APPLICATION FORM (ARI–Luce Collaboratory) :
Entry # 45251

PERSONAL PARTICULARS

Name

Kenzell Huggins

Gender

Male

Country of Origin

United States

Current Location (Country)

United States

Email Address

khuggins@uchicago.edu

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

Title of PhD Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology; Vibrant Industries: Animating Media in Singapore

Year Obtained (PhD Degree)

2025

Name of University (PhD Degree)

University of Chicago

Area(s) of Research

- Inter-Asia Engagements
- Science, Technology and Society

Regional Focus of Research

- Southeast Asia (Primary Focus)

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS

Academic Publication / Research Output 1

Babcock, Josh, and Kenzell Huggins. 2021. “Destination Storytelling Singapore: Media Development, Tourism Promotion, and the Mercurial Global Audience.” Published in Southeast Asian Media Studies 3 (3).

Academic Publication / Research Output 2

Kenzell Huggins. 2023. “National Day Platform 2022: Exploring a Singaporean Metaverse.” Published in Open Systems 1 by the Singapore Art Museum, curated by Duncan Bass. <https://opensystems.sg/os1/sources/huggins/>

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Academic Publication / Research Output 3

Susan Blum, Asha Barnes, Kenzell Huggins, and Eric Haanstad. 2018. Practicing Anthropology and Ethnographic Engineering in a Community-Based Ecological Project. Published in Practicing Anthropology 40(1): 26-28.

Award / Fellowship / Grant Obtained 1

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship

PAPER & RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Title of Paper

Whose Media?: Refiguring Authorship and Responsibility in Inter-Asian Media Co-Production

Abstract

Co-production, the act of producing film with significant multinational financial and creative input, has been an important part of the development strategy for Singaporean film and television industries since the Singapore Film Commission was established in 1998. Though Singapore has made co-production agreements globally, co-productions with Asian partners have been key as the Singaporean media authorities position the local media industry as a key player in inter-Asian media development. While co-production fosters the growth of a smaller film industry through sharing resources and knowledge, co-production also introduces questions about whether certain media texts truly belong to a certain country's "national cinema". Understanding the problem of attribution of national cinema as akin to problems of the attribution of authorship and responsibility for a text or speech act, this article argues that applying sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of the production format to international media industries will elucidate how collaborating industries may variously claim credit for a particular media text. Goffman was concerned with the overly simplistic attribution of responsibility for the production of any given utterance to a single speaker. Instead, he showed that there are at least three roles associated with the production of any given utterance: a principal, in whose name the utterance is made; an author, who orders and conceives the word of the utterance; and an animator, who voices the utterance. This article takes this model, applies it to media texts instead of utterances, and scales the three roles from individuals to national media industries that can claim aesthetic and cultural credit for their involvement in the creation of a given media text.

The article brings together historical, ethnographic, and interview data. A brief history of non-Singaporean film production in Singapore, alongside Singaporean co-production strategies, is presented. Ethnography conducted at the Asian Television Forum in 2021 and 2022 shows how media producers from the Asia region situate their own as well as Singaporean media production in a comparative global regime of media industries. This is supplemented with interviews conducted with Singaporean media professionals which create a narrative of the Singaporean media industry largely serving as an animator (in Goffman's sense) for the creative direction of foreign media industries.

Keywords

Singapore; film and television; co-production; Asian media development

Work Progress & Relevance

This paper is a revision of prior research, intended to be submitted as a journal article. The paper utilizes data derived from research completed as part of my doctoral dissertation. Within the dissertation, the data was utilized largely within a chapter focused on the placement of Singaporean film production within ideologies and stereotypes of Asia. In contrast, my proposed research project narrows its focus specifically on the question of co-production as an inter-Asian problem in Singaporean film histories. The application of Goffman's theory of the production format to this situation, my proposed theoretical solution, is a recent development within my thinking on these questions building on feedback received during the dissertation process. Specifically, the scaling of Goffman's concept of the production format to the level of a national cinema (from its usual level of application to individuals or institutions) presents an innovation for linguistic anthropology's approach to Goffmanian theory. Before the beginning of the program, I will rewrite the data and existing analysis from the dissertation into a new coherent draft integrating these ideas.

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These two transformations–focusing on inter-Asian Singaporean co-production and scaling Goffmanian theory–inform the two outcomes I intend to get through participating in the program. First, given my own research focus on Singapore, I would expand the regional perspectives within my research by thinking with colleagues whose expertise lie in the various countries that these co-productions are being formed with. Second, the interdisciplinary nature of the program is an opportunity to understand how my application of the work of a classic social theorist reads from to different scholarly traditions. After incorporating feedback and insights following the program, I would submit the article to a leading journal in linguistic anthropology.

Biography of Paper Author

Kenzell Huggins is a cultural and linguistic anthropologist who studies the construction of social value around and through screened entertainment media industries, with particular attention to the semiotics of media. His dissertation research examines the production of film and television in Singapore. The project explores the values attached to developing film and television production in a place historically perceived to be at the peripheries of global media production. These issues are analyzed through the conceptual lens of animation, understanding media production as the semiotic construction of life. Kenzell holds a Ph.D in Anthropology from the University of Chicago and B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Notre Dame. His work has been supported by the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program. He is currently a Teaching Fellow at the University of Chicago.

Curriculum Vitae

- ARI-LUCE-KHuggins-CV-Tabular.pdf

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & NETWORKING

What do you hope to gain from participating in the Collaboratory?

Through participating in the Collaboratory I intend to sharpen my writing in a community of fellow scholars of Southeast Asia. Working in a university without significant Southeast Asian studies representation, the Collaboratory represents an opportunity to connect with other scholars with similar interests.

Which aspects of the Collaboratory are most relevant to you?

- Writing Residency and Academic Academy
- Regional & International Networking and Research Showcase

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Name of Referee

Constantine Nakassis

Affiliation of Referee

PhD Advisor

Email Address of Referee

cnakassi@uchicago.edu

Recommendation Letter

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Kenzell Huggins

Teaching Fellow in the Social Sciences
Department of Anthropology
University of Chicago

khuggins@uchicago.edu

+1-(904)-487-8376

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

09/2016-08/2025	**Ph.D. in Anthropology** at University of Chicago, United States ● Dissertation Title: *Vibrant Industries: Animating Media in Singapore* ● Defended: May 1, 2025
06/2019	**M.A. in Anthropology** at University of Chicago, United States ● Thesis Title: *Exclusion and the Malay Golden Era in Singapore Government Planning*
08/2012-06/2016	**B.A. in Anthropology** at University of Notre Dame, United States

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

09/2025-Present	**Teaching Fellow in the Social Sciences** at University of Chicago, United States

RESEARCH FOCUS

- Linguistic and Cultural Anthropology
- Semiotics and anthropology of media
- Singapore; Southeast Asia
- Semiotic approaches to theories of animation
- Screened entertainment media industries: film, television, gaming, and VR
- Histories of Asian media industrial and aesthetic practices
- Multimodality, subtitling and captioning; language politics of multimodality

PUBLICATIONS

2023	"National Day Platform 2022: Exploring a Singaporean Metaverse." ● Published in *Open Systems 1* by the Singapore Art Museum, curated by Duncan Bass. ● <https://opensystems.sg/os1/sources/huggins/>
2021	"Destination Storytelling Singapore: Media Development, Tourism Promotion, and the Mercurial Global Audience." ● Babcock, Josh, and **Kenzell Huggins**. ● Published in *Southeast Asian Media Studies* 3 (3). ● Peer-reviewed.
2020	"Un/Boxing Fulfillment: A Field Guide to Logistical Worlds." Published in Allegra Lab. ● Julie Chu, Philana Woo, **Kenzell Huggins**, Heangjin Park, and Jack Mullee. ● <https://allegralaboratory.net/un-boxing-fulfillment-a-field-guide-to-logistical-worlds/>
2018	"Practicing Anthropology and Ethnographic Engineering in a Community-Based Ecological Project." ● Susan Blum, Asha Barnes, **Kenzell Huggins**, and Eric Haanstad. ● Published in *Practicing Anthropology* 40(1): 26-28.
2017	"Engagement in Practice: Not Just Technical Education; An Anthropological Perspective on a Community-Based Engineering Internship Program." ● **Kenzell Huggins**, Asha Barnes, Susan Blum, Jay Brockman, Gary Allen Gilot. ● Published in *2017 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference and Exposition Proceedings*.

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS

01/2018-01/2020	"Fulfillment" VR Project under Julie Chu and Daria Tsoupikova ● generating an interactive VR project about Amazon warehousing technologies and practices
08/2017-03/2020	UChicago Anthropology Media Lab Research Assistant ● managing multimedia and visual ethnography needs for the graduate students of the department

06/2016-06/2017	Bowman Creek Educational Ecosystem Intern, University of Notre Dame ● community-engaged anthropological research on a water reclamation and community improvement project with engineers
06/2013-09/2013	Summer Research Assistant for Profs. Gabriel Torres and Carolyn Nordstrom

HONORS AND AWARDS

Spring 2016	Graduate Research Fellowship ● National Science Foundation
Spring 2016	The Peter Brown Professional Achievement Award ● University of Notre Dame Department of Anthropology
Winter 2014	Franklyn E. Doan Scholar ● University of Notre Dame African Studies Department

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Winter 2021-Spring 2024	Aruna Global South ● Co-Director and Board Member
Fall 2023-Spring 2024	Semiotics Workshop at University of Chicago ● Coordinator
Fall 2023-Spring 2024	Michicagoan Conference, Universities of Chicago and Michigan ● Organizing Team, 2023
Fall 2018-Spring 2022	University of Chicago Anthropology Student Association ● Representative and Treasurer

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
1126 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637

16 January 2026

Dear colleagues,

I am very happy to recommend Dr. **Kenzell Huggins** for a position at the ARI–Luce Southeast Asian Studies Collaboratory at The Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore. I have known Dr. Huggins since Autumn 2016 when he matriculated in the Anthropology PhD program at the University of Chicago. I have served as his teacher in a number of graduate courses, his MA-advisor, as co-chair of his dissertation committee, and now as his colleague Dr. Huggins defended his PhD thesis, *Vibrant Industries: Animating Media in Singapore* on May 1, 2025 and is currently a Teaching Fellow (2025–2027) at the University of Chicago. Dr. Huggins is an incredibly intelligent and promising early-career scholar, as well as a nice and kind person, whose creative, interdisciplinary work engages the fields of Southeast Asian studies, media anthropology and media studies, as well as linguistic anthropology. Trained as an anthropologist and scholar of Southeast Asia, he is a perfect fit for your program. I give him my strong recommendation with absolutely no reservations.

Dr. Huggins's research focuses on ideological conceptions of creativity in Singapore's media industries (specifically, film, television, and new media) and how these mediate media production practices of various sorts, with a specific focus on the concept of *animation*, that is, the way in which media produce (rather than simply represent) forms of life and liveliness. Situating itself in the large-scale transformation of Singapore as an export-oriented industrialized city-state to one involved in global service and technology ("knowledge") industries, Huggins's research demonstrates how Singapore's media industries have become sites of financial and ideological invest-ment by the state for the cultivation of its liveliness and creativity. How is such a transformation attempted to be created by the city-state and industry players? And what, in turn, is *made*, what is brought to life, by such attempts to vivify media industries and the national publics they address and convoke? Dr. Huggins's research answers these questions, exploring how Singapore's investment in its media infrastructures open up broader topics of significance, viz. the relations between infrastructure, nation-building, and creativity and animacy in Southeast Asia. Particularly exciting in this project is how it brings together a historical view of the erasure of the so-called "Malay Golden Era" of cinema from a Singaporean genealogy of creative/industrial arts with a focus on how creativity is shaped in the present through various embodied, interactional processes. Indeed, Dr. Huggins's investigation of the production of various media objects, their circulation, and how they integrate larger political economies elucidate both wider social dynamics within contemporary Singapore as well as theoretical issues surrounding animation, co-production, and creativity. Dr. Huggins proposes as part of his ARI Luce application to focus on a specific part of this project, *co-production* in Singaporean cinema. As noted above, I am enthusiastic about this work and think the ARI–Luce Southeast Asian Studies Collaboratory at The Asia Research Institute is a perfect venue to support Dr. Huggins's scholarship.

Not only a fine scholar, Dr. Huggins has also been a model citizen at the University of Chicago. A constant presence at events in our department, Kenzell has also served as an organizer of, and participant in, various work-shops, conferences, and laboratories at the University. In such roles, he has shown himself to be professional, org-anized, and civically minded, precisely the kind of colleague that will enliven the collaborative space of a research institute such as yours. Moreover, he is at precisely the stage where he can benefit from a collaborative space bringing together early-career scholars of Southeast Asia. In short, I enthusiastically recommend **Dr. Kenzell Huggins** for a position at the ARI–Luce Southeast Asian Studies Collaboratory. If you have any questions, or wish to discuss Dr. Huggins's application, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Constantine V. Nakassis
Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, Faculty Associate,
Department of Comparative Human Development
Resource Faculty, Department of Cinema & Media Studies,
The University of Chicago; cnakassi@uchicago.edu, (773) 834 4810