

Mark McLelland's Reorienting of Internet Studies

Gerard Goggin

I arrived at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Queensland (UQ) in early January 2002. The Centre had been established by the pre-eminent Cultural Studies scholar Graeme Turner two years earlier. The first academic appointment was Mark McLelland, recipient of a University of Queensland Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. In late 2003, Mark parlayed his UQ Postdoctoral Fellowship into a coveted Australian Research Council (ARC) Australian Postdoctoral Fellowship for his project 'Local Culture/Global Space: Japanese Minority Sexualities and the Internet.'

I was the second academic appointment at CCCS, also a UQ Postdoctoral Research Fellow, embarking on a project on Australian Internet Histories. The CCCS was an eyrie on the sixth floor of the Duhig Building, a building which also housed the University of Queensland Main Library. Mark was friendly and cordial; and notably focused and succinct. He arrived at the opening of business hours, worked hard and with dispatch, and left at the close of business. He did not work from home.

I was intrigued to understand what the distinct mission of the new Centre was. I had left a continuing lectureship in Media Studies at Southern Cross University in Northern New South Wales, where I had been for three years, to take refuge and strike out for a new adventure. For a long time I had drawn on Cultural Studies, and regarded myself as part of the discipline. What was remarkable was how CCCS served as an extraordinary generative and rich location for a highly influential flourishing of Cultural Studies across a wide range of fields—due to the mentoring genius, generosity and long-range strategic view of founder Graeme Turner.^[1]

Mark was a foundation stone in this achievement of CCCS, and his work benefited from Graeme's incisive advice. We also benefited from Graeme's tendency to leave talented scholars alone to take best advantage of the space, resources and backing he secured and provided. Mark was on a unity ticket with Graeme in this regard. I remember Mark some years later musing on a brilliant English colleague who strongly insisted on giving scholars the latitude they needed—in terms of non-conformance to the creeping corporatisation of academic life—to do their work.

Bit by bit, Mark and I become more interested in each other's work. I had always been interested in Asian cultures and communication—a by-product of my last two years in high school in Singapore, and then doing a major in Indonesian Studies at the University of Melbourne. I found his work extraordinarily interesting—not just for the emerging areas of Japanese sexuality, culture and technology that he tackled, but also for his approach.

Mark exemplified the best of contemporary Cultural Studies. He was an impeccable theorist, who wore his learning lightly, and was razor-sharp conceptually and politically. He was attuned to the shifts of social, cultural and everyday life as well as the histories and implications of institutions and the complexity of the politics of sexuality, gender and racialised positioning, especially in

national and regional contexts. These elements grounded his deep commitment to research and theory. McLelland's pioneering research on the global, regional and international forces that shaped sexuality and culture was very much about the interplay between these forces, often assumed to be decisive, and the local and national. Mark was resolutely against an 'unmarked' global concept. It did not make sense to him, and the evidence he marshalled and the directions in which such work pointed sketched out a different paradigm about the ways in which our worlds were changing.

Our first major collaboration was an Internet Masterclass hosted by CCCS in 2004. Internet Studies was a relatively new interdisciplinary field. We felt that Australian-based researchers were doing some interesting work,^[2] and that it was timely to promote discussion and debate on directions in Internet research and to stage an event and opportunity to learn from and engage with some leading figures.

McLelland and Nanette Gottlieb's extraordinarily prescient edited volume *Japanese Cybercultures* had been published in 2003.^[3] *Japanese Cybercultures* represented a major advance in the area of what had been approached as cyberspace and also as cybercultures. It was a collaboration with the distinguished scholar Professor Nanette Gottlieb, whose work focused on language, politics and policy in Japan. Gottlieb had also drawn attention to the importance of technology in language policy.^[4] This led to her 2000 book *Word-Processing Technology in Japan: Kanji and the Keyboard*.^[5] Gottlieb's book was not well known in the Communication, Cultural, and Media Studies disciplines, and barely registered in nascent Internet Studies work. *Japanese Cybercultures* did make its mark, although it too deserved much wider attention and influence than it gained. In retrospect, it could be paired with another milestone book on Japanese information and communication technologies that appeared two years later, and, partly due to fortuitous timing, greatly influenced the nascent field of mobile media and communication research. This is the 2005 collection, edited by Mizuko Ito, Misa Matsuda and Daisuke Okabe, *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*.^[6]

In approaching our Internet masterclass, we were conflicted about the 'masterclass' concept, in such a new area, but also with the hierarchical implications of the term 'master.' So we invited a few different experts to give seminars, including doctoral and early-career researchers. That said, there were two stand-out star turns at the 2004 Internet Masterclass. The first was Geert Lovink, the Dutch-Australian intellectual, who was the proponent of 'Critical Internet Studies'; who had founded the international *nettime* mailing list and circle in 1995 and was a co-founder of the Australian internet research and culture group *fibreculture* in 2001. Someone who should have been a full professor by any other name, Lovink took up an appointment as a postdoctoral fellow at CCCS in 2003.

The other major international figure was Lisa Nakamura, then still relatively early in her career, but widely respected for her trail-blazing study of race and ethnicity on the Internet^[7]—the first full-length study of what has become a central axis of internet and digital media research. Lisa gave a brilliant seminar, but for Mark her conceptualisation of 'race' marked a different approach—one that, as she acknowledged, offered a quite specific account of race from a broadly US context of its specific histories of racialisation, technologies and culture.^[8] For Mark, he felt the need for accounts of technology and race, and other categories, from a much fuller range of locations; but also for such work and conceptualisations to fundamentally reshape the assumptions, bearings and orientation of the disciplines studying digital technology. This thinking is borne out in his major work, the 2005 book *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*.^[9]

So, the internet master class event was a key moment in a dawning recognition we both had (especially Mark) that while it was clear that societies were going through a prolonged and

profound evolution and take-up of a global technology, our frameworks for understanding this world historical phenomenon needed to be fundamentally recast and expanded. This was especially in the field of Internet Studies, but also in other disciplines such as Communication and Media Studies.

In 2006, the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Conference was held in Brisbane, hosted by Axel Bruns and QUT colleagues—the first time the conference had crossed the equator from its usually North American locales. By this time, Mark had left UQ, landing at the University of Wollongong, known for its work on the Asia–Pacific region, where he finally secured a permanent academic post. Mark suffered from disjunctures of the disciplines in finding a post after his UQ and ARC postdoctoral fellowships. An accomplished researcher, who had already made major contributions, his work with its cutting-edge focus on sexuality seemed to be too radical for many hiring in Japanese Area Studies, but not sufficiently connected to or at least acknowledged by Communication and Media Studies (then experiencing boom times in hiring), and certainly much appreciated in Cultural Studies, especially Asian Cultural Studies (but here there were very few appointments). As it turned out, Mark was appointed as a lecturer in Sociology.

It was at Wollongong that we held a AoIR 2006 preconference on 'Internationalizing Internet Studies,' featuring Merlyn Lim (then also early in a distinguished career; now at Carleton University) to discuss the Muslim voices in the blogosphere in Indonesia and internationally. I had a flare-up of a long-running back injury, so Mark had to convene a very successful workshop on his own. The stream of work that we brought together here and over the next two years was published in the 2009 collection, *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*.^[10] This book was a notable intervention into Internet studies. We had a wonderful time, working with authors across wildly different contexts, languages and disciplines, to showcase the many ways in which the Internet is experienced, imagined and theorised—suggesting how the field itself needed to dramatically rise to the challenge. It did not necessarily transform the field as we had hoped, though. Mark was infuriated by the 2013 AoIR conference in Denver (AoIR 14.0—'Resistance and Appropriation') where he felt a keynote panel on race, gender and information communication technologies showed how far there was still to go in terms of embracing international and rest-of-world perspectives.

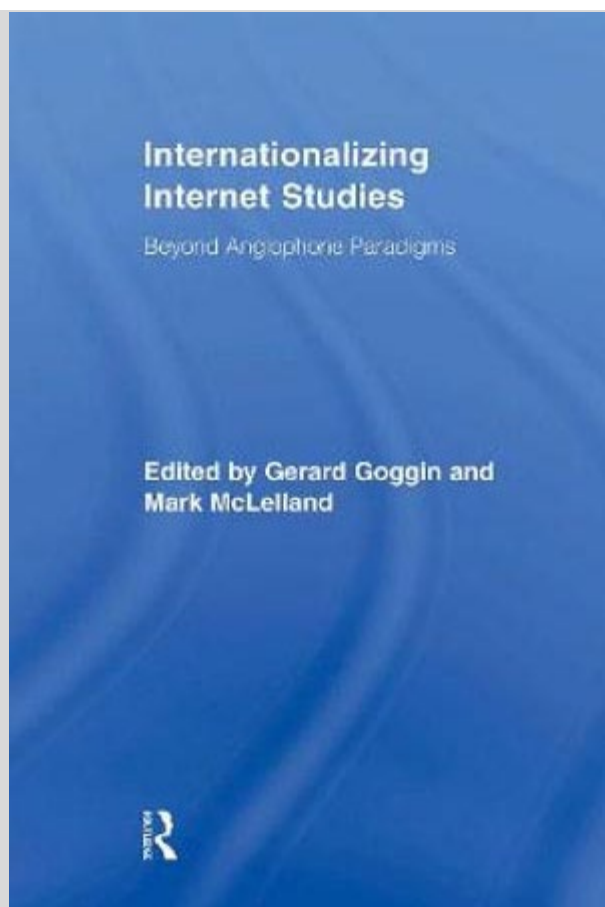


Figure 1. Cover of Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, New York: Routledge, 2009.

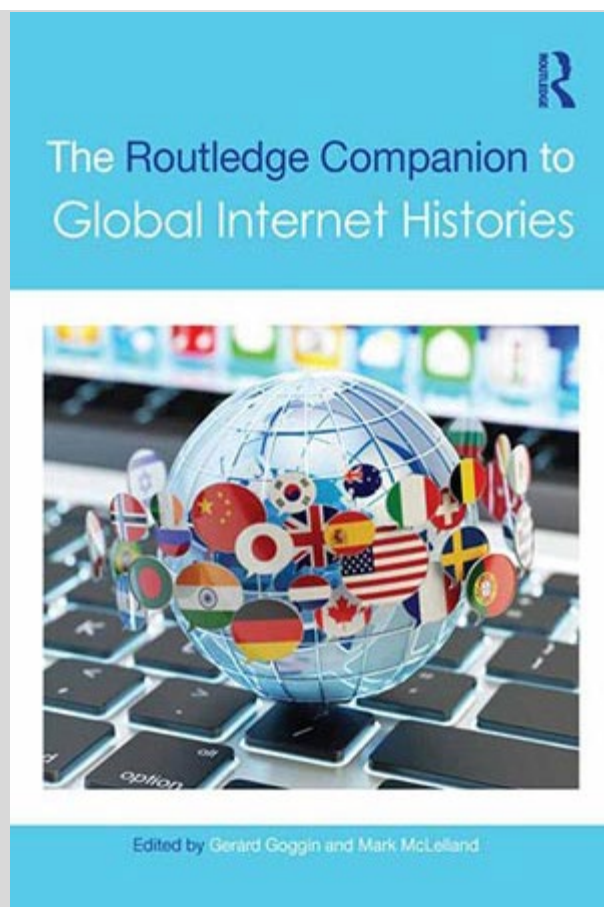


Figure 2. Cover of Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*, New York: Routledge, 2017.

Our next and related foray was the logical move into embracing Internet Histories, especially because of our frustration with the paucity of histories and historiographical work on the Internet—especially when it came to non-Western, non-Anglophone, global South, and other apparently marginal or peripheral locations and perspectives. Mark brought very strong insights to this endeavour. With his deep expertise in Japanese studies, he suspected that work was available in Japanese—but that it simply was not being read, let alone being credited, cited, or influential on global scholarship. Mark was also alive to the interplay of language and script on technology (here especially mindful of Gottlieb's work). We organised a pre-conference workshop on Internet Histories at the 2007 AoIR conference at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, hoping this would underpin an edited volume. We received thoughtful, critical feedback from reviewers on this proposal, but we thought that they were right; and that we did not need to rush to publish another anthology.

Instead, we joined forces with the Chinese new media researcher, Haiqing Yu (another brilliant researcher early in her career, now at RMIT) in a research grant application—on Internet histories in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Happily, the Australian Research Council funded the project in 2010, including a postdoctoral fellowship at Wollongong for the political economist of the South Korean Internet, Kwangsuk Lee (who returned to Seoul Institute of Technology). From this project, we produced the 2017 *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*.^[11] Another legacy of this project was the founding of the journal *Internet Histories*, a signature of which is a commitment to the international diversity of histories and theorisation of Internet and digital

cultures that Mark so helped to articulate and bring about.[\[12\]](#)

Among the many long-lived contributions of our beloved, stellar friend and colleague, Mark McLelland, then, are a reorientation of the conceptual and research bases of the important field of Internet Studies and cognate areas of technology and cultural inquiry. Mark had a very broad and deep awareness of the intra- and intercultural interplay in social life, especially the importance of paying attention, listening, and providing spaces for popular culture and deciphering and doing justice to the richness of subcultural practices, forms and formats. This disposition underpinned his ARC Future Fellowship project, where he gave attention to ethical, legal and policy aspects of popular culture and technology in Japan, Australia and elsewhere.[\[13\]](#) Into the bargain, he mentored, supported and published many doctoral and emerging scholars; and created legitimacy and space for important new research, topics and alternative ways of thinking.[\[14\]](#)

As he proceeded, I always found Mark gentle, respectful and compassionate to the core. He could be highly critical, expressing very well supported points in clear and memorable language. He was also, however, patient and kind, and very funny. He had a gift for bridging differences across people and cultures, while not seeking to elide the existence and importance of such variety. Rather he helped me, and us, find powerful and far-reaching ways to understand these, and draw upon them to reimagine our worlds in more hospitable, fair and pleasurable ways. I miss him very much, but find comfort in discovering the amazing and wide-ranging ways in which his work lives on.

Notes

[\[1\]](#) See also [Graeme Turner](#)'s reflections in this issue.

[\[2\]](#) I had just published my edited volume, *Virtual Nation: The Internet in Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004. On the internet in Australia, see Matthew Allen's reflections. Allen established some of the first subjects and course in Internet Studies when he was teaching at Curtin University in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Matthew Allen, 'Lessons from the history of internet studies,' *Cultural Science Journal* 12(1) (2021): 68–76, doi: [10.5334/csci.139](#).

[\[3\]](#) Nanette Gottlieb and Mark McLelland (eds), *Japanese Cybercultures*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, doi: [10.4324/9780203219614](#).

[\[4\]](#) Nanette Gottlieb, 'Technology and language policy: Word processing Japan,' *Asian Studies Review* 18(3) (1995): 58–68, doi: [10.1080/03147539508713018](#).

[\[5\]](#) Nanette Gottlieb, *Word Processing Technology in Japan: Kanji and the Keyboard*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000.

[\[6\]](#) Mizuko Ito, Misa Matsuda and Daisuke Okabe (eds), *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

[\[7\]](#) Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, London: Routledge, 2005. See also her later work *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[\[8\]](#) Lisa Nakamura and Geert Lovink, 'Talking race and cyberspace: An interview with Lisa Namakura,' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 26(10) (2005): 60–65, doi: [10.1353/fro.2005.0014](#).

[\[9\]](#) Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

[\[10\]](#) Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, New York: Routledge, 2009, doi: [10.4324/9780203891421](#).

[\[11\]](#) Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*, New York: Routledge, 2017, doi: [10.4324/9781315748962](#).

[12] McLelland contributed an important paper to the double special-issue that launched the *Internet Histories* journal: Mark McLelland, 'Early challenges to multilingualism on the internet: The case of Han character-based scripts,' *Internet Histories* 1–2 (2017): 119–28, doi: [10.1080/24701475.2017.1280889](https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2017.1280889).

[13] See Mark McLelland (ed.), *The End of Cool Japan: Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Challenges to Japanese Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, 2017, doi: [10.4324/9781315637884](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315637884). See also: Mark McLelland, 'Australia's "child-abuse material" legislation, internet regulation and the juridification of the imagination,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15(5) (2012): 467–84, doi: [10.1177/1367877911421082](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877911421082); and Mark McLelland, "'Not in front of the parents!' Young people, sexual literacies and intimate citizenship in the internet age,' *Sexualities* 20(1–2) (2017): 234–54, doi: [10.1177/1363460716645791](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460716645791).

[14] This point recurs in several essays in this issue, including [Vera Mackie](#)'s essay on Mark McLelland as an editor, translator and facilitator of other people's research.

MAIN

Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

URL: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue46/jackson.html>

© Copyright

Page constructed by [Carolyn Brewer](#)

Last modified: 14 Dec. 2021 0812