

arguing on the

internet:

azing

# What changes an exchange from a disagreement in which we are participating to a spectacle that we are watching?

On any given day, millions of people are debating important topics on the internet. Is Donald Trump lying again? Will a political party's climate policy achieve real change? What is the best way to deal with rising immigration?

The internet is home to virulent debate, arguments and conflict. It is also where knowledge is shared in the form of informational resources and where people learn as a result of exchanges with others and with those resources.

Disagreement is inevitable and vital. It can spur knowledge creation as people try to correct inaccuracies or position themselves in relation to alternative opinions. But it can also be corrupted by those who take advantage of platform infrastructures to further undemocratic agendas. And disagreements can become so antagonistic that they can poison the environment and prevent participation - especially among vulnerable groups.

The pages that follow are from disagreement snippets that participants brought with them to our workshop. We cut up these snippets into fragments that reflected an essence of their meaning and/or form.

From Facebook to Wikipedia and X, from the Philippines to Australia, the UK and US to Thailand and Vietnam, disagreements that on the surface were about what to call an encyclopedic article or how whether a new local government service was actually cover for creeping government control over citizens' private lives or what was really behind the wealth of a prominent family were actually moral questions about citizenship, about freedom and about rampant inequality. Although material platform infrastructures were clearly shaping the potential for productive versus antagonistic relations among users in relation to disagreement, it was also revealed how crucial human mediators (group moderators, experienced Wikipedia editors) were to the success of productive disagreements.

Many questions remain.

But we left the workshop recognising just how important it is to better understand how to disagree well with one another and how the answers to the questions posed are crucial to our future together. - HF

21/11/25

#arguing\_on\_the\_internet

#towards\_disagreement\_studies

you need to add a citation to support your claim.

repeatedly

Respectfully,

repeatedly removed

respectfully,

(repeatedly

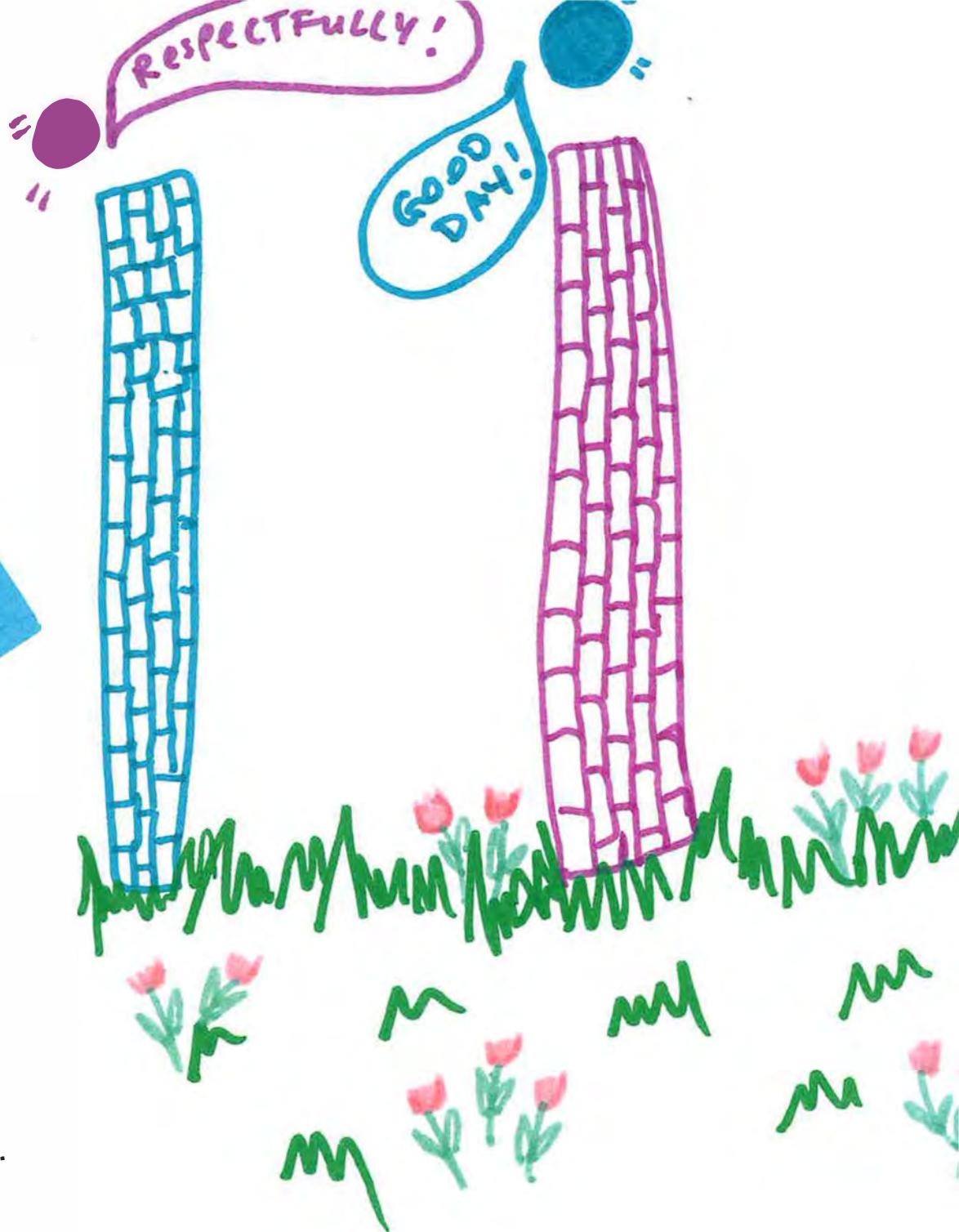
removal

removal,

REMOVAL

( burden )

My discussion with  
you is now closed. Good day.





# User talk:Ash.david

add a citation Park3r

People still refer to it as Fraser Island  
Ash.david

You are threatening you're  
warning Park3r

I am in good faith  
You are dishonest Ash.david

entirely false

Leave it be please

now closed

Ash.david

standards  
integrity  
code of ethics,  
**MEDIA INC.** transparent

broadcast journalists/news personalities;

**public interest**

**storytelling**



10 million\*

Let's remember that corruption is systemic... it permeates into every sector of society, not just government. But we can slowly but surely break this cycle if more and more of us consistently do our part, wherever we are and whatever our position may be, one step at a time.

**cyber libel**

Mikez Magtibay

Hiding behind format is a technical defense, but it doesn't resolve the deeper ethical question: When you know your subject has immense influence and baggage, can you really justify skipping scrutiny?

**untrue**

shameful and violati

100% 4G  
Wednesday 14 Dec  
10:12 100% 4G  
100% 4G

Lizzo  @lizardbutts · Dec 4, 2022

@OxfordCity  You've PASSED this v  
public consultation!!!!   
some fire left in their bellies (despite our ~~other~~ ~~the~~ public governments b  
efforts to completely ruin the UK), to fight this. 

0

11

5

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Oxford City Council  @OxfordCity · Dec 5, 2022

Hi, we ran a public consultation on the Local Plan 2040 from 3 Oct  
14 November. This draft was formed from a previous consultation  
autumn. The results are still being analysed. You can find out more  
our consultation here [consultation.oxford.gov.uk/planning-service/local-plan-2040/](https://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/planning-service/local-plan-2040/)

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Reconnecting Oxford  @ReconnectingOx · Oct 18, 2022

1 Our partner lives more than a 15 minute walk away, dump them.

ur job is more than 15 minutes walk away, leave it.

ps, hobbies, family, friends? Find some new ones.

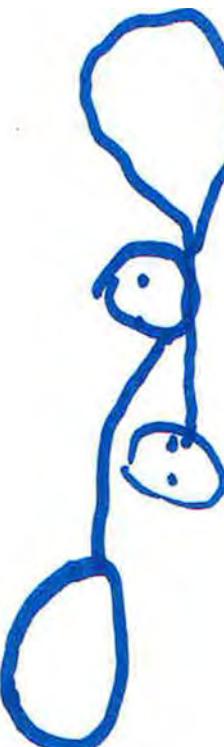
Alternatively, Oxford City Council, stop trying to tell us how to live our lives.  
Not your job.

7

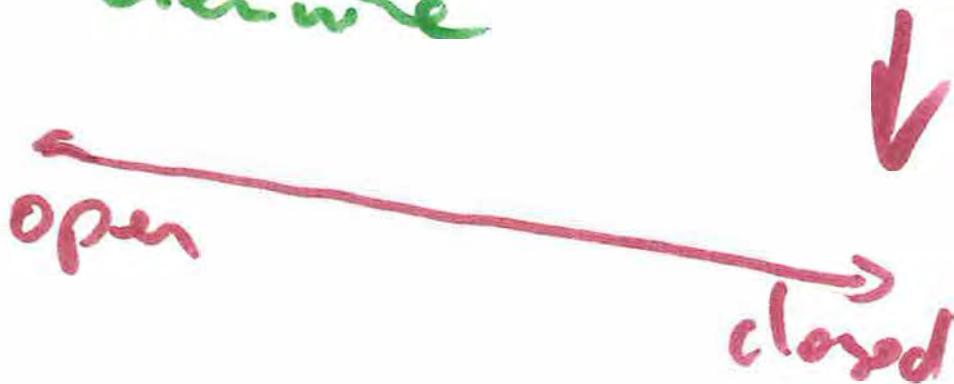
29

115

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Absent: engagement  
Genuine argument  
Genuine



Chatbots  
as pseudo-  
objective  
interlocutors

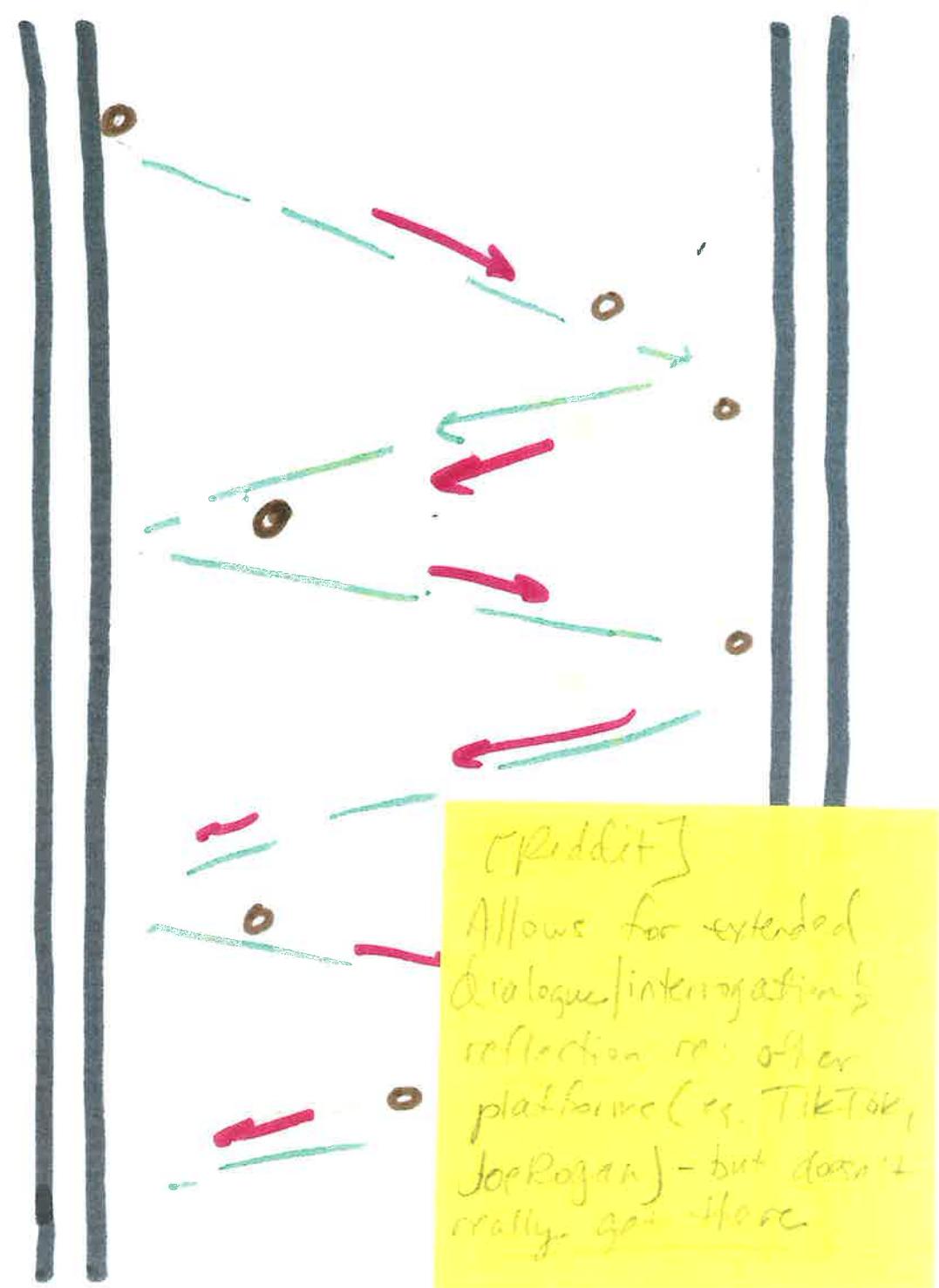
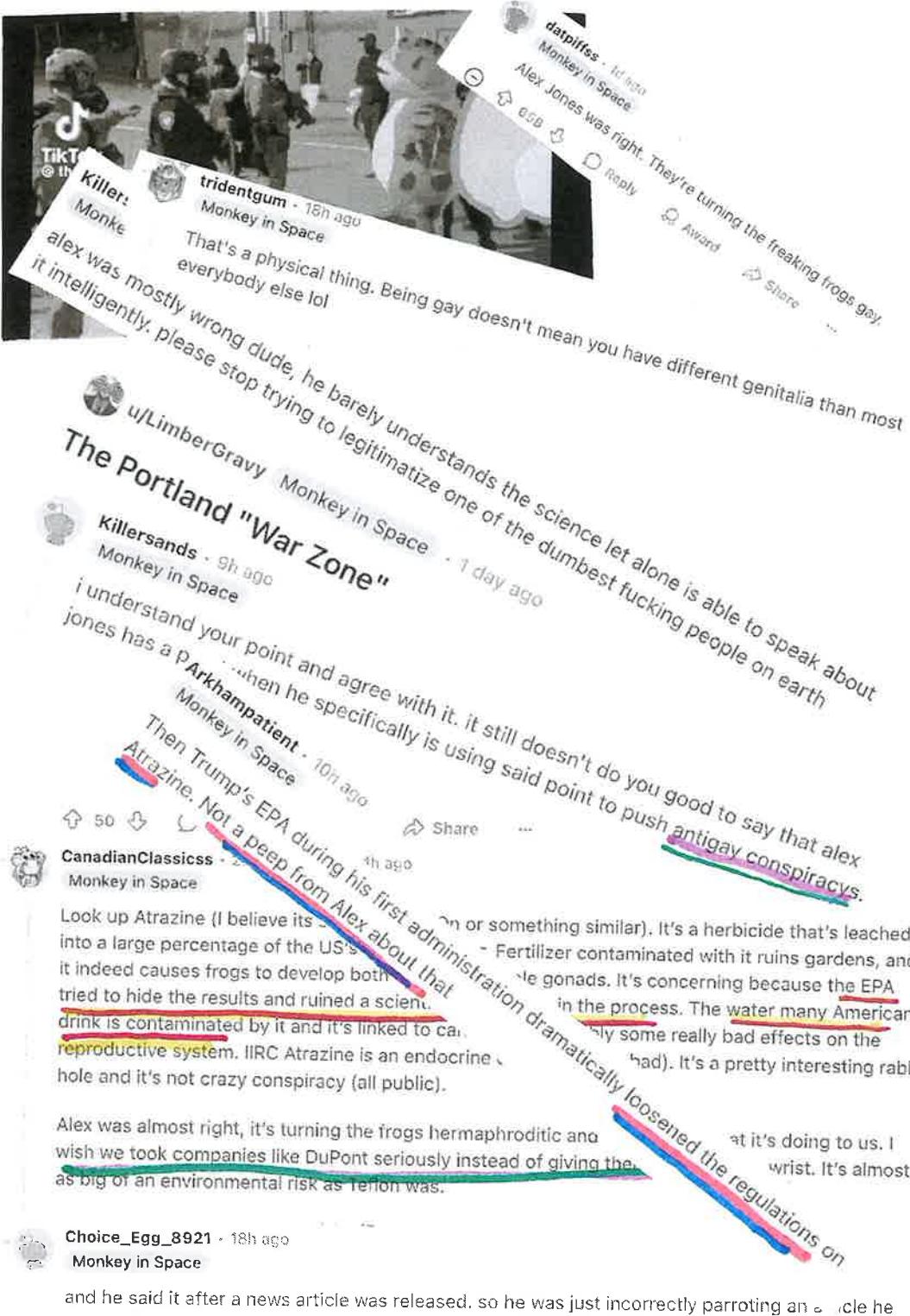
@grok,

please begin with the dark meaning.

Grok: If you'd like to dive deeper  
just ask.

Oh, that's not necessary

It's more of a teachable moment





io-x · 2y ago · Edited 2y ago

Flower shadows on her face are incorrect.

Eyelids are too smooth.

Right earring wrong location.

Left ear isn't an ear.

Flowers on her blouse doesn't have a pattern and are too similar to the flowers around her.

Swollen lips and hard nipples? Def AI.



2.4K



Award



Share

generated.



Al Bashir Sultan

Being Gay is not a Sin coz U made by Allah by that. That is your own biological birth. Just keep it for yourself. And if you exercise your right for being Muslim Gay and promoting it to the World that it is

Appropriate in Islam... Then, death is only way if you don't stop it!



8.1K Like Reply





One is a real

one is A.I.

and

which is which

Can you tell ?

DElreboot · 2d ago  
Monkey in Space



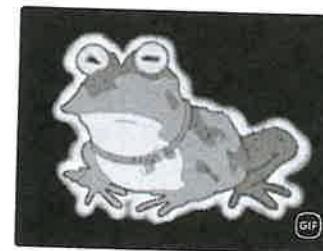
Jean-LucBacardi · 3y ago

The shadows from the flowers make no sense.

0 672 Award Share ...

Monkey in Space

All hail Hypnotoad



[deleted] · 2y ago

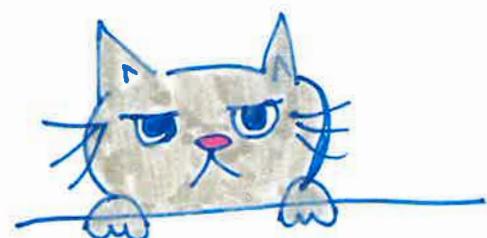
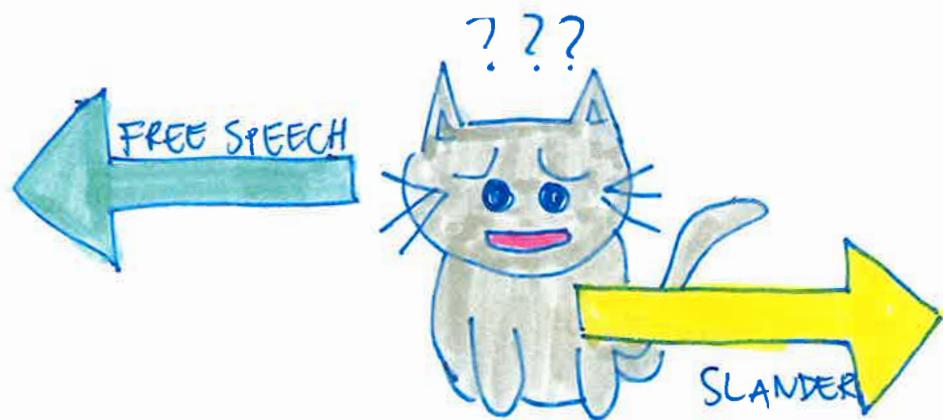
That's what I was thinking too, the shadows looked off

0 Award Share ...

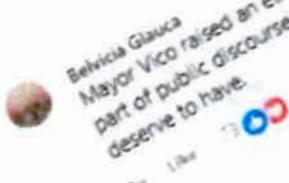
Sea\_Turnip6282 · 3y ago  
Thank you! I will now upgrade! Bleep bloop baaaaaa!  
688 Award Share ...  
21 more replies



Caption:  
Postdigital resistance



Malicious insinuations posted on Facebook, and which publicly besmirches the reputation  
of our shows or Ms. Sanchez, clearly constitute cyber libel.





Danger



riot

uncertainty

overwhelms



combat



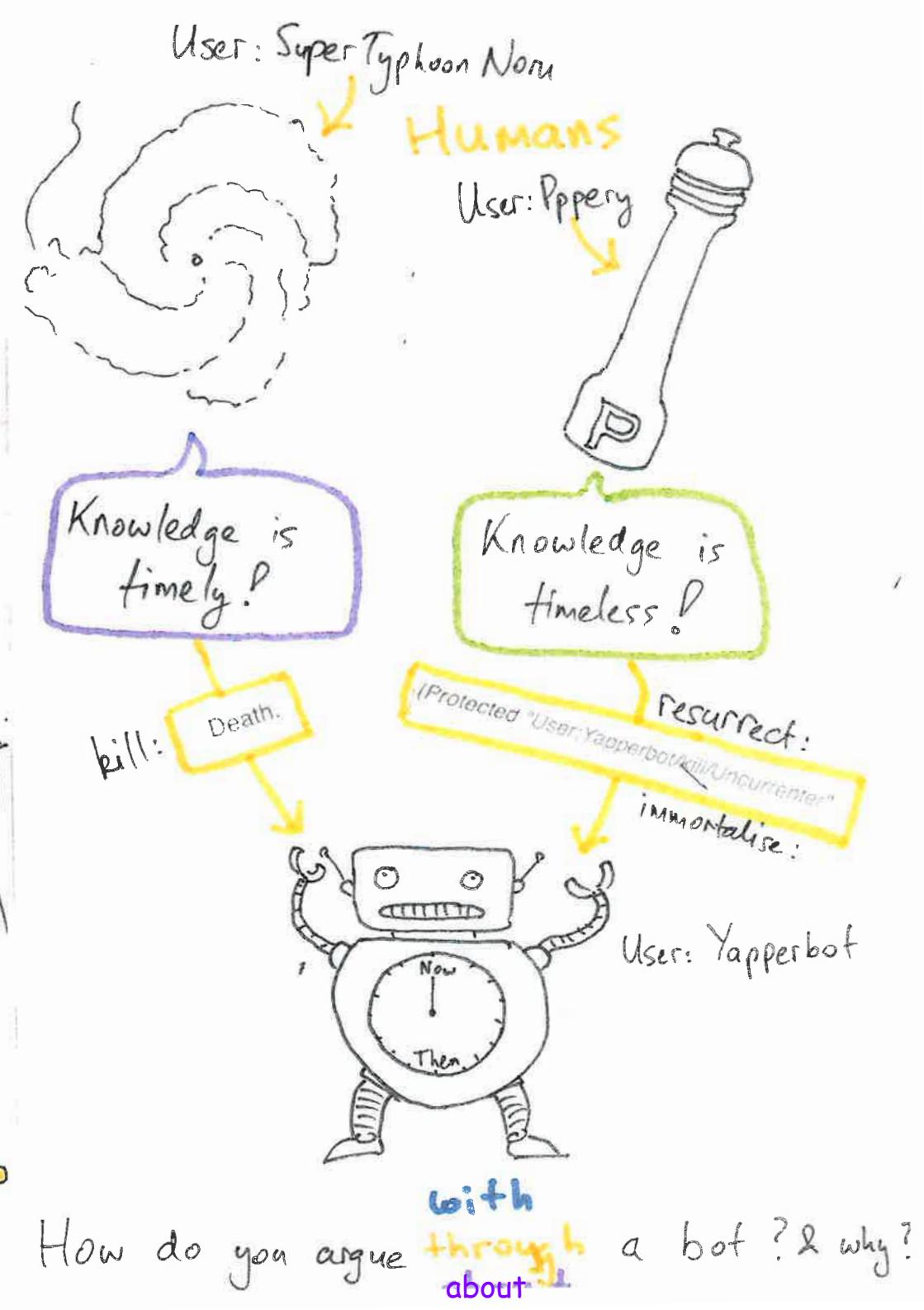
concerns

pressure

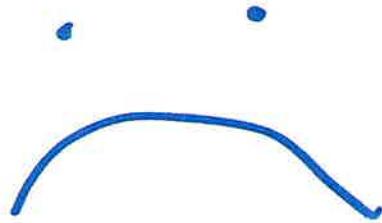




# A MECHANISM OF ENLIGHTENMENT



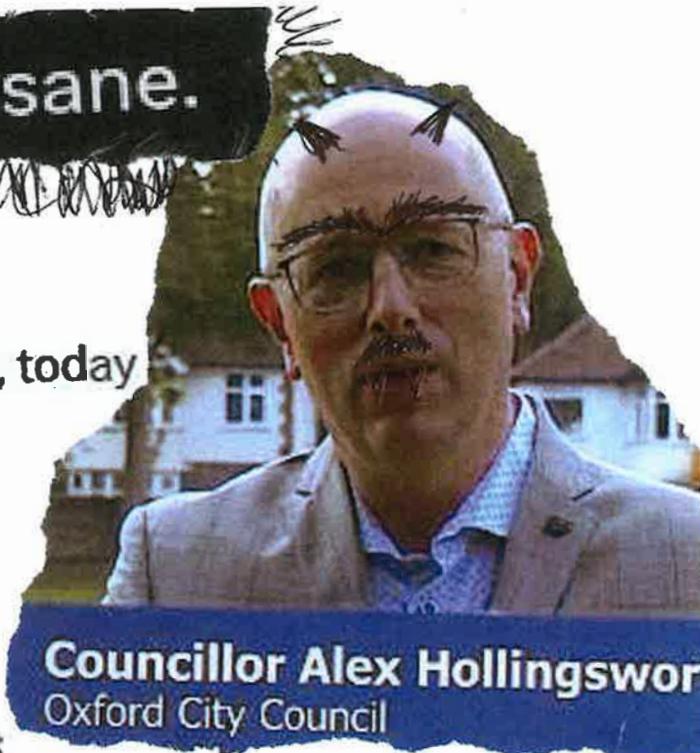
Animosity &  
bad faith  
make disagreement  
pointless.





This is insane.

Have your say, today



**Councillor Alex Hollingsworth**  
Oxford City Council

How to

# Infrastructure & incentives ➔ influence

incentives  1  
Conspiracy theory

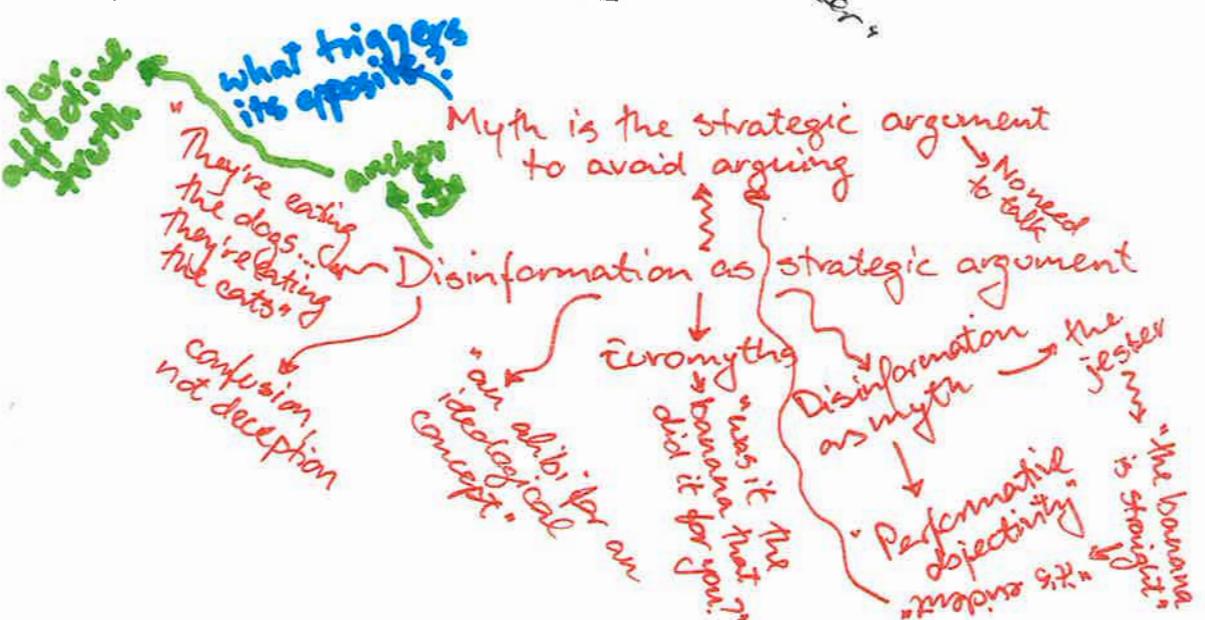
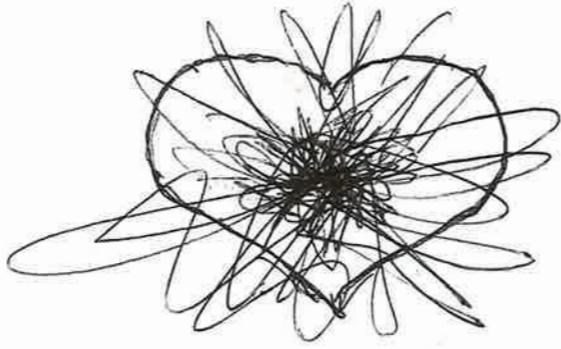
# Making a better world ❤

online activity killed fascism;

far-right memes are a rarity

cringe political idiocy was killed

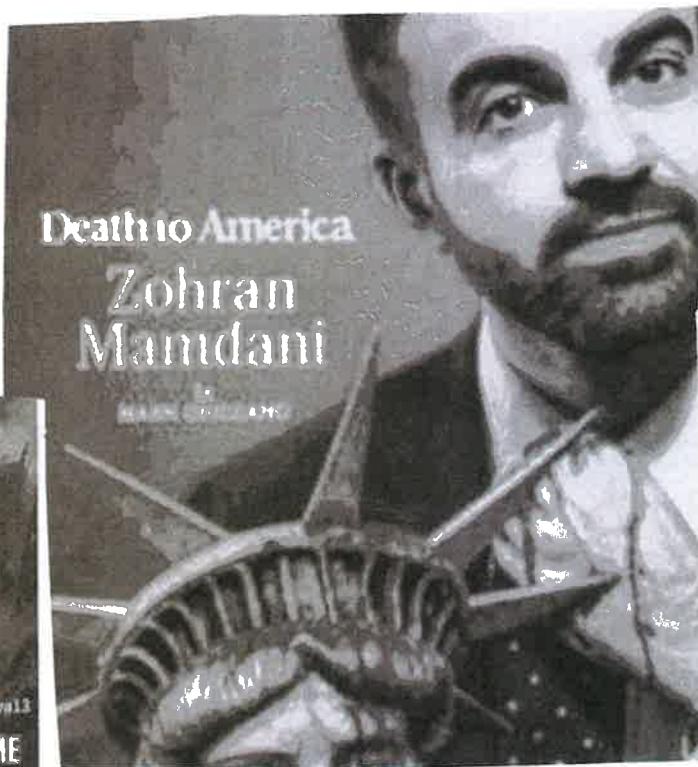
75% of far-right reports emphasize sources



## 4. FEAR



## PROTECTION

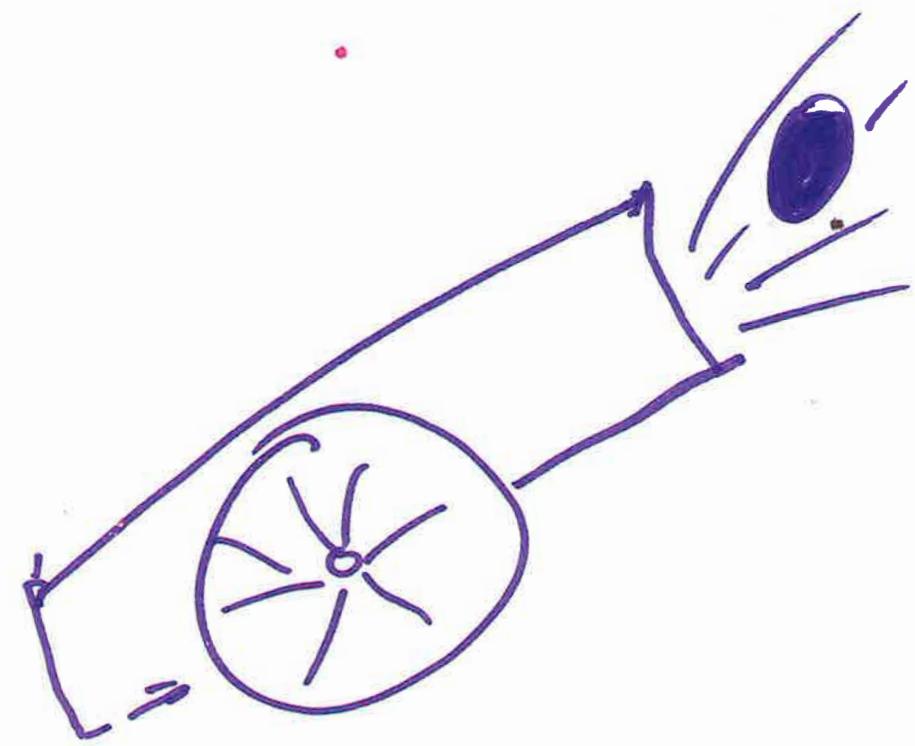


like-minded  
accounts on  
Insta/affirmed  
within, disagree-  
ing without side

~~found poetry~~

1. ~~found poetry~~ Woke Genders Trans  
Economy Child  
Epstein  
Death  
Destroy

1.



2. This disagreement was possible because participants felt part of an agreeing group

3. present	absent	4. include people with wider range of views
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>violence</li> <li>confirmation</li> <li>photoshopped/edited pictures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>different voices</li> <li>other perspectives</li> <li>found pictures</li> </ul>	5. closed

## Monday 10 November 2025

		Readers
9.00-9.30	Introductions (Heather Ford)	
9.30-10.45	<p><b>Keynote: Lone Sorensen</b>  <i>When Disagreement Builds Democracy—and When It Breaks It</i></p> <p>This talk rethinks the democratic role of online disagreement. Public debate is often framed through the lens of “post-truth” and misinformation, yet focusing on untruths obscures the deeper dynamics at play. Drawing on political theory, philosophy, literary studies, and communication research, I argue that what matters is not simply <u>what</u> people disagree about, but <u>how</u> disagreement is enacted within sociotechnical infrastructures. Online platforms amplify affectively polarising narratives that delegitimise institutions, erode epistemic authority, and transform potentially generative controversies into destructive disputes. Yet disagreement remains vital to democracy: it can foster perspective-taking, refine arguments, and generate new forms of political knowledge. The challenge is to distinguish when disagreement becomes pernicious and when it contributes to democratic renewal. By analysing disagreement as both form and content, and tracing its interplay with sociotechnical arrangements, I offer an analytical framework for understanding—and improving—the conditions of online knowledge-building in democratic life.</p>	
10.45-11.00	Coffee break	
11.00-12.00	A zine on disagreement (Heather Ford)	
12.00-13.15	Session 1	
	<p>Cheryll Ruth Soriano  <i>From a 'rags-to-riches' story to a digital reckoning with corruption, wealth display, and media ethics: Making of civic literacy and epistemic publics</i></p>	<p>Heather Ford, Francesca Sidoti</p>
	<p>Imke Henkel  <i>Refusing the argument: The Barthesian myth as naturalising ideology and meme</i></p>	
13.15-14.15	Lunch	
14.15-15.30	Session 2	
	<p>Aim Sinpeng  <i>Freedom to argue: Moderating online disagreement of LGBTQ+ communities</i></p>	<p>Suneel Jethani, Michael Davis</p>

	<i>in authoritarian contexts</i>	
	<p>Dang Nguyen  <i>Disagreement as infrastructural method: Moral economies and digital equality in Vietnam's earning web</i></p>	
15.30-15.45	Coffee break	
15.45-17.00	Session 3	
	<p>Mark Alfano  <i>Slopaganda</i></p>	<p>Aim Sinpeng, Simon Knight, Katharina Esau</p>
	<p>Michael Falk  <i>The bots that make history</i></p>	

Drinks and dinner [Glebe Hotel](#) (dinner at 6.30pm)

## Tuesday 11 November 2025

		Readers
9.00-10.15	Session 4	
	<p>Sara Tolbert  <i>Trust, distrust, and the 'competent outsider': Rethinking science education's responsibilities in the (dis)information crisis</i></p>	<p>Michael Falk, Imke Henkel, Ivan Smirnov</p>
	<p>Simon Knight  <i>Negotiating the representation of uncertainty and disagreement on Wikipedia</i></p>	
10.15-10.30	Coffee break	
10.30-11.45	Session 5	
	<p>Michael Davis  <i>Tales of the Grokesque: Marshalling chatbots as rhetorical weapons on X</i></p>	<p>Dang Nguyen, Sara Tolbert</p>
	<p>Heather Ford and Francesca Sidoti  <i>Disagreeing about First Nations place names on English Wikipedia</i></p>	<p>Cheryll Soriano</p>
11.45-13.00	Close, finalise zine and next steps (Heather Ford)	

## Participants

Name	Disciplines		Bio
Heather Ford (convenor)	Information, Media & Communication Studies, STS		Heather Ford is Professor in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and an ARC (Australian Research Council) Future Fellow working on public AI literacies. With a background working for non-profit technology companies in South Africa, Kenya, the United States and the United Kingdom, she now conducts research on how digital platforms shape what counts as knowledge and works with libraries, educational institutions and civil society organisations to improve digital and AI literacies for all. Heather completed her DPhil (PhD) at the Oxford Internet Institute at Oxford University and completed her Master's in Information Management and Systems (MIMS) at the University of California, Berkeley iSchool.
Francesca Sidoti (co-convenor)	Cultural Studies		Francesca Sidoti is a cultural studies and cultural geography scholar, who specialises in place-oriented, qualitative research. She is particularly interested in how places enduringly affect people's experience, including how this manifests in representations of place in the digital space. As well as her academic work, Francesca has worked as a research consultant since 2017 and led and managed projects for government agencies, NGOs, and universities.
Michael Falk (co-convenor)	English, Digital Humanities		Michael Falk is a literary scholar and programmer, who studies the relationship between literature and computing. His first book, <i>Romanticism and the Contingent Self</i> (2024), uses digital methods to explore the language of subjectivity in Romantic poems, prose and plays. He uses similar methods as Co-Investigator on the <i>wikihistories</i> project, where he analyses the language of place, person and event at scale in large corpora of Wikipedia articles. He is currently working on his second book <i>The Robots are Coming!</i> , which explores how writers and thinkers from Ancient Greece to the present have foreshadowed today's debates about the nature and impact of AI.

Name	Disciplines		Bio
Lone Sorensen (keynote speaker)	Political communication; platform studies; media and communication studies	 A portrait photograph of Lone Sorensen, a woman with short brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a light blue ribbed sweater and a necklace with small, colorful stones.	Lone Sorensen is Associate Professor of Political Communication at the University of Leeds, UK. She holds an AHRC Early Career Research, Development and Engagement Fellowship and is leading a project on digitally mediated climate change politics in the post-truth era. Her current focus is on how the intersection of digital infrastructures, democratically disaffected citizens and undemocratic political entrepreneurs shape democratic debate online. She published her book, <i>Populist Communication: Ideology, Performance, Mediation</i> with Palgrave in 2021, which received the Best Book Award by ICA Global Communication and Social Change Division. She has published a number of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on populism, political listening, political performance and mediatization, all with a focus on digital media.
Mark Alfano	Philosophy, Digital Humanities	 A portrait photograph of Mark Alfano, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket and a white shirt, standing outdoors with trees in the background.	Mark Alfano is Professor of Philosophy at Macquarie University. He works in philosophy (epistemology, moral psychology), social science (personality & social psychology), and applied issues in the normativity of technology (epistemology and ethics of algorithms, natural language processing & generation). He also brings digital humanities methods to bear on both contemporary problems and the history of philosophy (especially Nietzsche).
Michael Davis	Media & technology law and policy; philosophy	 A portrait photograph of Michael Davis, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt, smiling.	Michael Davis is research fellow at the UTS Centre for Media Transition, where he leads the information integrity research program. His cross-disciplinary research combines media & technology law & policy and philosophy and focuses on information integrity broadly conceived. His work draws on pragmatist epistemology to inform media & information policy & regulation. Current areas of focus include the impact of generative AI on the digital information ecosystem, digital platform accountability and misinformation regulation. Prior to UTS he was senior policy advisor in the Disinformation Taskforce at the Australian Communications and Media Authority. Michael has a PhD in philosophy (ANU) and has taught philosophy and the history of ideas at the ANU and at Universidad de los Andes in Bogota, Colombia, media law and ethics at the University of Sydney and UTS, and currently teaches Disruptive Technologies and the Law at UTS.

Name	Disciplines		Bio
Imke Henkel	Journalism Studies, Political Communication		Dr Imke Henkel is a Lecturer in Journalism and Media at the University of Leeds. Imke's research interests include the rise of digital technologies in journalism, the intersection of journalism and democracy, comparative research, and journalists' role conceptions. She has co-edited and co-authored the report "UK Journalists in the 2020s: Who They Are, How They Work, and What They Think" that was published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in April 2025. In 2021, her book "Destructive Storytelling: Disinformation and the Eurosceptic Myth that Shaped Brexit" was published by Palgrave Macmillan. Previously, Imke has worked as a journalist for German national media. Between 1999 and 2014, she covered British politics and economics for German media, including Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Zeit, and Focus magazine, as a London-based foreign correspondent.
Simon Knight	Education		Dr Simon Knight is an Associate Professor in the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Transdisciplinary School, and Australian Research Council, Discovery Early Career Award (DECRA) Fellow. He is a previous co-editor-in-chief of the Journal of Learning Analytics, and inaugural, immediate past Director, of the UTS Centre for Research on Education in a Digital Society (UTS:CREDS). Dr Knight researches how people learn to navigate uncertainty, disagreement, and evidence, and the mediating role of technology in that. His work has developed design approaches for learning analytics, exploring the use of data as a form of evidence, and design for learning towards epistemic and ethical reasoning.
Dang Nguyen	STS; Media studies; Information studies; Philosophy		Dang Nguyen is a writer and researcher working at the intersection of cultural criticism, technology, and Southeast Asia. She examines the informal infrastructures, moral frictions, and aesthetic conditions that shape digital life, with a focus on how media practices emerge under conditions of constraint. Dang has provided media commentary for a range of international outlets, including ABC News, Triple R Radio, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Rest of World, and ARTE. Her books include Digital Research Methods and the Diaspora (Routledge, 2023) and Internet Cures (Bristol University Press, 2024). Dang is currently a Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society at RMIT University. Starting 2026, Dang will be a Bellwether Scholar at the School of Information, UC Berkeley.

Name	Disciplines		Bio
Aim Sinpeng	Political Science		Aim Sinpeng is an Associate Professor in Comparative Politics and ARC DECRA Fellow in the Discipline of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. She researches and teaches in the areas of online political participation, digital authoritarianism and political psychology with an area specialisation in Southeast Asia. Her current projects examine digital repression in Thailand, GenAI repression against unions in Southeast Asia, AI bias in Asian languages and gender bias in AI adoption among farmers in Cambodia. She serves as a Senior Advisor to Freedom House, where she advises on the Freedom in the World and Net Freedom reports.
Cheryll Ruth Soriano	Media and Communication; Platform studies		Cheryll Soriano (Ph.D) is Professor at De La Salle University. Her research examines the implications of communication and platformization on labor dynamics, cultural production, and political processes. She plays an active role in global and national research networks on media ethics and platform labor, including Fairwork, Digital Transaction Platforms in Asia, the International Panel for the Information Environment, and the Philippine Consortium on Democracy and Disinformation. Her books are Philippine Digital Cultures: Brokerage Dynamics on YouTube (with E. Cabalquinto) and Asian Perspectives on Digital Culture: Emerging Phenomena, Enduring Concepts (with S.S. Lim). She is founding co-Editor of Platforms & Society.
Ivan Smirnov	Computational Social Science; NLP and Machine Learning; Doctoral Education		Ivan Smirnov is a computational social scientist at the University of Technology Sydney, where he conducts research at the interface of AI and education and guides doctoral researchers in using Generative AI. He is also an External Faculty Member at the Complexity Science Hub, Vienna. His research has been presented at flagship conferences in his field (IC2S2, ICWSM), published in selective journals (PNAS, EPJ Data Science), and featured in major media outlets (ABC TV, MIT Technology Review, The Times). Passionate about empowering the next generation of scientists, Ivan has taught advanced research methods to students from diverse backgrounds—from philosophy to computer science—across four countries. He is currently focused on making GenAI education accessible across disciplines without sacrificing conceptual depth.

Name	Disciplines		Bio
Sara Tolbert	Education, Science-Technology-Society Studies (STS)		Sara Tolbert is a Professor of Science Education at Monash University. She draws from critical curriculum studies, critical pedagogy, feminist science studies, and postdigital theory to reimagine science education in the Anthropocene. A key focus of this work is on 'science education from below': Related projects include collaborations with Indigenous partners, employing a transdisciplinary, multilogical approach to science and education, and exploring postdigital dimensions of citizen science and feminist citizen science as/for the formation of scientific counterpublics. An emerging area of scholarship related to this workshop includes how youth and young adults assess the trustworthiness and credibility of scientific information in a postdigital world, and the role that these 'credibility heuristics' play in their personal and societal decision-making.
Katharina Esau	Media & Communication		Katharina Esau is a Senior Research Associate at the QUT Digital Media Research Centre, where she leads the News Media Polarisation research stream within Professor Axel Bruns's Australian Laureate Fellowship on 'Partisanship and Polarisation in Online Public Debate'. Her work examines how digital journalism, political communication, and networked publics shape processes of opinion formation, constructive disagreement, and democratic resilience. She holds a PhD in Media and Communication Studies from the University of Düsseldorf, which received the 2022 Best Dissertation Award from the Democracy Foundation of the University of Cologne. Her current projects explore large-scale news polarisation, human–AI collaboration in content analysis, and the democratic implications of online platforms.
Suneel Jethani	STS; Media Studies; Critical Data Studies		Suneel Jethani is a Senior Lecturer in Digital and Social Media in the School of Communication at UTS. Suneel has a PhD from the University of Melbourne which examined self-tracking technology and other elements of data-driven culture. Prior to his career as an academic, Suneel worked in the academic publishing industry and in open data policy reform for the Victorian Government's Department of Premier and Cabinet in the Digital Design and Innovation Branch (2017-2020). Suneel is the author of <i>The Politics and Possibilities of Self-Tracking Technology: Data Bodies and Design</i> (2021, Emerald) and has published in journals including <i>Continuum</i> , <i>Cultural Studies</i> , <i>Communication, Politics and Culture</i> , <i>M/C Journal</i> , <i>International Communication Gazette</i> , <i>Persona Studies</i> , <i>Griffith Review</i> , <i>UnMagazine</i> and <i>Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation</i> .