorship in Chinese smartphone cinema**

Zhaoyu Zhu (UNNC)

This research is based on a philosophical reading of the new mode of spectatorship in Chinese smartphone cinema which fosters an immediate, visceral affect, which contrasts with traditional feature films that rely on structural linear storytelling, character conflicts, and deliberate comprehension of the film storyline. These new audiovisual media pose challenge towards the film theory. In the 1990s, Bordwell and Carroll argues that cognition plays the most important roles when spectators comprehend narrative and plots. He believes audiences can build schematic mental models for comprehending the causality in storyworld and character development. Although this theory was initially to challenge the problematics of the ideological interpretation and psychoanalysis prevalent in film studies at that time, this theory is insufficient to consider the audience's experience when watching the contemporary audiovisual media. This study argues that the contemporary spectatorial experience of audiovisual

media operates through a distinct mechanism: it emphasises more on pre-cognitive, embodied affective responses via rapid narrative twist, visual emotional cues, and instant audiences' gratification. Drawing on Brian Massumi's affect theory and phenomenological analysis of the reception of popular short videos and short drama series on Douyin and Hongguo, this presentation suggests that contemporary Chinese smartphone cinema create an affectist spectatorship, reflecting a break from the cognitivist spectatorship in audience's capacity to engage with diegetic world in the digital age of information overload and 'the loss of cultural physical strength', a term which initiates huge debate on the impact of information overload via mobile media in Chinese cyberspace.

## **Audiences as players: Examining stream humour in Twitch Plays Pokémon**

Xin Pan (UNNC)

Audiences can do far more than just watch; they comment, circulate, and recreate, actively shaping content. This agency is particularly visible in the contemporary streaming context, where stream viewers participate through comments, gifting systems, and meme production. This presentation focuses on humour generated through stream viewing on the Chinese platform Bilibili. Drawing on Mark Johnson's concept of stream-humour (2025), defined as humour existing "at the intersection of play-humour, game-humour and Internet humour", I argue that stream-humour emerges from the dynamic interaction of three agents: game content, streamer performance, and audience engagement.

Game content generates game-humour – the comedic moments that occur within the game world itself, such as witty dialogue and unintentional comedy caused by glitches. Streamer performance serves as a source of play-humour, referring to playful engagement with texts, events, or jokes about other players. Streamers frequently craft jokes based on game content, such as making fun of game characters. In addition, they employ different theatrical performance styles, including exaggerated reactions, humorous commentary, self-deprecating remarks, or deliberate misoperations for comic effect. Lastly, audiences contribute Internet humour, which encompasses memes, trolling, and ironic or even toxic jokes. Stream viewers do not simply watch and react to these comedic moments; they simultaneously attend to the streamer's performance, the game content, and the on-screen comments, synthesizing these elements and transforming unremarkable or unpleasant moments into a new layer of humour. Moreover, through repetition and cross-platform dissemination, certain moments may evolve into internet memes. Through a series of case studies, this presentation demonstrates how these three agents collaboratively construct stream-humour in the Chinese streaming context, revealing the collaborative and processual nature of humour in contemporary streaming culture.

## **Active audiences in historical storytelling:**

### ***Danmaku* as viewer-generated discourse in Bilibili's historical documentaries**

Zihan Zhao (UNNC)

This study explores how *danmaku* (bullet comments) on Bilibili, a Chinese video platform, function as a form of viewer-generated discourse that actively participates in and contributes to the storytelling of historical documentaries. *Danmaku* introduce a real-time linguistic layer that interacts with the visual and auditory modes of documentary narrative, reshaping how historical meaning is constructed and received on the platform.

The research focuses on Bilibili's self-produced documentary series *Historical Events* (历史那些事), exploring how *danmaku* respond to and reshape the meanings constructed through the documentary's visual, auditory, and linguistic storytelling, with particular attention to reenactment scenes in which historical events are creatively reconstructed. Drawing on Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Reception Theory, the study traces how viewer-generated comments operate alongside image, sound, and narration, forming a participatory mode of interpretation that extends beyond authorial control.

Through qualitative analysis of bullet comments in selected historical scenes, the study identifies emerging patterns of audience engagement such as factual correction, emotional resonance, cultural association, and intertextual referencing. Preliminary observations suggest that these interactions may reveal shared tendencies in how viewers interpret historical representations, with individual responses clustering around particular scenes and narrative moments in ways that point toward collective modes of interpretation.

Building on these initial findings, the paper considers how *danmaku* redistribute interpretive agency across audiences, producers, and platforms, and discusses the implications for understanding how participatory media practices are transforming the relationship between historical representation and its publics in the Chinese digital landscape. The study aims to contribute to broader conversations on the role of digital audiences as active agents in shaping historical storytelling.

### **Fuzai’s rise to digital corgi star on Bilibili: Behaviour affordance, animal agency, and remix culture** Qi Ai (Shandong Normal University)

Since early 2024, a corgi dog named ‘Fuzai’ from Weifang City, China, has rapidly risen to prominence on the Chinese Internet. Bilibili uploaders continued to post videos documenting Fuzai’s daily routines, accompanied by an expanding range of remixes. These derivative works reinterpret the footage of certain unconscious behaviours displayed by Fuzai in the daily videos, thereby enabling the sustained circulation of its image into 2025. This article introduces the concept of ‘behavioural affordance’ to reconceptualise how animal stardom is generated within platformised media environments. By analysing how Fuzai’s unconscious behaviours are transformed into circulating cultural fragments across multiple Bilibili channels, it demonstrates how contemporary digital stardom is sustained through the continuous reactivation and redistribution of behavioural materials rather than through stable textual representation.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA SUBJECTS**

### ***Homebound: Caste, religion, and the question of belonging in “New India”*** Vikrant Kishore (UNNC)

*Homebound* (Neeraj Ghaywan, 2025) is used in this paper to examine the limited presence of caste discrimination and dignity-centred narratives in Hindi mainstream cinema. While the industry has engaged with themes of nation, family, and class, films that address caste-based inequality in a sustained manner remain rare. This absence becomes more pronounced in the 2020s, where the cinematic field is increasingly structured by state-aligned and right-leaning narratives that influence what is produced, circulated, and received by audiences. Drawing on Basharat Peer’s reportage, *Homebound* follows the friendship between Chandan Kumar, a Dalit, and Mohammed Shoaib Ali, a Muslim. Through their everyday interactions, the film presents how caste and religious difference operate through routine conduct, workplace practices, and social behaviour. Caste appears through caution, restraint, and the management of identity, while religious identity produces repeated suspicion within institutional and public spaces. Their friendship does not resolve these conditions but makes them visible. This paper places *Homebound* within a small group of Hindi films that centre Dalit lives and questions of dignity. It argues that filmmakers working in this area face constraints in funding, distribution, and reception, yet continue to produce such work. The presence of Dr B. R. Ambedkar within the film’s everyday settings frames caste as lived experience, while drawing attention to his continued marginal position in Hindi cinema.

## **Jewish/Israeli trauma in the digital age: Absence and the re-insertion of suffering after October 7**

Mary Jane Ainslie (UNNC)

This project addresses the cultivation of extreme empathy through depictions of trauma as an important means to (re)insert Israeli/Jewish suffering into the global media narrative after the October 7 attack on Israel. In the chaotic digital aftermath of October 7, platforms such as Meta, X and Tiktok removed over 90% of content resulting from the digital assault of online propaganda and disinformation launched by Hamas in tandem with the attack on Israel. The ensuing digital 'absence' of Jewish suffering left Jewish and Israeli media with the task of reinserting the victim perspective and drawing attention to the plight of hostages through creating its own texts.

This project explores efforts to reinsert Jewish and Israeli suffering back into the media sphere, arguing that Jewish and Israeli media responses to this 'absence' must be understood within the wider Jewish tradition and context of posttraumatic cinema. Films such as 'Bearing Witness' seek to repeat the trauma of re-living and re-witnessing experiences in order to re-articulate and force dominant narratives to recognise the absence of Jewish trauma. In doing so the project suggests a re-appraisal of 'Trauma Porn' and its function, highlighting how this was an important means to counter societies' intolerance of Jewish suffering. This was seen in the quick response of dominant media to reject and delegitimize Israeli suffering on and after October 7, when the Israeli/Jewish perspective was dismissed as misinformation and/or merely propaganda designed to increase support for the Israel-Hamas war. In this way, Jewish and Israeli sources are familiar with the dangers of 'not' representing and so allowing such suffering to be excluded from narratives, evident in the decades long campaign to force acknowledgment of holocaust trauma.

## **The filming crowd: Bolsonaro, smartphones and the co-production of far-right imagery**

Miguel Antunes Ramos (USP)

This paper examines the image production of the Brazilian far right through the case of Jair Bolsonaro, former president of Brazil and leader of the country's far-right movement, currently imprisoned for his involvement in the 2022 attempted coup d'état. It advances the hypothesis that the movement's visual power does not operate through centralized propaganda alone, but through the active collaboration of its audience, who participate by producing and circulating images themselves.

Above all, this is a political formation that acts through the smartphone – filming and watching simultaneously. The applauding crowd is the same crowd that records. Bolsonaro's audiovisual ecosystem depends on this feedback loop: his official channels frequently circulate images produced by supporters, transforming spectators into visible participants. In this configuration, the audience is not merely addressed; it is incorporated. A supporter produces an image and later encounters their own recorded presence reframed within the leader's media stream.

By analyzing Bolsonaro's digital output and its circulation across platforms, this paper argues that smartphones have reshaped political subjectivity. The device becomes both camera and screen, collapsing the distinction between author and viewer. The result is the emergence of a political subject who is simultaneously spectator, image-maker, and activist.

Situating this case within broader debates on media participation and creative industries, the paper asks: how do contemporary image technologies reconfigure agency within political movements? And how does the co-production of images between leader and crowd transform audiovisual practice into a mechanism of mobilization—one capable of destabilizing democratic institutions?

## **Participatory media as post-truth sense-making**

Hugh Davies (CDiGRA)

Participatory media compels new mode of sense-making as consumption. Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of complex narrative forms that require audience to decode, interpret, and circulate theories as a central ingredient in the entertainment process. Panek (2006) and Elsaesser's (2009) respective theorisation of "puzzle films" and Buckland's notion of "mind-game films", (2009) were an early diagnosis of a now ubiquitous array of media genres (TV shows, podcasts, games) that require audiences to solve narrative inconsistencies as part of the consumption pleasure. Mittell (2012; 2015) has analysed these activities with the connected concepts of "drillability" and "forensic fandom", each of which describe the way fans undertake collaborative puzzle-solving to solve challenges to narrative comprehension in digital entertainment products.

Over the past two decades, these participatory sense-making practices have migrated from complex entertainment texts to real-world contexts, spanning the collaborative forensic media practices of organisations such as Bellingcat, WikiLeaks, and Forensic Architecture, as well as more informal but no less vigorous collective meaning-making communities such as QAnon, Pizzagate, and Gamergate (Jones, 2023; Davies, 2023). Jenkins' (2008) concept of "convergence culture" situates these slippages between reality and fiction within a broader redistribution of media power, where prosumers, modders, and citizen journalists actively shape the circulation of meaning.

In a media landscape where passive spectatorship has always been a fiction, contemporary audiences oscillate between viewer, promoter, investigator, and co-author. Networked infrastructures intensify collaborative interpretation while amplifying pattern-seeking and misrecognition (Aupers, 2020; Chia et al., 2021; Steyerl, 2016). The same affordances that sustain solidarity, creativity, and participatory fandoms can also enable conspiratorial world-building and political radicalisation. As this presentation will discuss, participatory media subjects thus emerge as cultural agents whose interpretive practices reshape not only audiovisual forms but the epistemic conditions under which media, culture, and the creative industries operate.

## **THEATRICAL RECEPTION**

### ***Yellow Earth: Audiences, reception and impact***

Corey Schultz (UNNC), Cecilia Mello (University of São Paulo)

When *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) premiered at the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1985, its enthusiastic reception marked a turning-point in Chinese film on international audiences. Winning film festival prizes in China, the USA, France, Spain and Switzerland, it was the first film from the PRC to gain such recognition. Based on a larger research project currently underway, this presentation examines how its reception changed Chinese film history by comparing its effects on audiences and critics when it was first released, and tracking how it has become an iconic landmark for Chinese art cinema. We begin by contrasting its initial lukewarm reception in China to that of Brazil, the USA and the UK, and conclude with examining its ongoing influence on Chinese cinema and its impact on how Chinese film is conceptualised internationally.

### ***Assembling yingzhan: Themed film screenings, affective audiences, and platformed cinephilia in Shanghai***

Yaping Xu, Yiming Li (Shanghai Normal University)

This paper examines the assemblage of yingzhan (影展) - themed film screening events in Shanghai - as a situated audiovisual practice in which programming, venue infrastructures, audience participation, and digital circulation operate as an integrated activity. Based on ethnographic materials collected in cinemas and related screening spaces, we approach yingzhan not simply as exhibition or reception, but as a composite event-form that mobilizes audiences as affective, interpretive, and promotional agents.

Drawing on film festival studies (especially work on festivalization, eventness, and cinephile publics), we argue that yingzhan functions as a para-festival dispositif: it condenses curatorial framing, temporal intensity, and symbolic distinction into recurring local events while remaining embedded in commercial exhibition circuits. These events exceed the screening itself through patterns of anticipation, repeat attendance, post-screening discussion, and platformed recirculation (ratings, social posting, image sharing, and commentary), sustaining a localized but digitally extended cinephile public. Informed by affect theory, we analyze how collective viewing atmospheres and mediated afterlives generate a shared but uneven "public feeling" around cinema. These affects are not only experiential; they are also organizational resources that shape visibility, value, and participation. We further draw on nostalgia theory to show how many themed screenings are structured through retrospective desire - for analog cinema, canonical auteurs, earlier urban imaginaries, or prior media cultures. Nostalgia here is not simply backward-looking sentiment, but a productive mode through which attendance, attachment, and circulation are organized in the present.

By theorizing yingzhan as an assemblage of curation, atmosphere, memory, and audience labor, the paper contributes to debates on active audiences, screen cultures, and the transformation of cultural and creative industries under contemporary technological conditions.

## **Screening and dining:**

### **Cultural logics and promotional strategies of dine-in cinemas**

Virgil Darelli (Catholic University of Milan), Luca Maria Francesco Fabris (Beijing University), Diego Terna (Politecnico di Milano)

This study explores the growing trend of offering food and beverages alongside films. Moving away from traditional popcorn and soft drinks, several movie theatres now offer food experiences such as breakfast, an aperitif, or dinner paired with the film. Often sold as 'premium' experiences, these offerings are advertised alongside a chef's name or a food brand.

This trend is part of a broader change in the film exhibition sector in the post-pandemic situation, where social engagement is favoured, as evidenced by open-air cinemas, events such as debates and meetings with directors, and retrospectives of old films, triggering memories of an era when cinema was still community-based. Having to contend with competition from home entertainment and more socially engaging activities such as socialising, dining out, outdoor sports and new hobbies, dine-in theatre finds itself in an awkward position, offering a 'classic' experience while also encouraging multitasking and social interaction. Many film exhibitors and critics oppose this trend, regarding cinema as a sacred experience rooted in rituals, concentration, and silence. This research, part of a broader study on the future cinema hall features, will investigate several case studies. Data will be collected through interviews and analysed by cross-referencing with the most recent reports on film audiences. The results will reveal the audience type most involved, the theatre's event structure, its business model (especially partnerships) and its promotional strategies, to highlight the logic and rhetoric behind film and food pairings.

## **Driving, Transcending, and Empowering: The Breakthrough Path of Chinese Films and Television in Cross-Cultural Communication on Digital-Intelligent Platforms**

Ning Zhang, Luming Chen (Fuzhou University)

Amid the intensifying backlash against globalisation, Chinese film and television productions are facing the dilemma of cross-cultural communication caused by dominance of Western discursive systems, the persistence of cultural discount, and the information cocoons (Sunstein, 2006) generated by algorithmic mechanisms on digital platforms. Nevertheless, the attention and recognition of Chinese film and television works internationally have not decreased. How do Chinese film and television works achieve their own path of breaking through? Through our research, we argue that Chinese film and television works have successfully exported themselves internationally through three dimensions: digital-intelligence-driven development, media transcendence, and fan empowerment.

First, Chinese film and television leverage streaming media matrices, differentiated content operations, and multilingual services to enhance overseas exposure and visibility ; Second, China's film and television industry is promoting the development of its own international streaming platforms, especially in Global South markets, using "localized production + AI empowerment" to reduce cultural discount and gradually achieve a transformation from "going out" to "standing firm." Third, fan communities, through reverse-algorithm practices, cross-media secondary creations, and resource sharing, construct cross-cultural circles of empathy, strengthening the international dissemination and cultural identity of Chinese film and television at the grassroots level. Finally, we argue that the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese film and television will need to rely more on artificial intelligence technologies to break down barriers between different paths, platforms, and groups, dissolve the internal independence within the matrix, and move toward an intelligent model of media convergence, thereby providing effective strategies and practical value for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese visual media.

## **Four facets of global gaming's re-distribution and re-negotiation**

Lars de Wildt (University of Groningen), Gejun Huang (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University), Bjarke Liboriussen (UNNC), Sunny Jie Yang (Waseda University)

This panel proposes an overview of how the global videogame industry - from the perspective of four researchers in China, Japan, and Europe - is currently being re-distributed and re-negotiated in four ways. First, we observe a re-orientation from a Western-centred game industry toward Chinese audiences. Established developers in Canada, Japan, the U.S., and their satellite studios all over the world are slowly adapting their established formulas to China, representing 25% of global income from videogames. In the process, these established formulas - American soldiers, superheroes, and gruff white men in 'AAA' budgets - are overturned for audiences globally. Secondly, we highlight a simultaneous shift in the opposite direction, as the burgeoning global Chinese game industry turns toward international markets previously dominated by Japanese and American studios. As Chinese gaming entrepreneurs work on developing its international industry, we must re-think earlier research on the game industry in light of Chinese heterogeneous creative practices, its place within overarching industry trends and among established global actors. Thirdly, we consider the role of the state within this cross-border re-distribution of the gaming industry. We draw attention to the historical roles of Chinese videogame policy, and how Chinese concerns and ambitions around videogames have come to be drivers of soft power and 'national cultural security,' generally; as well as how these extend into global rivalry in the domain of AI, specifically. Finally, we open up our consideration of 'the' game industry by re-thinking hobbyist games as a distinct cultural practice rather than a prehistory of independent games. By focusing on small-scale community driven creation, and how traditional hobbyist game practices persist and transform within UGC platforms - including amateur forums, visual novel sites, and social media communities - we re-centre such autonomous creative logics beyond large-scale national, institutional and industrial boundaries.

## THE MAKING OF CHINESE AUDIENCES

### **Cross-border audiences and Digital Silk Road media: How Chinese streaming platforms cultivate international viewership**

Mahdi Yousefi (Hainan Normal University)

China's Digital Silk Road initiative is enabling streaming services like iQiyi and Youku to cultivate international user bases across Belt and Road territories. This study investigates how these platforms transform viewers in Southeast Asia and the Middle East from passive consumers into active cultural intermediaries. The research study examines how people in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other regions shift from passive viewers to active cultural intermediaries through various strategies, cultural interactions, and daily life activities. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach grounded in platform studies and audience reception research. It combines detailed platform walkthrough analysis of interface design, algorithmic recommendations, localization features, and community tools on iQiyi International and WeTV, with thematic analysis of roughly 4,500 user comments and reviews drawn from MyDramaList, regional YouTube channels, and local social media forums. These data are further enriched by netnographic observation of transnational fan communities in Thailand, Indonesia, and selected Middle Eastern markets.

Chinese platforms achieve their success by focusing on cultural proximity rather than algorithmic personalization. The company supports local content production by funding projects featuring local historical dramas, which will be available on iQiyi. Non-English languages that receive AI-generated official subtitles face public criticism for errors in their translations. The limitations of this system have created active volunteer subtitling networks that help distribute content and promote international cultural exchange. This research advances the field by illustrating how audiences, subjects, and agents are actively negotiated across spatial, linguistic, and technological borders. It presents a distinctive, community-driven model of audience cultivation that differs markedly from Western streaming giants and highlights the emergence of new transnational actors within the global creative industries.

### **From "The People" to the platform masses: New mass literature and art and the paradox of transnational audiences in Chinese digital cultural exports**

Zheng Yue (Zhejiang Wanli University)

The rapid global circulation of Chinese web fiction, micro-dramas, and mobile games has given rise to transnational audiences whose modes of engagement sit uneasily within existing theoretical frameworks. This paper advances *xin dazhong wenyi*, or New Mass Literature and Art, as a critical lens for making sense of these developments. Genealogically linked to Mao-era people's literature and art, the concept captures an entanglement of state cultural policy, platform infrastructure, and grassroots creative agency that distinguishes China's digital cultural ecology from its Euro-American counterparts—a triangular dynamic that theories of participatory culture and platform capitalism have not sufficiently addressed.

The concept, however, encounters a productive paradox when extended beyond national borders. Where *renmin* designates a bounded political subject, the *dazhong* conjured by algorithmic distribution and market expansion are constituted less through cultural belonging than through data-driven aggregation. This paper traces that tension through several cases of transnational audience practice: fan translation communities rendering Chinese web fiction for Southeast Asian readers, reaction video creators repackaging micro-dramas for new publics, and player communities mediating mobile games across linguistic borders. In each instance, audiences perform significant affective and interpretive labour as cultural intermediaries—translating, curating, and recontextualising content in ways that simultaneously enable the global reach of New Mass Literature and Art and lay bare the friction between its emancipatory aspirations and the extractive logic governing platform-mediated cultural flows. The paper thus intervenes in ongoing debates about whether digitally enabled audience

participation constitutes genuine creative solidarity or operates principally as uncompensated promotional labour within deeply asymmetric circuits of cultural exchange.

## **Make a fan out of you: Disney's Chinese audiences in Shanghai**

William McCarthy (Zayed University)

With several studio acquisitions, including Pixar, Marvel, and Lucasfilm, Disney has become one of the largest and most influential global media conglomerates in the new millennium. However, studies of the company's audiences have been scant since the landmark Global Disney Audiences Project was published in 2001 by Wasko, et al. Since its publication Disney audience studies have included only Denmark (Drotner, 2001), Norway (Sørensen, 2018), and Arabian Gulf countries (McCarthy, 2025; Pike, 2018). Unlike most countries where audiences have been primed on Disney texts since birth, China is distinct in being exposed to Disney only since the country's global media opening in the 1980s. This study used two methods. First, a questionnaire (n=356) of adult Shanghai residents, who visited the local Disneyland at least once, examined Disney's reception by Chinese audiences in Shanghai, the second largest metropolis in China with almost 25 million residents and home to a Disney resort since 2016. In addition, participant observation with on-site fieldwork was conducted for three days at Shanghai Disneyland and at the world's largest Disney store in Pudong. Findings illustrated Disney's Chinese audiences diverged in several ways from previous Disney global audiences by showing steadily increasing engagement with Disney materials from childhood to adulthood, Star Wars as a favorite Disney intellectual property, and less perception of Disney as promoting individualism and physical beauty and higher perception of Disney stories as universal rather than Western or American. Shanghai Disneyland threaded the glocalization needle with over 90 percent of respondents simultaneously agreeing the park had become a part of Chinese culture but still needed to do more to reflect Chinese values and customs while still feeling like an American-style Disney park. In general, Chinese audiences, compared to global audiences in previous studies, exhibited a higher level of engagement and receptivity to Disney.

## **Youth as subject, youth as agent:**

### **Inventing and imagining futures in contemporary Chinese teen films**

Ying Xiao (University of Florida)

In modern Chinese history, youth has long functioned as a privileged figure through which the nation imagines its future, hence the oft-quoted mantra "the young people are the future." In the twenty-first century, in the face of the rapid, unprecedented socioeconomic, technological, and political changes, the roles and practices of youth have undergone profound transformations. This essay examines how contemporary Chinese teen films position youth as both narrative subjects and media agents within a fast-changing, ever-expanding audiovisual ecology besides and across the screens. Through a close analysis of *Upcoming Summer* (dir. Leste Chen, 2021), *Better Days* (dir. Derek Tsang, 2019), and *Nice View* (dir. Wen Muye, 2022), I explore how this distinct subgenre or film cycle constitutes, complicates, and contests the zeitgeist and the very notion of Sinofuturism through what I term "coming-of-age interpellation." Drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation while extending the existing scholarship on the Bildungsroman, I argue that these works do not merely represent youth as the future of the nation; they actively produce youth as ideological and affective subjects aligned with—or resistant to—the imaginaries of adolescence and "Chinese Dream." In particular, the films mobilize popular music, social media dynamics, and digital youth culture to construct what I call a real-and-virtual-scape—a hybrid time-space where online and offline, individual subjectivity and national identity converge and collide. By situating contemporary Chinese teen cinema within the broader framework of film and screen cultures and technological mediation, my paper argues that the coming-of-age stories with their intricate entanglements of the private and public, the individual and the collective, the fantastic and the prosaic, global and local, and the temporalities of past, present, and future constitute an ambivalent and

contested site where ideology, affect, and digital participation intersect and interact. Within them, Bildung is no longer a linear, static teleology but a dynamic, fluctuating chronotope in which Chinese youths are recruited and interpellated into affective and agentive negotiations of neoliberal precarity, algorithmic digitization, and the transnational flows of popular culture in a postmodern, posthuman, and post-apocalyptic time.

## **SPACES OF THE PUBLIC**

### **Beyond gaming: The historical interactions between the LAN scene and technology, media and gaming in Germany, 1993-2005**

David Betzing (University of Lucerne)

The notion that gamers are mere consumers is a long-disproved prejudice. As prosumers, they develop the content of games further and form subcultures, which have a significant influence on the development of games, technology and the economic and cultural structures surrounding them. This is particularly evident when looking at the history of LAN parties in Germany. They emerged through technological advances, shaped technological and cultural developments, and disappeared again due to technological innovations. My findings are based on digital sources, media reports, private archives, and interviews with contemporary witnesses.

The term 'LAN party' means playing games together on one's own computers in a local area network (LAN) over several days and nights. They were made possible by technical advances in network technology. In the early 1990s, coaxial cables became widespread, allowing more than two computers to be networked locally for the first time. Additionally, Doom was released in 1993, popularising gaming in a local network. LAN parties emerged, and from then on, multiplayer games tailored themselves to the needs of LAN gamers. When hubs and switches became widespread in the late 1990s, LAN parties could accommodate hundreds of participants. They became more professional and the hobby gave rise to the LAN scene and its own LAN economy with organisers, media, and early e-sports leagues. LAN gamers had appropriated games and created their own subculture, which was influential beyond games.

Around 2005, online gaming experienced its breakthrough in Germany. Attending LAN parties became increasingly obsolete, marking the beginning of their decline. Yet, during their existence, they emancipated themselves from the object around which they were formed and gave games and gaming practices their own meaning. In doing so, they formed the basis for today's gaming and internet culture.

### **Following its steps along the road: Tracing material entanglements of urban low-end advertising imagery**

Yujing Ma (Queen's University), Yaohan Zhang (Sound Studies Group)

How does the digital and physical distribution of suggestive imagery direct audiences' perception? If attempting to trace the production process of things passive audiences are forced to look at, would this speculative process evoke an alternative power relationship between them and the audiovisual content?

While browsing websites or using apps, suggestive imagery pop-ups occasionally appear. Within screens, the female image is endlessly sampled, circulated, generated, and distributed in perfect pixels. Random audiences click images via their "private" screen, they are believing algorithms detect the secret content or aesthetics they watch. But the same kind of imagery becomes so fragile to be broken through a walk down the streets of Shenzhen's urban village, massive and low-cost printed, anonymous, disposable colorful tart cards on the grounds catch passersby's eyes along the roads. Whether they are willing to face it or not, suggestive imagery openly occupies the lowest ground of public space. The image, having acquired a concrete physical medium, has failed materially: Stains,

friction marks, decayed fibers, and rough cropping errors due to the templates. It materializes a peripheral and system that operates and entangles with digital media, informal labor, and urban infrastructure.

In this paper, the authors discuss a practice-led research project, focusing on the artistic methods of tracing, collecting, and recreating to disturb its efficiency and expose invisible operation processes of urban media systems. Through investigating the tart cards and the pop-up ads distributed in real-world and virtual systems, they reflect on the dual identity as passive audiences and random participants. Audiences couldn't avoid encountering and being impacted by the content, their random entanglement shapes their existence. Drawing inspiration from the "sensory ethnography" (Pink 2015) and "critical fabulation" (Hartman 2008), their practice focuses on audiovisual storytelling through integrating media production, fieldwork-based research, and experimental use of digital technologies.

## **From public square to platform: K-pop random play dance and the mediation of audience**

Yuki Watanabe (University of Otago)

In the age of platformisation, media audiences are simultaneously consumers, producers, and data sources, while the global media circulation destabilises nation-based cultural identities and enables new forms of transnational belonging. This study investigates these transformations in audienceship by examining K-pop "random play dance" (RPD) as a globally mediated YouTube phenomenon.

Originally started as spontaneous gatherings of a few fans dancing to shuffled K-pop hits, RPD events have grown, with the largest now attracting hundreds of participants in major cities worldwide. At typical RPD events, participants assemble in public spaces, forming a U-shape around an open performance area with a video camera positioned at its opening. As short segments of K-pop songs play randomly, anyone who knows the choreography can run to the centre to dance. With songs changing rapidly throughout the event, there are no fixed performers or audience-only temporary positions that anyone can occupy. This fluid dynamic is further compounded as participants perform not only for those physically present but also for the camera that witnesses the event. They later become audiences to themselves, viewing themselves through uploaded YouTube videos.

Through analysis of RPD YouTube videos and multilingual comment threads, this study examines how the phenomenon embodies temporality, spatiality, and identity among the audience/performers of the media event. With events held monthly across Asia, Europe, and the Americas, these physical sites and their YouTube renditions manifest audiences as fluid, fragmented subjects, characterised by recursive self-watching and commentary, where K-pop fans continuously move between positions of spectator and spectacle. Through both the embodied performance of K-pop choreography in public spaces and its subsequent viewing on YouTube, participants and online audiences negotiate complex cultural identities that defy simple national or ethnic categorisation, instead articulating new forms of belonging forged in the transnational circulation of popular culture.

## **Negotiating datified temporalities and the cultural-economic logic on streaming services in China**

Elaine Jing Zhao (University of New South Wales)

As a growing range of streaming services compete not only for audience share, and equally importantly, for time share, temporality cultivated in various ways remains vital to value production. While existing research has highlighted the affordances of nonlinearity and binge-viewing, how multiple temporalities are mediated by different streaming services and negotiated by audiences remains less known. With these questions on mind, this article draws attention to the need to move beyond the more general and often binary account of on-demand and non-linear temporality. It highlights temporal regimes as a site of negotiation, which is integral to understanding the reconfiguration of value regime and power relations in the streaming economy. In doing so, this article considers the multiple temporalities and

their cultural-economic logic mediated by streaming services and negotiated among multiple stakeholders. It focuses on the China context, where the turn to the subscription model in a once predominantly advertising-supported market has paralleled shifting temporal regimes on leading services. The analysis draws on publicly available data on scheduling approaches and broader distribution strategies, complemented by industry reports, journalistic accounts, as well as social media discourse. The article critiques the construction of elastic schedules informed by data and algorithms in the broader scheme of datafied audience to manipulate viewer experience and affective engagement. It reveals multiple temporalities including artificial ephemerality, collusive synchronicity, and metric thresholding, which are enmeshed with, and in service of, temporal acceleration to maximise subscriber value capture. It considers the implications for subscribers, who are caught between agency, constraint and boomerang effect.

## **SHIFTING AGENCIES**

### **Beyond the passive audience: Structured agency in the digital media ecology**

Sally Shangguan (Nanjing Normal University)

Digital technologies have profoundly unsettled the broadcast-era notion of the passive audience as a homogeneous mass of receivers. In its place has emerged a complex, platform-mediated ecosystem in which audiences are structurally embedded in the production, circulation, and valorisation of media. This paper argues that while contemporary audiences appear increasingly active, their agency is simultaneously reconfigured and constrained by algorithmic and corporate infrastructures.

First, the audience now operates as a network of “promotional nodes,” performing infrastructural labour through everyday practices of clicking, sharing, and scrolling. Within platform ecosystems, such interactions are captured, commodified, and redeployed to optimise visibility, requiring content to be designed for algorithmic circulation. Second, digital media has refigured spectatorship through forms of interactivity, transforming viewers into “interactive players” who navigate non-linear narratives. Yet this apparent empowerment remains bounded, as user choices are pre-structured within platform-defined parameters. Third, the audience itself has expanded beyond the human: algorithms, AI, and automated bots now function as primary interpreters and amplifiers of content, reshaping what is seen, valued, and circulated.

These developments give rise to a paradoxical condition. While audiences are more participatory than ever, their engagement increasingly unfolds within systems that privilege optimisation, predictability, and control. The paper therefore proposes the concept of “structured agency” to move beyond the binary of passive versus active audiences, highlighting instead how participation is both enabled and delimited by platform logics. By situating contemporary spectatorship within this tension between activity and control, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on audience labour, algorithmic culture, and the reconfiguration of media power in the digital age.

### **From enclosure to rhythm:**

### **Recalibrating immersion in contemporary media design**

Yuran Cai (University of Waikato)

As technology advances, media design increasingly orients itself toward immersive intensification, moving beyond simple audio-visual stimulation to the construction of multi-sensory and interactive environments. Despite these technical developments, the underlying aspiration remains consistent: to concentrate and sustain audience attention within the designed experience and to temporarily displace awareness of physical reality. Yet contemporary media ecologies are saturated and multiple. Audiences now operate across overlapping environments rather than remaining confined to a single one, and the

ideal of fully bounded immersion becomes difficult to sustain as physical reality continues to intrude upon the designed environment.

Analysis of YouTube comments across 48 high-traffic videos, together with in-depth interviews, reveals that audiences actively distribute their media participation within the rhythms of everyday life, organising engagement around perceived cognitive load and personal context. This distribution is not always self-directed; shifts in attention are frequently described alongside embodied responses and perceived changes in cognitive load.

Drawing on Ben Highmore's (2011) concept of "promiscuous absorption," this paper extends his framework into interactive media design and proposes a shift away from enclosed immersion. Media is understood as an ambient presence within everyday life that occasionally invites focused attention. Immersion is thus recognised as a rhythmic process of attentional reorientation rather than total enclosure. Both the empirical analysis and Highmore's theoretical framework point to the embodied nature of such attentional shifts. This paper therefore proposes calibrating embodied interactions that either align with habit or counter-habitual friction. Through this approach, design can modify the perceived cognitive load required and modulate the conditions under which audiences engage according to their own ways of navigating everyday life.

### **The social life of audiences: Agency with and beyond the screen**

Panos Kompatsiaris (HSE University)

This paper examines contemporary media audiences as distributed configurations that operate across data-making platform infrastructures and meaning-making everyday practices. It seeks to problematise the opposition between the "active audience" of cultural and reception studies (e.g., Hall, 1980; Velkova & Kaun, 2021) and the "audience commodity" of political economy (Smythe, 1977; McGuigan, 2015), arguing that digital audience activity cannot be solely understood in terms of empowerment, interpretation or resistance, nor reduced to narratives of extraction and exploitation. Instead, audience practices unfold through mundane, repetitive interactions, such as liking, scrolling, sharing and watching, which simultaneously generate meaning, sociality and economic value.

To account for this idea conceptually, the paper suggests bringing audience studies into dialogue with the anthropological framework of the "social life of things" (Appadurai, 2013; Kopytoff, 2013), which gives a way to show that the same practice or object can be meaningful, personal and non-commodified in one context and abstracted, aggregated and monetised in another, without assuming that commodification is total or final. Thus, audience practices can be understood as entities that move through different moments of commodification and de-commodification across their lifespans, e.g., a single digital interaction may function as a meaningful expression for human participants while also operating as machine-readable data for algorithmic systems. In this sense, the paper suggests that seen from this perspective, audience activity is always already addressed to multiple agents, including other users, platforms, advertisers and automated decision-making infrastructures, and argues for the analytical foregrounding of low-intensity, everyday forms of digital audience lifeworlds.

### **Spectator, creator and/or scriptor: AIGC and search for own creation**

Karolina Pawlik (Yunnan University), Chen Wu-Wei (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University)

The paper explores the shifting relationship between agency and spectatorship by taking a closer look at interactions between the film creator, audience and advanced technology. More specifically, we are interested in the shifting notion of 'passivity' and 'activity' in AIGC era. How does our comprehension of 'creator' and 'viewer' change as machines take over more and more of the creative work, and how do positions of the creator/commissioner and viewer/observer shift in this interaction?

As the mechanization of creative processes progresses, humans may provide intent and context, while the AI provides synthesis and execution. Who—and to what extent—remains a creator and storyteller under these circumstances; who becomes a 'scriptor' using language as a creative interface

to generate content? Is the creator gradually/ occasionally turned into a passive viewer of the 'own' creative process? What does it mean to 'DO' something in an interaction with an AI film generator? What does it mean to 'BE' a creative and active human in contemporary sociotechnological context? In the era of algorithmic aesthetics, who is guiding the process and deciding what qualifies as a meaningful art/creative outcome? What is the future intertextuality co-created in human-machine collaboration? How does the process impact our self-perception and what are the implications for further creation? What are the broader implications not only for the creative industries but also for the human society? In our reflection on artistic (co)agency and control, as well as shifting relationship between film director and audience, initiated by Jia Zhangke's film *Jia Zhangke's Dance* (2026), we are guided by Roland Barthes essay *The Death of the Author* (1967) and by Byung-Chul Han's recent book *The Crisis of Narration* (2024).

## MODES OF ADDRESS & ENGAGEMENT

### **The screen viewing logic and visual effects of attraction films**

Li Jingrui (Beijing Normal University)

This study examines attraction films to explore their screen viewing logic and the resulting artistic, psychological, and cultural effects, offering theoretical and practical insights for the creation, dissemination, and reception of digital-era cinematic art. As a core category in digital screen studies, the development of attraction films is inseparable from the evolution of screen media. From the perspective of screen genealogy and employing media archaeology, this research traces their progression from the rectangular interface to environmental media. Initially, viewers maintained a relatively detached relationship with the screen, with attraction stemming primarily from narrative tension and visual presentation. The transformation of media forms has not only reshaped how attraction films are presented but also driven a fundamental shift in viewing logic, laying the groundwork for the subsequent triple logic of screen viewing. Consequently, the source of "attraction" in these films has expanded from content alone to a 多元化 synthesis of content, media, and experience.

### **Breaking the fourth wall as spatial reconfiguration: *Incantation* (2022) and the implicated audience**

Jiawei You

How does breaking the fourth wall operate in horror cinema beyond moments of direct address? This paper approaches the fourth wall as a spatial rather than purely visual problem, examining how horror films collapse the boundary between on- and off-screen space to organise fear and meaning at the level of perception. Focusing on the conventions of found footage horror, and with particular attention to the influential yet comparatively underexamined Taiwanese film *Incantation* (Kevin Ko, 2022), I analyse how the subgenre's claims to authenticity and its construction of verisimilitude generate a heightened sense of permeability between cinematic space and spectators' lived space. I argue that *Incantation* radicalises these conventions by framing the act of viewing itself as a form of ritual participation, transforming spectators from external observers into affectively and spatially implicated participants. In doing so, the paper proposes a renewed account of embodied spectatorship in horror cinema, demonstrating how spatial transgression functions as a central mechanism through which horror reconfigures the relationship between film and viewer.

## **New directions in vertical storytelling: Creative shifts in micro-drama for mobile audiences**

Roy Hanney (UNNC)

Vertical micro-dramas—ultra-short, serialised narratives designed for mobile-first platforms—have rapidly emerged as a distinct screen form. Though their growth has been driven by formulaic storytelling rooted in romantic melodrama, this paper offers a critical evaluation of how narrative constraints within the format are beginning to be questioned, and how creative innovations might reshape its future. Rather than focusing on platform economics or viewer behaviour, the paper considers how storytelling practices are evolving under the pressure of mobile-specific conditions: vertical framing, ultra-short durations, and fast-paced episodic rhythms. While dominant models continue to rely on highly compressed, cliffhanger-led narratives, this review identifies signs of creative disruption—works that begin to experiment with structure, pacing, and genre. One such example is *Red Mirror*, a speculative fiction project produced collaboratively by the First Film Festival and social media platform Xiaohongshu (RedNote). The project departs from romance-driven streaming formulas by inviting creators to develop darker thematic material with greater conceptual ambition. Building from this, the paper explores emerging possibilities for the form, including the potential for AI-assisted scripting, chat-based and branching narrative design, and hybrid genre experimentation. These are not yet widespread practices, but areas of innovation beginning to take shape at the margins of commercial content. The study argues that vertical micro-dramas are entering a transitional phase. As the format matures, creators and studios are starting to test its creative limits—opening up new space for storytelling that is mobile-native but not narratively constrained. In doing so, vertical micro-dramas invite broader reflection on how story might adapt to the fragmented attention, episodic rhythms, and intimate interface of mobile publics.

## TRANSLATING GENDER

### **Commercializing popular feminism in China's television industry: The case of big heroine dramas**

Qi Ling

Over the past decade, the television drama industry in China has targeted women audiences by producing so-called big heroine dramas. Drawing from the theoretical lens of popular feminism, this paper examines how big heroine dramas construct women's empowerment in ways that resonate with women audiences while remaining commercially profitable and ideologically acceptable in a social context where feminist politics remains marginalized. This study conducts textual analysis on the most popular and formulaic big heroine drama cases, situating them within the political economy of the television industry in China and the industrial transformations in the streaming era.

This paper argues that the television industry actively commercializes and depoliticizes feminism through a neoliberal ethos in big heroine dramas, championing women's public engagement while transmuting feminist politics into individualized, marketized logics structured by an aspirational affect. This neoliberal womanhood is further forged in the reformed romance and Confucian family contexts, while leaving male privilege in these heterosexual institutions intact. It is through this depoliticized, neoliberal feminist imaginary that popular big heroine dramas achieve market profitability and ideological compliance. While this neoliberal formation remains robust, post-2020 cases increasingly mobilize collective ethos and a more order-disruptive affect, indicating a potentially new phase of popular feminism in the streaming era. Across both phases, costume drama, the most prevalent generic setting for big heroine dramas, serves as a hegemonic device that displaces feminist critique onto a distant feudal past, thereby further containing feminist politics and contributing to the popularity of big heroine dramas in the hegemonic television sphere. This study enriches discussions of popular feminism in China by situating it within the local and shifting television industrial conditions.

### **Queering femininity in globalizing China: Exploring wilful subjects through *The Last Year of Darkness* (2023)**

Anran Zheng

This paper explores the queer potential of femininity in contemporary Chinese screen culture through a close analysis of *The Last Year of Darkness* (Ben Mullinkosson, 2023), a transnational queer documentary grounded in the underground nightlife of Chengdu. By examining drag performance and queer community life represented in the documentary, along with its filmmaking mode, this paper investigates how femininity operates as a site of resistance under the affective governance of the Chinese Dream. In this paper, I conceptualize femininity not as a fixed identity or an aesthetic symbol, but as a fluid formation that can exist in women, men, and those who defy the gender/sex binary, traversing gendered and geographic boundaries. Femininity is approached as a visual style, an emotional logic, and an ethical mode of filmmaking that engages with aesthetic practices and affective politics.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's concept of willful subjects, along with insights from queer Asia studies, affect theory, and feminist scholarship, I analyze how queer subjects in the film embody "willfulness", "too much will," and "weak will" as forms of queer will. I argue that femininity unfolds aesthetic and political possibilities for queer will in a globalizing Chinese context. Entangled with Chineseness, this will is marked by ambivalence and ambiguity, embodying an alternative mode of resistance against the cultural regulation and emotional norms shaped by nationalism and heteronormativity.

While existing scholarship on Chinese queer screens has often regarded femininity as either a conservative virtue for women or an iconography of effeminate men, I affirm femininity by rethinking its aesthetic and political potential. By queering femininity through the lens of transnational queer documentary, this paper offers an alternative mode of queer resistance in a globalizing China.

## **From web novel to stage play: The trans-media adaptation of Chinese feminist narratives in *She's Tired of it* (2023)**

Xi Liu (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University)

The immensely popular Chinese game-themed web novel *She's Tired of it* (2023), penned by "For Her", chronicles the protagonist player ID 6237486 as she relentlessly challenges her fate within a virtual realm. Ultimately, she resolutely shatters the game's predetermined choices, thereby unlocking an entirely new and uncharted gaming universe. The novel emulates the established genre conventions of Western fantasy-themed otome games and reverse harem narratives. After establishing a strong sense of familiarity for readers, it subverts expectations through sharp deconstruction and critique, exposing the underlying logic of gender oppression and objectification inherent in such web fiction genres. It thus emerges as a contemporary, locally rooted Chinese feminist narrative exploring female agency and structural oppression.

Adapted into a stage play directed and edited by Chen Tianran, the production commenced a nationwide tour in late 2024, garnering considerable positive reviews and commercial success. The eponymous stage adaptation transforms a "counter-convention" web novel heavily reliant on inner monologues, psychological processes, game system prompts, and omniscient perspectives into a theatrical form confined within limited time and space. It achieves this through live actor performances and stage design while retaining the game's visual allure, undergoing a "cross-media journey from textual novel to video game to theatrical performance" (Li, 2025).

This study examines the cross-media adaptation strategies employed to stage such a work, particularly the transition of narrative focus from internal to external, the visualization and sonification of systems and rules, and the portrayal of female group images and "sisterhood." It examines how the production employs theatre's distinctive tools, including narration, soliloquy, physicality, lighting, sound effects, and collective spectatorship, to externalize the text's internalized "weariness" and "awakening" into a profoundly impactful and infectious public performance, deepening and expanding Chinese indigenous feminist narratives within their cross-media journey. The study will also analyse the reception of these female-centred affective configurations among young audiences and explore the contribution of interactive subject-making to current discourses on gender and feminism in China.

## **Recontextualizing motherhood: Algorithmic redistribution and audience agency in Chinese short-video remixes**

Zilu Yan, Chutong Yu (Queen's University)

With the rise of short-form video platforms in China, television narratives increasingly migrate across media borders into algorithm-driven ecosystems. This paper examines what happens to narrative agency when serialized television clips are fragmented and remixed within short-video form. Mother, as an indispensable figure in modern Chinese dramas, has become a key subject for remix content due to its potential for strong emotional tension. Yet these remix videos are not just reproductions of the original narrative, they re-encode the image of the maternal figure.

This paper conducts specific case studies to examine how maternal figures are recontextualized when migrating from original television broadcasts to short-video platforms through remix practices. By comparing original scenes with remixed versions circulating on Xiaohongshu, authors focus on three dimensions to analyse: narrative context, affective structure, and visual rhythm. The results show that characters, originally crafted with complex and context-dependent motivations, are often compressed into singular emotional symbols; affective captions and background music amplify or even reshape the original emotional expression, while editing tends to preserve conflict-driven climaxes and disrupt the original narrative flow.

Short-video platforms function as non-human agents governed by algorithmic temporality. By privileging dense emotional units, they reshape content visibility and reconfigure the cultural

representation of maternal figures into circulation-optimized emotional units. In this process, audiences not only consume content but also actively participate in redistribution and re-encoding through comments, likes, shares, and derivative content creation, acting as key connectors within the platform ecosystem.


This paper utilizes recontextualization analysis and discourse analysis methods to demonstrate how remix practices reframe and circulate the maternal figure within the short-video ecosystem, and how agency is redistributed among creators, users, and platform algorithms. It aims to reveal how platform mechanisms shape content accessibility and emotional presentation, while also showing the role of viewers as active participants in the process of transmitting the meaning.

## **PUBLICATION WORKSHOP**

Besides the Screen has always been committed to make knowledge circulate across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. In this post-conference workshop (IAMET 121), we'll share some of the network's experiences in publishing, while inviting participants to collaborate in developing publication activities compatible with their work and expectations. Open to participants at all career stages.

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