PEER TO PEER
THE MAKERS OF THE OTHER INTERNET

A film by Andrew Garton

Secession/Films ⇄

WRITER/DIRECTOR	Andrew Garton
PRODUCER	[TBC]
GENRE	Documentary, feature length
BUDGET	[TBC]
LOCATIONS	Australia, Internet
STATUS	Pre-production development
SCHEDULE	[TBC]
AUDIENCE	Education, social media producers and consumers, digital literacy advocates

Poets, dreamers, and coders engineered a parallel internet that, by 1992, had email servers running in 72 countries. Two generations of information technology activists, mavericks, and peers meditate on the pre-web computer networks - the 'other internet' - they had created.

In Sydney, a trumpet player is troubled by rainforest timber imports and the human rights abuses taking place at the source of their extraction. In 1985 Ian Peter lands online where he hears about a new technology that could help strategize an international response to his concerns. He finds Mike Jensen, a young South African computer scientist who will help Ian and many others establish a global electronic network. In 1989 Ian and Mike launch Pegasus Networks from the back of a combi in northern NSW.

In Melbourne, a young keyboard player in an Afro-reggae band wonders why she knows so little about Africa and the people she is told are living under extremely difficult conditions there. Karen Banks leaves Australia to follow the music and finds her computer skills can do something to remedy this. In 1990 she too connects with Mike Jensen, and begins work on GnFido, an international computer gateway, based in London.

In India, a young engineer and aspirant poet leaves the slums of Delhi to find a way to improve the conditions of the people he finds working in gruelling conditions. Jagdish Parikh too hears of a similar technology. In the late 1980s he meets Filipino intellectual, Roberto Verzola and Brazilian activist Carlos Afonso. Using experimental email software, they connect independent journalists and unions across southeast Asia to each other.

As Carlos brings email to Brazil's activists, in Nicaragua, computer technician Cristina Vasconi, who grew up in political exile, begins her own journey connecting countries across Latin America with Uruguayan colleague Miguel Pierano using the same software that had put Pegasus Networks online.

Back in 1987, in a New York hotel room, two young computer technicians meet with Peter Gabriel and Steven Van Zandt (Musicians for Peace) and coin the name 'Association for Progressive Communications.'

Mitra Ardron had already been linking environment groups to a computer in the hallway of his London flat as early as 1985. By 1989 Karen, Ian, Jagdish, Mike and dozens of others were finding each other.

From Africa to Latin America, North America to Eastern Europe, Indochina to the Pacific Islands similar experiences were being played out by people who brought to their work a vigour and determination motivated by the deprivations they had either witnessed or experienced.

Through interviews, original and world music, a spoken-word choir, poetry, and sketched animations PEER TO PEER describes what happened when these social movement pioneers engineered their computer networks together, creating a short-lived parallel internet whose influence lingers in the shadows of cyberspace.

PEER TO PEER is told through conversational interviews with the makers of the 'other internet' and the people who led the filmmaker to them.

Ian Peter, founder Pegasus Networks, Australia, 1989 – 1995, co-founder APC 1991, internet governance advocate 1995 to present
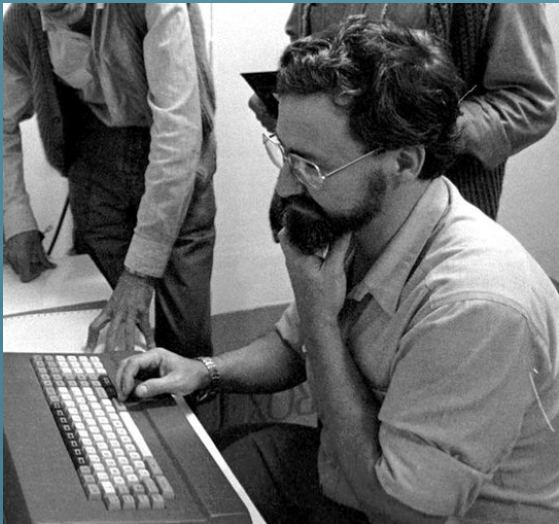

Mike Jensen, computer scientist, co-founder The Web, Canada, 1986 and co-founder Association for Progressive Communications, 1991 to present

Karen Banks founder GnFido, UK, 1990 – 1997, Association for Progressive Communications (APC) 1991 to present

Jagdish Parikh (Interdoc Asia/Pacific) and Roberto Verzola (Email Centre), Philippines, 1992

Carlos Afonso at Ibase, Brazil, 1985

Cristina Vasconi, computer engineer, Nicarao, Nicaragua 1985 - 1995

Miguel Peirono (right), Uruguayan computer scientist and computer network software pioneer with Mike Jenson (left) , Prague 1994

Mitra Ardron, computer scientist, founder GreenNet, UK, 1985, APC 1988 to present

Paul Wilson, Pegasus Networks 1989 – 1997, APNIC Director General 1998 to present

Anriette Esterhuysen information and communication rights advocacy, 1987 – 1992, South Africa and Zimbabwe

Robert Garnsey - co-founder PacTok Pacific Island Network, Sydney, Australia

Lee Rhiannon – AID/Watch, PacTok, Australia Photo. Sydney Morning Herald (2017)

Pang Wee – Sarawak Access installs PacTok, Malaysia 1993, active till late 1990s

Jac sm Kee – feminist activist, writer, led Women's Rights Programme for Association for Progressive Communications, founder Take Back the Tech

Norbert Klien – Cambodia email pioneer, 1993 to present

Michael Ney – computer network advocate, introduced Andrew Garton to email in 1988, Australia

Andrew Garton , Pegasus Networks 1989 – 1996, APC Council and Exec Board 2000 - 2014

Much has been written about the history of the internet, the trajectory from publicly funded utility to one monopolised by Silicon Valley's giants of tech. But very little is known about the many social justice networks that first went online over thirty years ago.

By 1992, these networks spanned 72 countries, more than the internet did at the time. Less is known about the people who had pioneered these initiatives, the communities that grew around them, and how they interacted with each other.

By 1996 most of these networks were absorbed into the internet, and the internet itself centralised into market-driven media ecologies that have grown there since.

These **monopolies** have created social media platforms that have **no social conscience**, they have created business models based on **amplifying hate** and **fake news**, they engage in **unregulated surveillance** and **data mining of their clients** and develop **devices and apps that are not designed to disengage us from them**.

Addressing these issues today is a global movement, led in part by numerous non-commercial initiatives, and Tim Berners-Lee (founder of the Web), urgently **de-centralising the internet** through technical and governance objectives. Their aim is to offer **digital self-determination** via peer-to-peer alternatives to most known services on the internet.

What could this movement learn from the social movement pioneers who engineered these early, by and large, peer-to-peer networks?

PEER TO PEER provides a timely and critical response to the issues we face online; from fake news and gendered violence to surveillance capitalism.
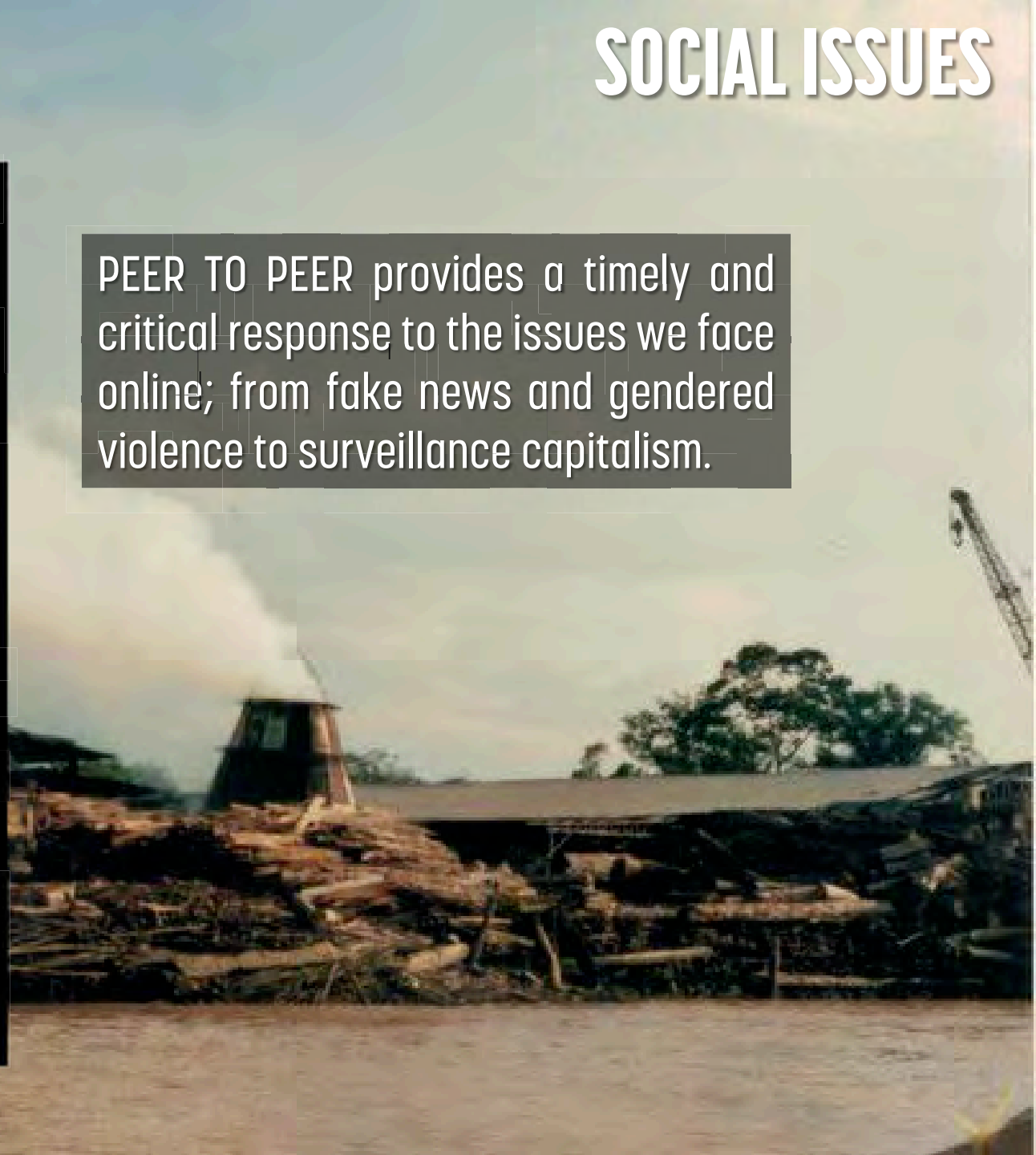
PEER TO PEER is not another film about the internet. It is about the people who had created another internet; their motivations and the threads of world culture and the arts that drew me to them. I was also there, involved in their initiatives and developing my own.

Often, I wondered how it was that I managed to be there at all; working side by side with these extraordinary people in Brazil, South Africa, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia Much like an ethnographic filmmaker immerses themselves with their subjects, I was there to both observe and gather their stories.

The filmmaker and essayist Jean Rouch describes the ethnographic filmmaker as "possessing an intimate understanding of the communities among whom they work," requiring said filmmaker to have spent a great deal of time with their subjects well before production. I have spent nearly a third of my life with the people and their projects I am now turning my camera to. I am doing so with all the creative skills I have at my disposal, both acquired and intuitive.

But PEER TO PEER is more than the stories of progressive thinkers, activists and computer scientists developing and distributing software. It is about their deep motivations, their concerns for the planet we leave forthcoming generations. And how this has underpinned the myriad projects we had undertaken.

The story about the 'other internet' is not told in Werner Herzog's documentary, *Lo and Behold*, nor does it ever appear in the many books written about the internet.

PEER TO PEER, in part, tells my story, because I was there; meeting the peers, and finding creativity and love among them.

ANDREW GARTON

Photo. Mubeen Siddiqui, Tilonia, India, 2015

PEER TO PEER is informed and inspired by the following filmmakers and select works.

Laura Poitras – Flag Wars (2003), The Oath (2010), Citizenfour (2014). Photo. Katy Scoggi

Errol Morris – Gates of Heaven (1978), The Thin Blue Line (1988), Wormwood (2017). Photo. Bridget Laudien

David Lynch – Interview Project (2009) Photo. Georges Biard

Pelen Esmer– The Collector (2002). Photo. mubi.com

Location. Tarkine Rainforest, Tasmania
© Bob Brown Foundation

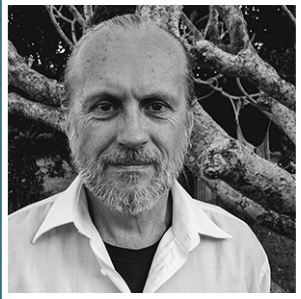Artist. Tanvir Taolad, Bangladesh
© the artist

INSPIRATION #2

PEER TO PEER is comprised of stylised bridging scenes, projections,
and locations drawing on a variety of visual arts and design practices

Artist. Boris Eldagsen, Germany
© the artist

Location. Timber plantation, Orbost, Victoria
© getindustry.com.au

ANDREW GARTON – Writer/Director

Andrew Garton is an independent filmmaker, musician and producer with a background in community access media dating back to the mid-1970s. His work spans the genres of non-fiction film-making, sound design for screen and stage, radio documentary drama. His first feature documentary, *Ocean in a Drop* (2017) describes the impact broadband internet has had on India's rural and tribal communities. It was launched in India with the support of DFAT and the Australian Consulate and screened on Indian national television. It resulted in *Right to Know*, a commissioned book and podcast series. His second feature, *Forged from Fire – the making of the Blacksmiths' Tree* (2019), was nominated best documentary at the Melbourne Documentary Film Festival. Andrew lectures in media ecology, documentary and multiplatform production at Swinburne University.
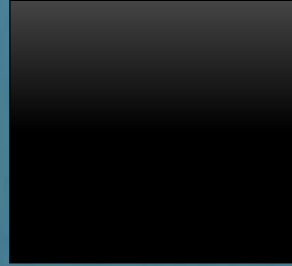
TBC – Director of Photography

Brief Bio
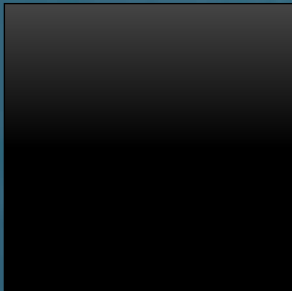
TBC – Production Designer

Brief Bio

MIRRANDA BURTON - Illustrator

Mirranda is an artist meandering between drawing, printmaking, comix and animation. Working for many years in commercial and independent animation and as a visual artist was the catalyst for making graphic novels, and in 2011 her first book, *Hidden*, was published by Black Pepper Publishing. Her second book, *Underground: Marsupial Outlaws and Other Rebels of Australia's War in Vietnam* (2021), in published by Allen & Unwin. She is presently working as a graphic recorder and sketch artist with the Sketch Group.

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Roberto 'Obet' Verzola hailed as the "father of Philippine Email" in 1992 founded the country's first email service which he operated from his home in Manila. Appalled by the concentration of wealth and coercive controls over the use of the World Wide Web he shuttered the pioneering Email Centre. Until his sudden death in 2019, he poured his energy into electoral reform in the Philippines, intellectual property rights, agriculture and genetic engineering issues, and renewable energy initiatives. Obet was an intellectual, activist, husband and parent without peer!

The central characteristic (of the typical 'other internet' user) is a commitment to a future for the planet that works a lot better than the present.

Mitra Ardron, Why the Association for Progressive Communications is Different, 1987