

SA-UK Bilateral Research Chair in Digital Humanities

The National Research Foundation (NRF) in co-operation with the British Academy have established a Bilateral Research Chair in Digital Humanities. The University of the Western Cape is pleased to announce that as a result of NRF British Academy review process, Professor Premesh Lalu has been awarded the Chair (under the auspices of the SARChI programme at Tier 1) based in the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Cape. The Chair is an initiative of the CHR's Iyatsiba Lab, and was proposed to build on the already stellar achievements of the Laboratory of Kinetic Objects, the Documentary Film Programme, the Project on Sound and Media, and the New Archival Visions initiative. The NRF and British Academy awarded the chair to conduct research and study on the changing relationships between the human and technology, historically and in the present.

Research focus of the Chair

The Chair in the Digital Humanities builds on the experience and success of the first phase of the CHR study on the human and technology (Lalu, 2007; Minkley et al, 2016; Grunebaum et al, 2017). While at times the digital is too hastily conflated with the virtual and computational sciences, the CHR's distinctive method of humanistic inquiry approaches the question of mediation as an "inseparable agency" of our global conjuncture (DSI Decadal Plan 2022; Williams, 1976). This perspective sheds instrumental approaches to technology (Adorno, 1961) through a reckoning with the human and technology as co-evolutionary features of mnemotechnics, or machine memory (Stiegler, 1994), with the digital as a necessary condition to this development. What shifts has the digital implied for formative ideas of the public sphere, citizenship, the world of work, political communities of belonging, literacy, nature, and the idea of the university on which the humanities were founded? The Chair is invited to lead a new study on the mutual imbrication of the humanities and technology, as the digital rescripts their co-constitution and alters conditions of sense-perception structuring contemporary lived experience. Emerging from established research platforms on the Becoming Technical of the Human, Communicating the Humanities, Aesthetic Education, and New Ecologies of the Subject, and sustained through ongoing inquiries on the encounter between archives, art, and digitisation, the CHR is uniquely placed to host a Chair in the Digital Humanities.

The Chair will drive a significant research agenda in the CHR to meet UWC's commitment to national development goals and the institution's Vision 2035, thereby enhancing the CHR's already substantial impacts (NRF Flagship Review 2022). Through convening reading programmes, seminars, and conferences with international partners, exhibitions and performances, as well as masterclasses and training labs in techniques of the digital, the Chair will be a major resource for postgraduate study, interfaculty research collaboration, the activation of archives and scholarly resources situated in multiple publics and university constituencies, and crafting pathways to youth employment in the digital arts (Murray, 2022).

Professor Premesh Lalu

Premesh Lalu is the former director of the Centre for Humanities Research and has a B1 rating from the National Research Foundation. Lalu is ideally placed to advance the CHR's distinct methodological interventions of producing trans-hemispheric research teams and postgraduate networks on the humanities in a digital age given his vast local and international scholarly engagements. The SA Dept of Science and Technology invited Lalu as then CHR director and PI of the CHR's DSI-NRF Flagship to convene the 2016 National Science Week on behalf of the department. In a debate on New Technologies and the Human Condition, Lalu asked how the human is implicated in the rise of new

technologies, to the extent that the landscapes of knowledge and meanings of existence have been so thoroughly altered as to produce a planetary crisis. This is a question at the heart of his recent book, *Undoing Apartheid* (2022), which offers a humanistic reading of the technological changes brought about by the scientific revolution of the past two centuries. *Undoing Apartheid* takes apart apartheid by tracking its rationale in the disciplines of psychotechnics (Wundt, 1920) and cybernetics, or the science of communication and control (Wiener, 1948) upon which it constructed a sensory order (Hayek, 1936). Together, they explain the dynamic relations between the human and technology that is now revealed in the onset of an ecology of the digital. In redirecting this new ecological sensibility, Lalu argues that only a retraining of the senses through an aesthetic education tuned to the co-evolutionary schema of the human and technology can help us to surpass apartheid's sensory order as a planetary predicament.

Lalu is a former Advisory Board member of the international Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes, a former chairperson of the Handspring Trust for Puppetry in Education, and a former trustee of the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa. He has held fellowships at the Humanities Long Room at Trinity College, Dublin; Emory University (Rockefeller-funded Institutions of Public Scholarship Programme); Amherst College (Mellon Humanities Initiative); and the University of Minnesota (the Interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Global Change). Lalu has been invited to lecture at Cornell University, University of Virginia, Shanghai University, Northwestern University, Bologna University, Addis Ababa University, American University of Cairo, Utrecht University, Ghent University, Macalester College, University of Minnesota, Columbia University, University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University, University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, University of the Free State, University di Firenze, Delhi University, University of Santiago, Chile, Duke University, and the Tropen Museum (Amsterdam), among others. As former director of the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, he served as convenor for the Department of Science and Innovation-National Research Foundation Flagship on Critical Thought in African Humanities of the CHR and has served as principal investigator on seven major Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grants at the University of the Western Cape. He was also the academic lead in initiating the CHR's Iyatsiba Lab in Greatmore Street, Woodstock, Cape Town.

Lalu currently serves as an advisory board member of the Käte Hamburger Research Center in Munich, Germany, Advisory Board Member of the Leuphana Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture and Society, Lüneburg, Germany, and an External Advisory Board member of the Humanities Long Room Hub at Trinity College Dublin. He is a former international Advisory Board member of the Jackman Humanities Institute and juror for the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart for the 2022-23 session.