Money, Media and Contemporary Culture

A series of workshops and public lectures by visiting Professors Bill Maurer and Tom Boellstorff from the University of California, Irvine

Money, technology and financial inclusion

Monday 18 March, 10.00am - 2.30pm
GSBL Boardroom, Building 13, Level 4, Room 2 RMIT City Campus
RSVP: aastha.swaroop@rmit.edu.au

This workshop will include a presentation by and conversation with Bill Maurer, a presentation by Tom Boellstorff, and a range of short papers by RMIT researchers.

The unbearable persistence of binarisms: On the ontology of the digital

Monday 18 March, 4.30-6.00pm
GREEN BRAIN - Storey Hall, Building 16, Level 7, RMIT City Campus
RSVP: priyanka.willis@rmit.edu.au

In this talk Tom Boellstorff conducts a meta-analysis of his research in Indonesia and in virtual worlds, as well as the research of a number of other scholars, to make a big claim: the most fundamental issue in all of social theory is the unbearable persistence of binarisms. He explores how a rethinking of dichotomy is essential to addressing the most politically, theoretically, and methodologically significant issues in regard to digital culture. In doing so, he examines a reframed dualism as the gift of the virtual, manifested in several ways including overlay, that provides crucial insights into the ontology of the digital.

The awkward history of payment technology and financial inclusion

Tuesday 19 March, 4.30-6.00pm,
GREEN BRAIN - Storey Hall, Building 16, Level 7, RMIT City Campus
RSVP: priyanka.willis@rmit.edu.au

Despite their importance and ubiquity, payment infrastructures are little studied outside the payments industry, and within the industry the rapid development of new systems of value transfer exceeds the ability even of experts to keep up. The public lecture by Bill Maurer will address the question of the public interest in payments – the public good provided by the means of value transfer, and whether and how the state’s monopoly of the legitimate means of exchange (state-issued currency) is challenged by new, private payment infrastructures, which often “ride the rails” of public systems. The case study is mobile phone-enabled banking and payment, heralded as a boon for “financial inclusion”, the formalizing of informal or the “cash only” world.

Sexuality in Southeast Asia: Past, Present and Future

Thursday 21 March, 11am-3pm,
Building 9, Level 2, Room 12, RMIT City Campus
RSVP: digitalethnographyrc@gmail.com

This interactive workshop will draw upon Tom Boellstorff’s extensive work in Southeast Asia and presentations by other scholars to explore the past, present and future of sexuality and gender research in the region.

What we talk about when we talk about “alternative economies”: From Islamic banking to local currencies

Thursday 21 March, 4.30-6.00pm,
GREEN BRAIN - Storey Hall, Building 16, Level 7, RMIT City Campus
RSVP: priyanka.willis@rmit.edu.au

In the wake of the global financial crisis that began in the summer of 2008, many commentators, critics and visionaries have looked anew at contemporary and historical alternatives to dominant financial paradigms. Alternatives, it is thought, might point a way out of the current predicament, provide options for those who wish on an individual or collective basis to stand outside of mainstream finance, or inspire new blueprints for the possible. For an anthropologist, the quest to discover, adapt or adopt such alternatives is familiar enough to wish on an individual or collective basis to stand outside of mainstream finance, or inspire new blueprints for the possible. For an anthropologist, the quest to discover, adapt or adopt such alternatives is familiar enough to give pause. Drawing on examples from Islamic banking and finance and local currency movements, Bill Maurer explores the various modalities of alternative, the potential of plural and diverse economies, and the analytical assumptions inherent in separating the alternative from the modal or normative.