

# **The Social and Cultural Life of Information**

## **Workshop Programme**

**CSDS Delhi**

November 14-16, 2013



**Supported by TTI-IDRC, Delhi**

## Day One: Thursday, November 14

### Session One: The Biometric Century?

14:00 - 14:30

Workshop Introduction

Ravi Sundaram, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

14:30 - 15:30

Keith Breckenridge, University of Witwatersand, Johannesburg

*Technological Inertia: The Politics of Privacy and the Failure of Anglo-American Biometric Registration*

Discussant: Radhika Singha, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

15:30 - 16:00

Tea

16:00 - 17:00

Lawrence Cohen, University of California, Berkeley

*De-Duplicating India: On the Promise of Immateriality*

Discussant: Lawrence Liang, Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore

17:00 - 18:00

Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Research Associate, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

*Of Identity, Platform, and 'New' Information Infrastructures of Governance: Situating the Aadhaar Project within the History of Electronic Governance in India*

Discussant: Nayanika Mathur, University of Cambridge

## Day Two: Friday, November 15

### Session Two: The Colonial Archive

9:30 – 10:30

Miles Ogborn, Queen Mary, University of London  
*Speech Marks: Early Modern Information Geographies*  
Discussant: Ravi S. Vasudevan, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

10:30 - 11:30

Brian Larkin, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York  
*How to Spell Mohammedan? Note on Circulation, Standardisation & the Documentary Production of Empire*  
Discussant: Miles Ogborn, Queen Mary, University of London

11:30 - 12:00

Tea

12:00 - 13:00

Radhika Singha, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi  
*Punished by Surveillance: Legal Codification and Police Modernisation in Colonial India 1861-1923*  
Discussant: Keith Breckenridge, University of Witwatersand, Johannesburg

13:00 - 14:00

Lunch

### Session Three: Contemporary Life-worlds

14:00 - 15:00

Nayanika Mathur, University of Cambridge  
*Man-eaters of the Indian Himalaya: Identifying, Naming, and Hunting Big Cats in Uttarakhand*  
Discussant: Awadhendra Sharan, CSDS, Delhi

15:00 - 16:00

Ramah McKay, University of Minnesota

*Data's Discordances: The Political Life of Medical Information in Maputo, Mozambique*

Discussant: Sarada Balagopalan, CSDS, Delhi

16:00 - 16:30

Tea

16:30 - 17:30

Tarangini Sriraman, *Centre de Sciences Humaines*, New Delhi

*'One Hearth, One Home, One Family': Materiality and Affect in Urban Poor Enumeration*

Discussant: Ramah McKay, University of Minnesota

### **Day Three: Saturday, November 16**

#### **Session Four: Urban Information Ecologies**

10:00 -11:00

Ravi Sundaram, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

*Information, Transparency, and the New Urban Turn*

Discussant: Lawrence Cohen, University of California, Berkeley

11:00 -11:30

Tea

11:30 -12:30

Solomon Benjamin, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

*Occupied and Possessed Cities: Territoriality, Information, and Techno-Managerial Politics*

Discussant: Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Research Associate, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

12:30 - 13:15

Lunch

## **Session Five: Media Archaeologies**

13:15 - 14:15

Ravi S. Vasudevan, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

*Cinematic Information in the Colonial Archive, 1940-1946*

Discussant: Brian Larkin, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York

14:15 - 15:15

Lawrence Liang, Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore

*Of Hidden Cameras and Hidden Truths: Law and Visual Evidence in an Era of Digital Uncertainty*

Discussant: Ravi Sundaram, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi

15:15 - 16:15

Tea

16:15 - 17:00

**Closing Session**

## Paper Abstracts and Brief Biographic Notes

Day One: Thursday, November 14

### Keith Breckenridge

*Technological Inertia: The Politics of Privacy and the Failure of Anglo-American Biometric Registration*

In a famous 1969 essay, Thomas Hughes coined the phrase technological momentum to describe the mutually reinforcing social and technological imperatives that have fostered the development of many large infrastructures. Recently, many of those who follow the development of state information systems have remarked on the momentum gathering behind biometric identification and cash transfers in almost all the countries of the former colonial world. What we are witnessing seems to be a very pure instance of Hughes' insight-- technological momentum building a new global infrastructure of biometric citizenship. Yet the reverse also seems important. In many of the countries of the North Atlantic, biometric registration systems have long and fraught histories of development. In almost every generation powerful forces in the state have argued for universal biometric registration. They have all failed. This paper examines the way that an inconsistent, indeed often an incoherent, but well-developed political philosophy of privacy has defeated these efforts in every case. And it explores why the same political movements have not developed in the former colonial world.

**Keith Breckenridge** is an Associate Professor and the Deputy Director at Wiser- The Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand. He writes about the cultural and economic history of South Africa, particularly the gold mining industry, the state and the development of information systems. He is in the final stages of writing *Biometric State*, a book project that shows how the South African obsession with Francis Galton's universal fingerprint identity registration served as a 20th century incubator for the current systems of biometric citizenship being developed throughout the South. He has published widely on the history and contemporary politics of biometrics, with important papers in *Africa*, *History Workshop*, the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *Public Culture* and comparative anthologies on systems of identification. This interest in biometrics has also drawn him in to the global institutional history of state documentation, especially the forms of birth, death and marriage registration that are ubiquitous (but very poorly understood) in Europe, Asia and the Americas. With Simon Szreter, he edited *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History* published by OUP and the British Academy in 2012, and is currently working on *Power without Knowledge*, a book that examines the very limited forms of official knowledge that supported the state in South Africa in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

## Lawrence Cohen

### *De-Duplicating India: On the Promise of Immateriality*

The decade of the 2000s were marked by the creation of two massive projects reconceiving the nation and its population as a database through the actants and imaginaries of biometrics and big data: the National Population Register (NPR) focused on a new government of territory and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) focused on a new government of money. The relation between the two projects and their big data has been disputed and continues to evolve, creating the threat of duplication for projects organized around the imperative to end corruption and enter history through the promise of "de-duplicating" the nation. The figure of de-duplication, a technical demand of database governance that reworks the long-standing colonial and post-colonial ambivalence with the duplicate as a condition of modernity, has been particularly associated with the promise and threat of UIDAI and its "branded" identity card, Aadhaar. This talk examines the political subject of de-duplicated belonging through an iterated claim made by UIDAI personnel: that Aadhaar, despite appearances, is "not a card by only a number." De-duplication depends upon such a claim of immateriality, that this paper links to the work of Ravi Sundaram, Matthew Hull, Sanjay Srivastava, and others. A scene in Hull's powerful ethnography of the Islamabad Plan, in which a senior planner deplores the propensity of the "government of paper" to subvert the reason of government it was created to supplement, and in which he imagines an end to paper, offers a way in to the dream of immateriality and to its potential realization in UIDAI. To explore some of the conditions of de-duplicated life and its emergent political subjectivity, the paper examines three sites where UID has been deployed: (1) a Mumbai AIDS NGO focused on transgendered women's health; (2) a Jharkhand village that was a key experimental site for the transformation of the old age pension; and (3) a Varanasi Dalit slum that is in the process of registering "everyone" for their Aadhaar.

**Lawrence Cohen** is Sarah Kailath Professor of India Studies in the department of Anthropology and the Medical Anthropology Program at the University of California, where he is the Director of the Center for South Asia Studies. In addition to sociology and anthropology, he has trained in geriatric medicine and was the author of the multiple award-winning *No Aging in India: Modernity, Senility, and the Family*. Other research has included work on AIDS and sexual biopolitics, on the global emergence of the kidney as a site of ethical publicity, on the cataract and the 19th-century emergence of the surgical camp, and on the sexuality of "backwardness" in U.P. and Bihar. He has recently begun work on UIDAI and the emergence and promised "de-duplication" of the data-nation.

## **Sumandro Chattapadhyay**

*Of Identity, Platform, and 'New' Information Infrastructures of Governance: Situating the Aadhaar Project within the History of Electronic Governance in India*

The growing literature about the Aadhaar project, as proposed and under deployment, have variously focused on its prospective implications for citizenship including those for differently-abled bodies, for efficiency of governmental services (especially of calculations and monitoring of public funds distribution), for formalisation and unification of unorganised banking and welfare-accessing practices, and the making of the database state in India and its attempted privatisation. The Aadhaar project is still in the process of completing, and substantially far from completion of, its initial phase of registration and assignment of the Unique Identification Numbers. Given this restricted scope for commenting upon the Aadhaar project's proposed model of data-driven governance, this paper tries to read the project's informatic imagination against a survey of Indian state's electronic governance initiatives, and explores whether the former proposes a 'new' imagination of governmental information infrastructure in India.

Briefly charting the recent history of development of electronic governance systems and policies in India since early-1980s, the paper focuses on the physical and informatic aspects of the established infrastructures of electronic governance. The proposition of the Aadhaar project as an 'identity infrastructure platform' to facilitate and streamline cross-department electronic interactions between the state and citizens is examined within the national electronic governance context. The notion of the 'platform' and its implications, especially for informatic technologies and experiences of the state, are discussed in detail. In conclusion, the paper engages with a few earlier commentaries on the Aadhaar project and argues for the need to situate and analyse the project within the history of electronic governance in India.

**Sumandro Chattapadhyay** is a researcher associated with The Sarai Programme, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, and HasGeek Media LLP, Bangalore, India. His interests include informatisation of governance in India, policies and politics of knowledge, and critical theory. Previously a student of economics, he has worked on topics related to urban development, data visualisation, and open data policies. He is a free software and open access enthusiast.

## Day Two: Friday, November 15

### Miles Ogborn

*Speech Marks: Early Modern Information Geographies*

The purpose of the creation of information infrastructures is to try and ensure that information can persist across time and move across space: what is produced as information in the here and now is intended to be retrieved and used in the there and then. In the case of early modern mercantile and imperial information infrastructures this operated at a global scale. Making these infrastructures work, however, also relied at various points of transition in the social life of information upon a complex ecology of forms of grounded material inscription, embodied and located performances, and face-to-face communicative social interaction. This paper will use examples from the English East India Company in the seventeenth century and Caribbean natural history in the eighteenth century to examine the relationships between these global and local geographies of information, and to suggest the significance of forms of oral communication for understanding the social and cultural life of information.

**Miles Ogborn** is Professor of Geography and Head of the School of Geography at Queen Mary University of London. He is an historical geographer and the author of *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York, 1998), *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, 2007) and *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 2008). He is currently working on the spoken word in the early modern Caribbean and its Atlantic World.

## **Brian Larkin**

*How to Spell Mohammedan? Note on Circulation, Standardisation & the Documentary Production of Empire*

In 1923 the Colonial Office sent out a circular to colonial territories and to the India and Foreign Offices asking how the term Mohammedan was spelled in their administrations. The aim was to adopt an authoritative ruling as to the correct spelling which could then be made consistent across the British empire.

Through close reading my paper will analyze this series of documents as an exemplar of practices of information storage, circulation and retrieval that constitutes the communicative infrastructure of British imperial rule. Empire, the projection of political power across space, is a function of circulation. Imperial control organizes diverse territories into a hierarchical system that places into motion a ceaseless movement of files, persons, laws, despatches and administrative practices. I argue that the circulation of files, such as those on the spelling of Mohammedan, are the material practices whereby forms of circulation are enacted and which constitute the command and control structure of imperial orders. I examine how the file is a political technology that is central to the constitution of empire as a modern system of administration.

**Brian Larkin** is the author of *Signal and Noise: Infrastructure, Media and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, (Duke, 2008) and the co-editor of *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (California, 2000). He has written about the history and materialities of media technologies in Nigeria, as well as on the circulation of cultural forms, piracy and infrastructure. His current work examines the intersection of religion and media and with Charles Hirschkind, he edited a special issue of *Social Text*, 'Media and the Political Forms of Religion'. He is currently completing the manuscript, *Secular Machines: Media and the Materiality of Islamic Revival*. Larkin is the co-founder and co-organizer (with Stefan Andriopoulos) of the Columbia University Seminar on Media Theory and History. He sits on the board of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, the editorial board of the journal *Africa* and is a member of the *Social Text* editorial collective. He is associate professor of anthropology at Barnard College, Columbia University.

## Radhika Singha

*Punished by Surveillance: Legal Codification and Police Modernisation in Colonial India 1861-1923*

From the 1860s legal codification, the scrutiny of the high courts, and the expansion of a legal profession brought certain changes to the practices and procedures of 'preventive policing' in colonial India. Those targeted as the **badmaashes**, the rascals of a police jurisdiction had to be stabilized by paperwork and judicial proceedings so that they could be included in the ranks of the 'habitual offender' even if they had not been convicted for a specific offence. The policing of vagrancy and 'bad-livelihood' was cast as a major plank of colonial order. Yet its judicial reference points remained so loose, that the line between the legal, the discretionary and the outright illegal were continuously disputed. The photograph and the fingerprint seemed to have the potential to condense and circulate information about dangerous elements across police jurisdictions. In fact their main use was within local parameters – to buttress a process designed to turn the troublesome or disruptive figure into the **dakhila wala**, that is someone who had to present himself at the police station when called for. The 'respectable orders' accepted the legitimacy of subjecting dangerous plebian elements to this state of police servitude. However they also felt that such procedures created an unpredictable interface between the realms of plebian and police or executive 'illegality'.

**Radhika Singha** teaches history at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her research themes focus on the social history of crime and criminal law, identification practices in relation to colonial governmentality, borders and border –crossing in South Asia. The mobilisation of human resources from India for World War one has become a second, often intersecting research track. She has published a book entitled *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 1998), and articles on identification practices, law and infrastructural power, colonial travel documents, and non-combatant labour in World War one.

## **Nayanika Mathur**

### *Man-eaters of the Indian Himalaya: Identifying, Naming, and Hunting Big Cats in Uttarakhand*

This essay is centered upon the problems associated with identifying a big cat as a 'man-eater' in present-day Uttarakhand in northern India. The naming and authorization of the death or capture of a man-eater takes place through the means of a hunting license issued by a senior state official. The identification of a specific cat as a man-eater at the point of its killing remains a highly fraught enterprise for the Indian state. This is largely due to the fact that multiple big cats can be operating in the same region without all of them necessarily being dangerous to human lives. It is only when post-mortems are conducted that definitive proof of human-eating can be furnished. The paper begins by tracing the history of the collection of information about man-eaters and the development of a rubric that allowed the colonial British state to identify particular ones as those that should be, as the official notes describe it, 'destroyed'. It moves on to dwell on the protectionist legal regime that was extended to cover all big cats in the post-independence phase and the repercussions this has had for the Uttarakhand region, which witnesses the highest incidences of human-big cat conflict in India. Inherent difficulties in ever properly identifying a big cat as a man-eater coupled with conservationism has greatly exacerbated the struggle by local state agents to identify, name, and hunt big cats. The paper ends with a discussion of the legal problems that surface when a big cat that has been hunted down proves to not, in fact, be a man-eater and how these incidences are papered over by state officials.

**Nayanika Mathur** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Anthropology at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (CRASSH), University of Cambridge. Her doctoral research traced the movement of law through the bureaucratic apparatus of a Himalayan state in India. This work is currently under review as a monograph with the tentative title of *'Paper Tiger: bureaucratic everydayness and the developmental state in Himalayan India'*. Her research interests are centered upon the study of law, bureaucracy, the written, materiality, new technologies, and human-big cat conflict. A new research project is underway, which compares the introduction of national identification infrastructures in the UK and India. The objective of this work is to examine the nature and forms of conspiratorial theorizing these state practices premised upon the utilization of new technologies allow for.

## **Ramah McKay**

*Data's Discordances: The Political Life of Medical Information in Maputo, Mozambique*

What do practices of gathering, analyzing, and ordering medical information in Mozambique reveal about transnational medical governance today? This paper draws on ethnographic examples of the ways in which information about HIV/AIDS is collected, documented, analyzed, and deployed in order to illustrate how medical information practices enact and complicate medical authority in a context marked by multiple local, national and transnational institutional interventions into public health. By following the medical and bureaucratic practices through which health information is generated and used at a national level and in relation to the management of individual patient cases, the paper explores the forms of governmental and medical multiplicity that structure transnational medical interventions in Mozambique, and highlights the forms of care and citizenship made available by such interventions.

**Ramah McKay** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota. Her research explores how transnational medical interventions in Mozambique transform possibilities for care, claims-making, and knowledge production. She is currently working on a book manuscript, *Postsocial Prescriptions* that follows the experiences of Mozambican patients and health workers in a context where transnational investment gives rise to institutional and governmental multiplicity. Her ongoing research investigates new (and renewed) transnational linkages between Mozambique and non-traditional donors (including India and Brazil).

## Tarangini Sriraman

*'One Hearth, One Home, One Family': Materiality and Affect in Urban Poor Enumeration*

The question of how to define a household and what space a family can occupy in urban realms is propelled by the discursive possibilities of the identification document. What kind of affective ties of kinship in a spatial and temporal context are recognized or alternately, forged, by operative definitions of a household for purposes of ration card enumeration of the urban poor, is a question this paper asks. Drawing on ethnographic work in a slum cluster in South Delhi, this paper traces marginal subjects' endeavours to mould familial bonds through artifactual paths provided by the document. The paper is interested particularly in the material minutiae that lurk behind the official delineations of household within identity documents. I study the erasures, disruptions and re-imaginings of familial affect produced by performative interrogations of household in ration card enumeration. While they are highly vital to the production of welfare discourse in India, these re-imaginings of the family in official enumeration practices demand a range of evidentiary performances, engender different forms of sociality and provoke unlikely modes of self-insertion into the record. The paper navigates shifting sites of the demarcation of household for purposes of issuing identity cards and ration cards by commenting on a vital enumeration initiative in 1990 of Delhi's slum residents which sought to partially lift the aura of illegality around urban poor occupation in government land.

**Tarangini Sriraman** is a Postdoctoral Fellow, Urban Dynamics at the *Centre de Sciences Humaines*, New Delhi. Her work engages with the historical relationship between identification documents, law, citizenship, marginality and welfare processes in the urban spaces of Delhi. She is interested in the material forms and the legal, cultural and social aspects of documents like ration cards, voter cards, beggar permits, housing-related identity cards and tokens in colonial and postcolonial contexts. She has also worked on the various cultural and social spheres of circulation of identity documents in the colonial medical landscape of epidemic control and the imperial pursuits of trade and commerce.

## Day Three: Saturday, November 16

### Ravi Sundaram

#### *Information, Transparency, and the New Urban Turn*

India's cities have seen the initiation of massive informational infrastructures that have little parallel in any postcolonial society. Biometric identification, GIS mapping, transportation databases, city-wide CCTV cameras are among the many initiatives underway. The 'informational turn' poses a cluster of new questions for research on postcolonial media infrastructures. These include relationships between social power and the urban poor, the modes of visibility and disruption in the city, and fractures within urban regimes when informational structures are rolled out by competing state actors. The informational turn has mobilized regime modernizers, corporate reformers and social movements. Transparency discourses are significant, as technologies of visibility seek to reassemble undocumented populations into enumerated biometric databases. We are witnessing a major attempt to transform the existing technologies of managing urban populations since 1947. New information infrastructures attempt to rearrange the relationship between urban governance and traditional politics, seen as expressive of a corrupt and opaque urban system. I look at the demolition of a squatter settlement on the banks of the Yamuna, and the making of a GIS database for the capital to open discussions on these questions.

**Ravi Sundaram's** work rests at the intersection of the post-colonial city and contemporary media experiences. As media technology and urban life have intermingled in the post-colonial world, new challenges have emerged for contemporary cultural theory. Sundaram has looked at the phenomenon that he calls 'pirate modernity', an illicit form of urbanism that draws from media and technological infrastructures of the post-colonial city. His current research deals with urban fear after media modernity, where he looks at the worlds of image circulation after the mobile phone, ideas of transparency and secrecy, and the media event.

Sundaram was one of the initiators of the Centre's Sarai programme which he co-directs with his colleague Ravi Vasudevan. His publications include *Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in Delhi* (2009), *No Limits: Media Studies from India* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Delhi's Twentieth Century* (forthcoming OUP).

## **Solomon Benjamin**

### *Occupied and Possessed Cities: Territoriality, Information, and Techno-Managerial Politics*

Considering practices of 'urban' territoriality where land is 'occupied and possessed' points to a multiplicity of local inscriptions. This approach rejects the dominant frame of planning to pose an urban that escapes assumptions underlying both modernity and developmentalism. These are complex and necessarily uncertain worlds constituted in a multiplicity of logics with vital political space underpinned by an operative terrain of 'illegibility'. Theorizing via such practices is necessarily inter-disciplinary, unruly and un-disciplined. It would refuse easy conceptual binaries, passivity, and the possibility of 'projectification'. It is hardly surprising that new age governmentalties are a managerial police. Here 'the city' is assumed across ideological positions to be constituted from singular histories and logics, and emphasizes a frame around modernity. Thus, the promotion and criticism of 'E-Governance' and GIS view these multiple inscriptions to be informal, non-conforming, and mafia driven. Developmentalism is then concerned with the deserving and undeserving poor, the BPL, 'widows', or 'Dalits' – categories which modernisers and technocrats aim to standardize or tag via GIS based planning linked to the UID. A critical perspective while rejecting the narrative of an emancipatory modernity needs to also question techno-managerial hegemony as an inevitable panoptic management, and perhaps a de-politicizing phantasmagoria.

**Solomon Benjamin** is Associate Professor at the Humanities and Social Science Department of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India. Benjamin has a PhD from Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Urban Studies and Planning, where his doctoral thesis focused on the history of a small firm industrial area of East Delhi. He has published in major international journals such as the IJURR, SARAI reader, GeoForum, Third World Planning Review, and European journals like Clusters, Agone, and Review Tria Monde with works translated into French, Spanish, German, and Catalan. Benjamin is on the editorial board of the international journal of critical geography Antipode and member of the reviewer panel for the IJURR, Antipode, Urban Studies World Development, Environment and Urbanization. He was faculty in the School of Social Sciences at Bangalore's National Institute of Advanced Studies, in the University of Toronto's Dept. of Political Science, and a visiting faculty at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. Benjamin's recent contribution to the academic literature, 'Occupancy Urbanism' has emerged from his work on urban land, economy, and globalization, with a geographical interest in Southern Cities.

## **Ravi S. Vasudevan**

### *Cinematic Information in the Colonial Archive, 1940-1946*

One of the key concerns of this paper is to understand the nature of the colonial film archive, and, more specifically, to consider film as archive, as a material form which imprints information and experience. The focus is on what were called information films in the 1940s, films of propaganda, education and instruction; the institutional infrastructures which supported their production, including governmental departments, media policies, the advent of 16mm projectors, film experts, film training institutions, film societies influencing aesthetic formations, as well as dedicated institutions to promote and/or directly undertake filmmaking. Using film analysis and print-archival research, I try to explore films of the period as encoding information about the political, social and cultural institutions and networks they derive from. I look at films as films, as surfaces that invite reflection on how they are composed, the narrative and aesthetic data that constitute them, and how these in turn gesture to the articulation of a particular world of film experts and technicians, film companies, economic enterprise and public institutions. Another strategy I employ is to look at film/media institutions through biographical ephemera, tracking career lines as they weave amongst media institutions. My final consideration is to take the question of film and information into the realm of film's material form, as a kind of informationalizing apparatus, a means of the gathering, storing, classifying, marking, retrieving, and recombining of footage.

**Ravi Vasudevan** works in the area of film and media history at Sarai/CSDS. His work on cinema explores issues in film, social history, politics, and contemporary media transformation. He is visiting faculty at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Vasudevan is a member of the Sarai Reader editorial collective, the advisory board of Screen, and co-founder and editor of BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies. His publications include *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (edited, 2000) and *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (2010). His current research tracks the way film use was dispersed from the site of the cinema into a variety of practical functions that constitute a crucial archive of mediated life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is also exploring the emergence of video technologies as part of a new Sarai project he is coordinating with Ravi Sundaram on media infrastructures and information.

## **Lawrence Liang**

### *Of Hidden Cameras and Hidden Truths: Law and Visual Evidence in an Era of Digital Uncertainty*

The revelation of scandals by sting operations using hidden cameras and the widespread use of truth technologies including narco analysis and brain mapping tests have been two important signposts of our contemporary media world. They have also been at the heart of legal debate over privacy, media ethics and legal disorder. The increasing reliance on information systems and digital technologies in the world of law enforcement and the courts raise challenging questions of how we think of the relationship between the public/private, visible/invisible in legal discourse. How do we think of the sites of the production of law when the world of the laboratory and the studio increasingly get blurred with the new emphasis on the independent forensic value of visual information? This paper examines how the law responds to but is also significantly reconstituted by new technologies and suggests that a useful way of thinking of the social life of information is to examine its afterlife as law.

**Lawrence Liang**, is a co-founder of Alternative law Forum (ALF), a collective of lawyers working on various aspects of law, legality and power. His key areas of interest are law, technology and culture, the politics of copyright and he has associated for ten years with Sarai, CSDS. He also doubles as a film scholar and is currently finishing a book on law, justice and cinema in India. He is also a fellow at the Centre for Internet and society and serves on its board.