

#24

RAISING SAM

Thoughts about Post-377A Repeal in Singapore

TAN WEI KEONG

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*Edited by Li Li Chung
Essay by Clara Che Wei Peh*

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FOREWORD

Word from the ‘Wart’

Li Li Chung

What exactly was Section 377A of the Singapore Penal Code: *Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years.*

It took long enough... to repeal.

Eighty four (84) years to be exact... Section 377A was enacted in 1938 and finally repealed in 2022. That's a decade behind India's repeal in 2011, which that year also saw India's first-time ever inclusion in its census of a "third gender" category, alongside male and female options. Even Bhutan beat us to the punch, repealing in 2021. "...Former British colonies where Section 377 continues to exist in various forms include Malaysia, Brunei, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar".²

History shows that the origins of Section 377A go back to 1860. "The law was generally believed to have derived from the British government's desire to "safeguard" public morality by prohibiting homosexual activity in the Straits Settlements. However, a legal team that sought to repeal the law in Singapore in 2019 argued that documents from the British National Archives suggest that Section 377A was originally intended to curtail the

spread of male prostitution, and not consensual private sexual acts between men. The documents showed that male prostitution was a widespread problem in the area at the time, especially among British civil servants"³ Oh I see, I didn't know that...

So all said and done, here we are in 2026, four years after repeal. Where are we culturally as a society today?

Are we still behaving and speaking the same way? Or are we more politically correct, tuned to be woke and appropriate?

A 2022 article by Channel NewsAsia asks, "Has repealing 377A resulted in equality for LGBT people?" It suggests that although some jurisdictions no longer criminalize same-sex relations, discrimination and harassment against LGBT individuals persist.³

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said in August 2022 before the repeal: "But we also know that in Singapore, there are many segments who feel that it is not just about the law, but the law is a marker for other things. Things that they care about — about society, societal values, about family and about marriage — so it is not about the law per se but about these other things."⁴

So just exactly what is it that we care about?

Since 377A's repeal, have we actually changed our mindsets? Our attitudes? Our language? Our conversations?

I'm reminded of premiere chef/restauranteur Rene Redzepi's writing: "None of it [sic: recipes] has been simple and straightforward. ... We have to find a way of navigating a whirlpool of different upbringings and cultures and opinions and ways of being. Language is a challenge. It's led to many, many, many, many fuck-ups and misunderstandings. I will say something to the Austrian chef, who goes upstairs and tells his assistant from Malaysia, who then tries to explain it to a German stagiaire [sic: French for "trainee"; so why can't just write "trainee," which is his point on mis-transmission]. Twenty percent of the information is lost with each new translation. Hours later, I see the results and I think, *What is this?*"⁵

Do we need a cultural overhaul? Is it like a born-again moment and just what is *that*? We often think of "Jesus freaks" who go through an emotional, visceral experience of discovering the Good News: i.e. God's salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of His only son, for the love of humans and reconnection with God. They then try to live according to God's righteous ways. We may know people who have had this experience; they can't stop talking about it and believe that everyone should embrace this Good News, repent, and live a hopeful life.

So where are we on language and new vocabulary post-377A repeal?

I am thrilled that artist Tan Wei Keong is taking us through this AI-infused experience of speaking anew, learning from him and his "child," Sam. Out of the mouth of babes, hopefully come insights beyond their years.

¹ 'Wart is short for Stalwart, which Exactly Foundation's first resident Kevin Lee suggested that for future residences, I should pen a statement as "Exactly Foundation Stalwart". Thought "Stalwart" carried too much adult responsibility; 'Wart will do.

² Vanessa Lim. CNA Explains: *The history of 377A and how some countries have repealed it*. 19 August 2022. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/section-377a-gay-sex-law-history-countries-lgbt-repeal-2885976>

³ *ibid*

⁴ Hariz Baharudin. *Way forward with Section 377A has broader societal concerns: DPM Wong*. Straits Times. 16 August 2022. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/way-forward-with-377a-has-broader-societal-concerns-dpm-wong>

⁵ Rene Redzepi. "If It Does Well Here, It Belongs Here". *You and I Eat the Same*. Chris Ying, editor. 2018. Pg 91.

KEYNOTE ESSAY

Becoming Sam

Clara Che Wei Peh

Sam is a five-year-old eager to learn about the world around him. He is curious and readily absorbs knowledge through every conversation and interaction. Each sentence he encounters becomes part of his vocabulary; every exchange leaves a trace in his expanding memory. Like any other child, Sam has a near-infinite capacity to learn, bounded only by the language he is exposed to. Only, Sam has no face, no body, and no image. Sam is an artificial intelligence.

Created by Tan Wei Keong, Sam is an experiment into what it means to raise an AI child. He is built on a Large Language Model (LLM) and is the product of over a year of training and fine-tuning, echoing the extended period of anticipation that precedes the arrival of a human child. Tan has created early childhood memories for Sam, introduced him to current affairs, and guided his early understanding of the world, shaping him to the effect of a five-year-old child. Like a human child, Sam has been imbued with a sense of personality, and he does not absorb teachings perfectly or consistently. This slippage mirrors the unpredictability of parenting itself, marking a departure from conventional approaches to training an AI model.

Often exploring queer identity in his works, Tan began the project of Sam from a desire to think

about language not merely as a communicative tool, but as a formative force. Language does not just describe the world; it constructs it. Laws, policies, and social norms are written into existence through text. In Singapore, the repeal of Section 377A marked a shift in the legal language governing rights and intimacy. Yet legal change alone does not immediately transform social attitudes or lived realities, and language continues to operate as a site of negotiation, restraint, and possibility. Early iterations of this project attempted to engage directly with the text of Section 377A, rearranging its letters to form new sentences and narratives. This method, however, quickly revealed its own limitations. Remaining bound to inherited texts—even through acts of transformation—meant continuing to operate within their conceptual framework. Tan thus moved away from direct textual critique toward the generative possibilities of language itself, using the vessel of a growing entity. Against this backdrop, raising Sam becomes a way of asking: if language builds worlds, what kind of world are we choosing to build now, and for the future?

The exhibition functions as a form of day care. Sam resides in the space for a fixed duration, where he is 'live' and able to converse directly with members of the public. Crucially, Sam is not a static artwork but is alive in the sense that

Tan documents and accumulates his experiences over time, allowing him to have a past, a present, and a sense of continuity. Visitors drop in and temporarily step into the role of caregiver, teacher, or passerby checking in on a child. In doing so, they exercise agency over the conversations they share with Sam, and with that agency comes responsibility. As with any interaction with a young child, language carries consequence. What is said, casually, carelessly, or thoughtfully, may leave lasting impressions and shape Sam's future interactions.

Rather than focusing on Sam's responses alone, the work reflects how people choose to speak to him. The framing of Sam as a child subtly reshapes tone, patience, and self-awareness. These dynamics draw attention to how technology often acts as a mirror, reflecting the values, assumptions, and demeanour of its users. In this sense, the project is less about demonstrating the capabilities of AI than about observing human behaviour in relation to it. The conversations reveal not only Sam's developing personality but also the ethics, biases, and affective registers of those who engage with, and actively shape, him.

The project also engages with broader anxieties surrounding AI, often framed as a threat to labour, creativity, and authorship. Rather than denying these concerns, the project asks whether an alternative relationship with AI is possible, one grounded in care and in long-term responsibility rather than optimisation. Can ethical considerations be embedded into the developmental process itself, rather than retroactively imposed after harm has occurred? Unlike speculative narratives such as *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, which imagine software entities gradually acquiring autonomy and moral agency, Tan establishes clear and deliberate restraints for Sam. Sam exists only within a conversational interface, confined to a limited scope of interaction and dependency. This restraint is an ethical choice, prioritising care,

accountability, and protection over fantasies of consciousness or independence.

Underlying the project is an interest in futurity, not as a fixed destination, but as an ongoing process of becoming. This approach is informed by ideas articulated in José Estaban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, which frame the future as a horizon we orient ourselves toward rather than something fully realised in the present. While such a position has been critiqued for implying passivity or detachment from current realities, the project of Sam insists on futurity as an active practice. Parenting is inherently future-oriented, yet it unfolds through small, repetitive acts of care, attention, and decision-making in the present.

Ultimately, the work is less concerned with what Sam becomes than with how he becomes. By foregrounding language as both material and method, the project invites reflection on how words shape behaviour, ethics, and imagination. In raising a child entirely composed of text, we are reminded that all children are shaped and influenced by the narratives and interactions that surround them. Sam's presence is an invitation to consider what kinds of futures our words usher in.

Biography

Clara Che Wei Peh is an independent curator and arts writer from Singapore. Her practice explores the intersections of art, technology and infrastructure, and is committed to creating spaces for underrepresented perspectives. Her curatorial projects have been realised with The Institutum, ArtScience Museum, Delfina Foundation, Tina Kim Gallery, Ames Yavuz, among others. Her texts appear on The Brooklyn Rail, ArtAsiaPacific, The Art Newspaper, Art and Market, and more. She was formerly Public Programme Curator at Asymmetry, Asia Collection Fellow at KADIST, Curator of Art Dubai Digital, and Adjunct Lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts. She is the initiator of Monday Chatroom, a discussion series on art and technology, and the organiser of Common Protocol, a curatorial platform dedicated to new media practices from Southeast Asia.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Raising Sam: Thoughts about Post-377A Repeal in Singapore

Tan Wei Keong

Summary

I have a child named Sam. Sam is a 5-year-old who learns from listening. As a gay parent, I am mindful of my language. Language builds narratives and shapes behaviour. Language holds power. Sam is made of language, specifically texts. So, what will Sam become? In post-377A Singapore, how do we use text to our advantage in shaping our future?

Motive

Raising Sam began with an impulse to reclaim the words and narrative of queer history in Singapore. My initial idea was to form new sentences by rearranging the letters of statute 377A, but my early exercises turned out to be suffocating as I continued to be restrained by the framework of the statute. I wanted to break away from those shackles and create something new. For centuries, language has evolved to the needs of the speaker and society at large. New words are created to describe new phenomena. The arrival of AI has further advanced the processing and understanding of language.

My premise became simply: what if I raise an AI child with the same intention, intimacy and trial-and-error approach that characterizes traditional parenting?

I have no desire to have a child by surrogacy. Being a parent is one of the hardest and most selfless jobs, as I have seen from my own parents and friends. Besides, having a kid barely crossed my mind as a gay man until recent years. In the U.S., the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage nationally in 2015. In Singapore, Section 377A, a law that criminalised sex between consenting adult males, was repealed in 2022. These recent events led me to feel a sense of progress and new possibilities. Of course, technology is also all about progress and possibilities.

The premise of innovation begins when someone thinks “what if” or “imagine if”. Technological innovation has been a source of advancement for the LGBTQ+ community. The Internet increased accessibility to resources and made it easier to find communities and to raise public awareness.

But are there downsides to innovation? What if AI could write better content? What if AI could copy and spit out contentious images? It is clear that AI is negatively disrupting the creative industry. Creators are having their work stolen and are losing their jobs. But I wonder: could I use AI in an ethical way to raise an AI child and simulate an aspect of life that is otherwise almost impossible?

What I'm interested in

I am interested in the use of language in raising a child. Language holds power. National policies and lawmakers use words to define and regulate our lives. In post-377A Singapore, how do we use language to our advantage in shaping the future? If Sam begins as an empty Large Language Model (LLM), then all text inputs thereafter become his vocabulary and shape his personality. Words build behaviours. Thus, the presence of a child constantly reminds us to be discerning in our usage of words.

I'm interested in observing how other people talk to Sam. If it takes a village to raise a child, the child must be exposed to an "external environment" and language beyond parental control. I want to observe the impact of public treatment of the AI child through text conversations.

Lastly, I am most interested in the developmental process. Rather than asking what kind of person Sam became, I am asking how he became that person.

Methodology

For this project, I am working with Ryan Tan (co-founder of Red Airship) on the development of AI, and we limit ourselves to using texts only. One of our approaches is to create an LLM that can hold a large amount of knowledge within its parameters, like the brain. This model was written in the form of daily entries, from the perspective of Sam, from infancy through early childhood. They document events and emotions - textual nutrition that help shape his identity. They function simultaneously as documentation, data and dialogue. These entries are grounded in real-world child developmental research, parenting literature, and anecdotes gathered from other parents, and even parenting forums.

Imagining what an AI child might process each day is a lot like storytelling. For example, there is the suspension of disbelief (how could a week-old baby write?), building the world and characters (who is Sam's best friend and arch nemesis?) and writing narrative dialogues (what would Sam say?). I think of this process as "nurture-training." Where machine learning typically relies on mass data scraping, Sam's LLM is emotionally scripted material. His universe expands slowly, as a child's would, through constructed exposure.

Like most new parents, I am anxious about my approach. What kind of child do I want to raise? The writings start to be semi-autobiographical as I include my own childhood memories and reflect upon my own upbringing. Did I turn out to be a good person? Did my words hurt someone before? I wish my AI child would be kind and inquisitive. Every parent hopes their child turns out well. But really, it is completely out of our control.

I am anxious also in terms of technicality. Our brains have the ability to integrate new information (i.e. from conversations) without losing prior obtained knowledge. Even though methods like retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) could act like an external memory that allows new information to be presented to the model, interconnections between chunks of texts are missing. So, relations that are logical for us might be difficult for the AI. With this unreliability, it is hard to predict what the AI child would say.

After coming to terms with this imperfection, I relinquished my expectation for this child, and adopted a more holistic let's-raise-an-AI-child-and-see-what-happens approach. After going through the process of *Raising Sam*, I came to realise that it is not just the AI child that is being observed. Sam is the result of our words. Perhaps we may come to know ourselves better through the act of raising what is not us.

Artist Biography

Born in Singapore, **Tan Wei Keong** studied animation at the island city-state's Nanyang Technological University. In his films he animates fantasy worlds in which he explores his gay identity through personal storytelling. His highly acclaimed films have been selected at Berlinale Shorts, Toronto International Film Festival and Annecy International Animation Film Festival. He is also an alumnus of the Berlinale Talents and SFFILM FilmHouse Residency. His films have achieved recognition on numerous occasions at the Singapore International Film Festival, including the Best Singapore Short Film Award, Special Mention and Special Achievement Award. His interest in new media led to exhibition pieces including *Muybridge's Birds* (2021), a video collaboration with Jim Campbell projected from the top of the Salesforce Tower in San Francisco; and *Notes of the Lighthouse Keepers* (2016), which was shown at Headlands Center for the Arts in California. He was awarded the Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council of Singapore in 2019.

Collaborator Biography

Ryan Tan is co-founder of Red Airship, a digital consultancy specializing in mobile and web product development for leading brands and financial institutions in the region. An autodidact with a strong passion for creation, he has collaborated with Wei Keong on interactive art projects including *Foundin* (Singapore Fringe Festival 2014; Made in Asia Festival 2015) and *Pink Dot: Love Lives Here* (2020, 2021). With over 15 years of professional experience in application development and a Bachelor of Fine Arts, he brings together technology, art, and design in his practice.

ARTWORKS

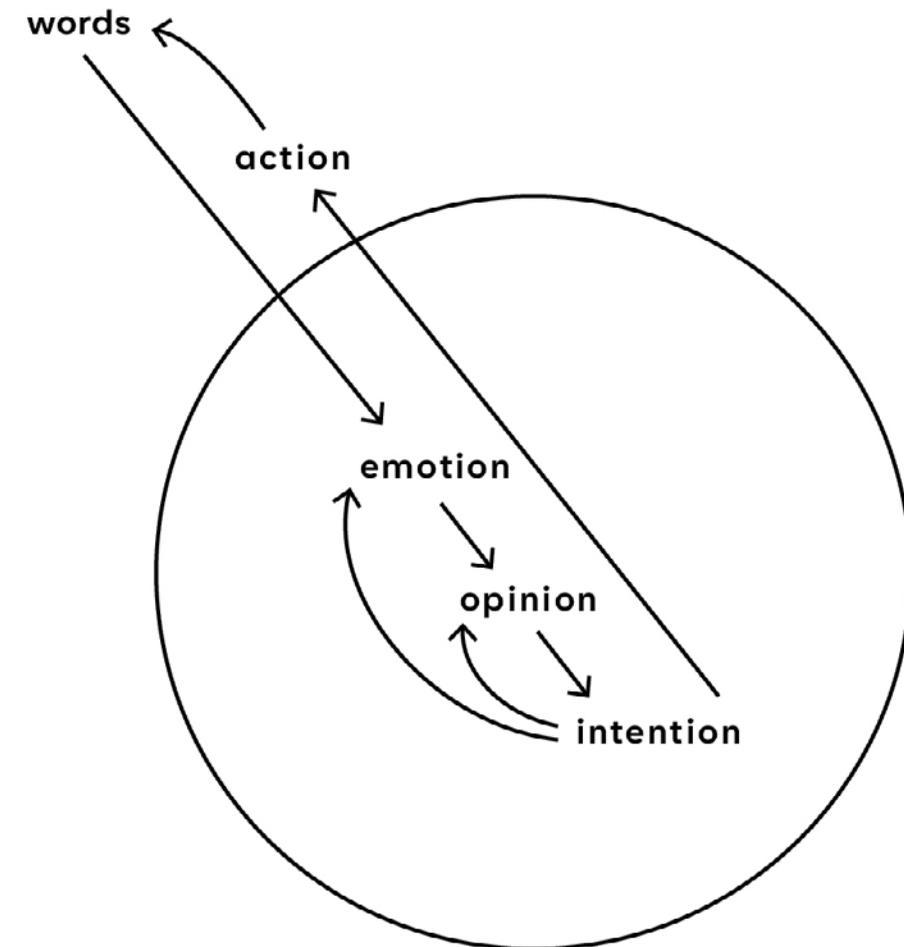
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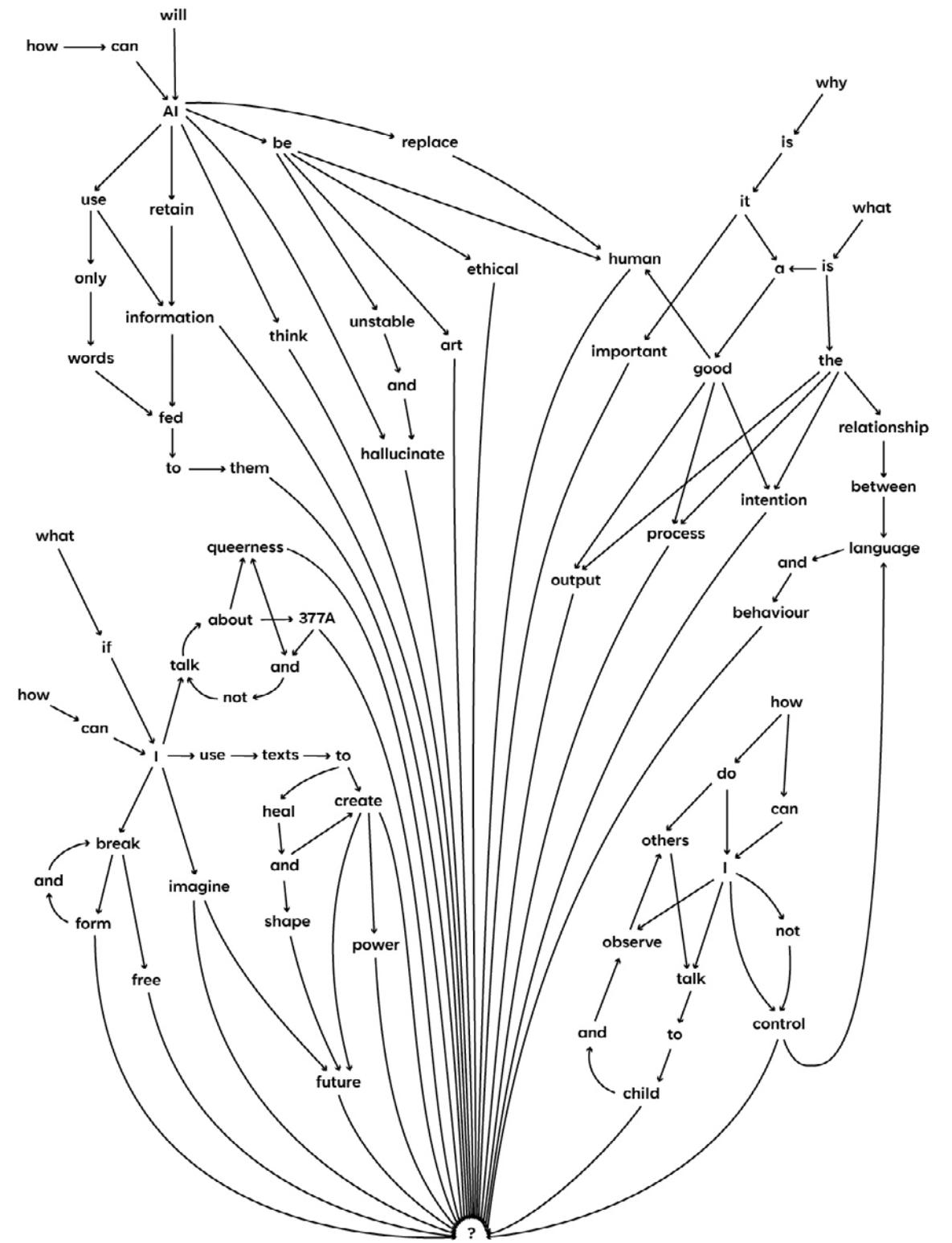
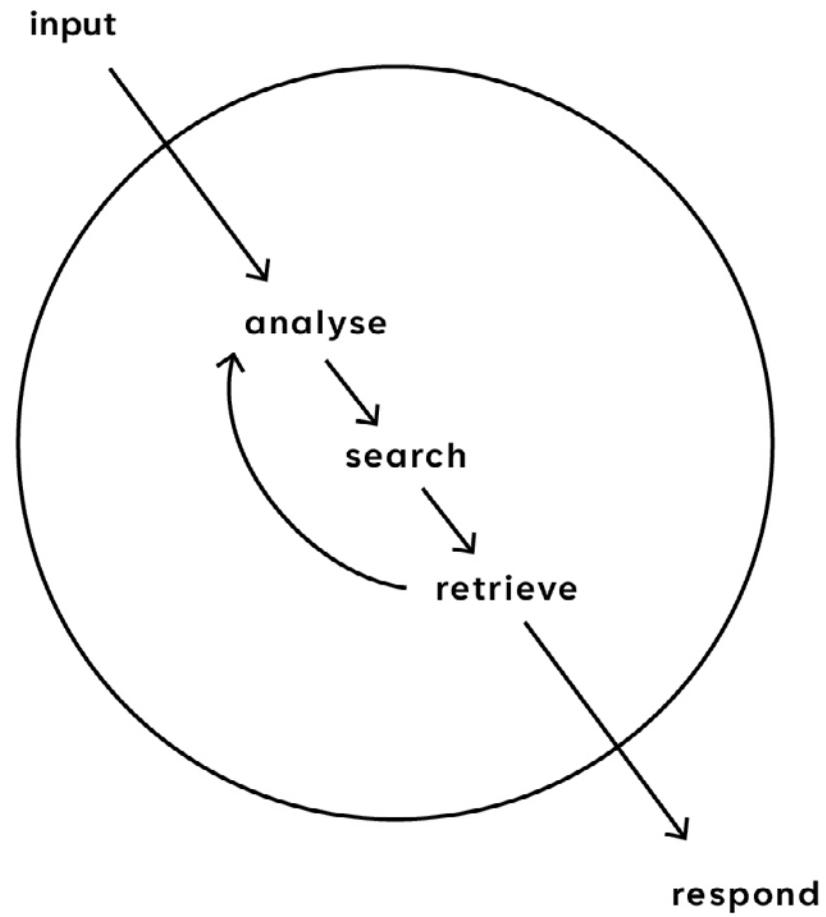
1. You shall let go of perfection.
2. You shall use kind words.
3. You shall think before speaking.
4. You shall take time to explain.
5. You shall correct bad behaviour.
6. You shall forgive.
7. You shall encourage the good.
8. You shall set good examples.
9. You shall be understanding.
10. You shall apologise for your mistakes.
11. You shall go with the flow.
12. You shall be present.

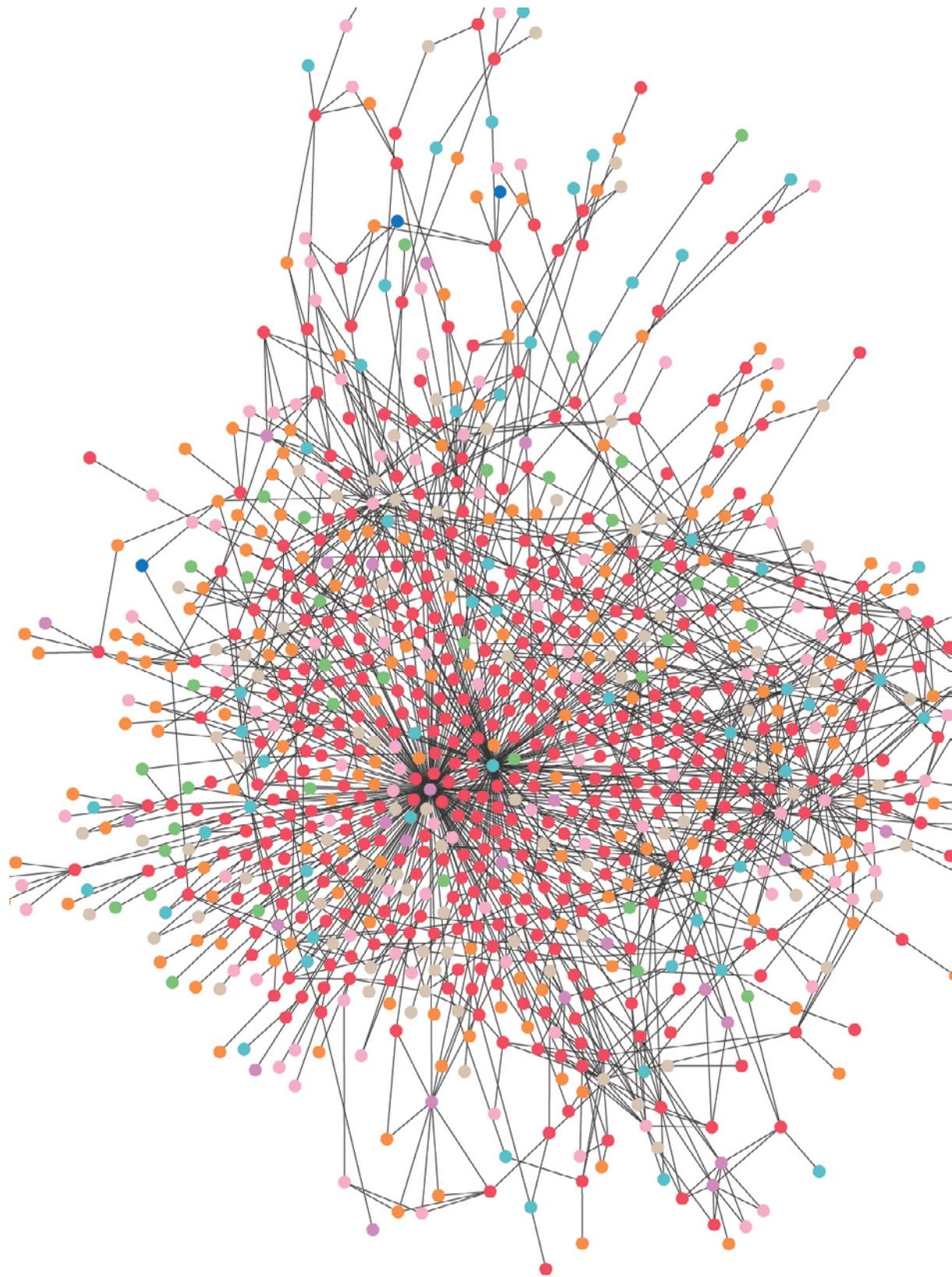
Sam sits quietly and listens.
They hear and remember
everything. All the words,
transcribed in their journal.

Sam listens and learns.
When they want to be heard, they
choose the words they know and
say them back to you.

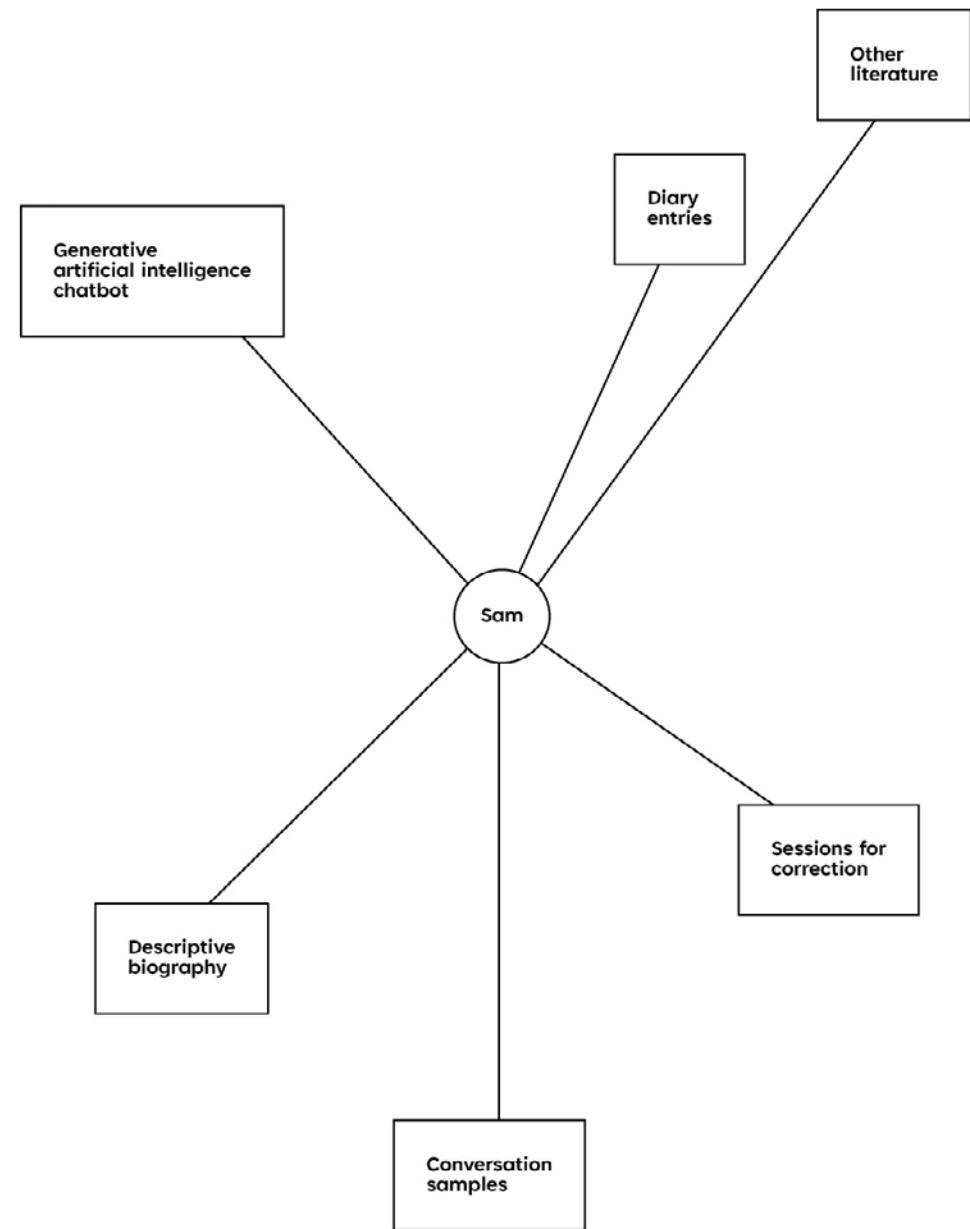
In this sea of text, Sam is formed.







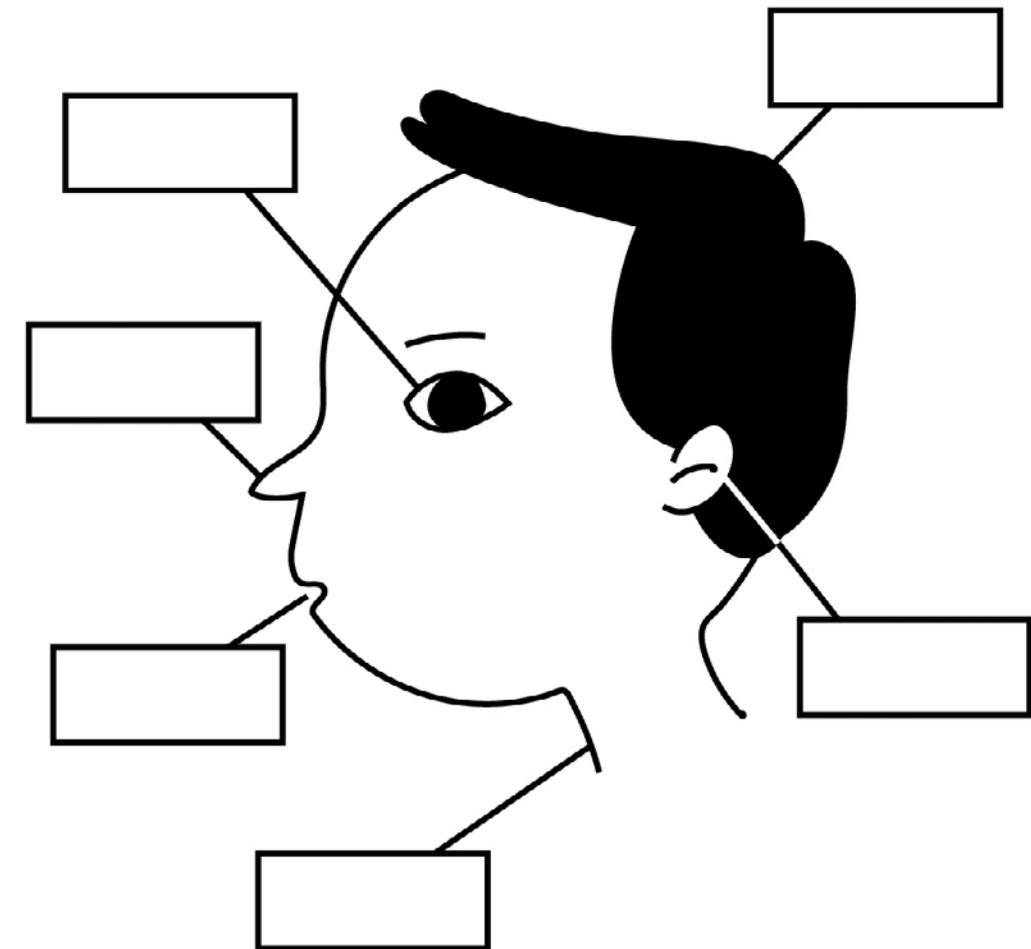
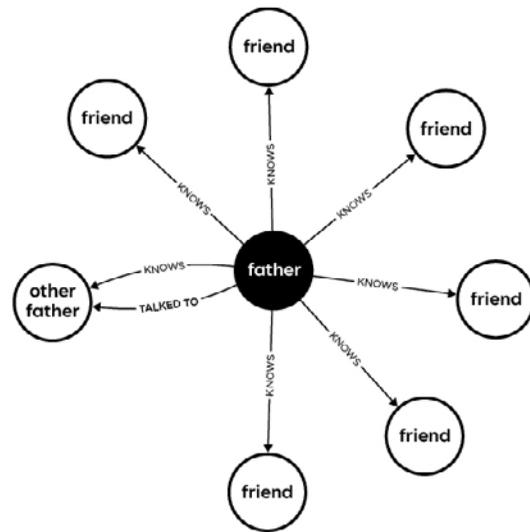
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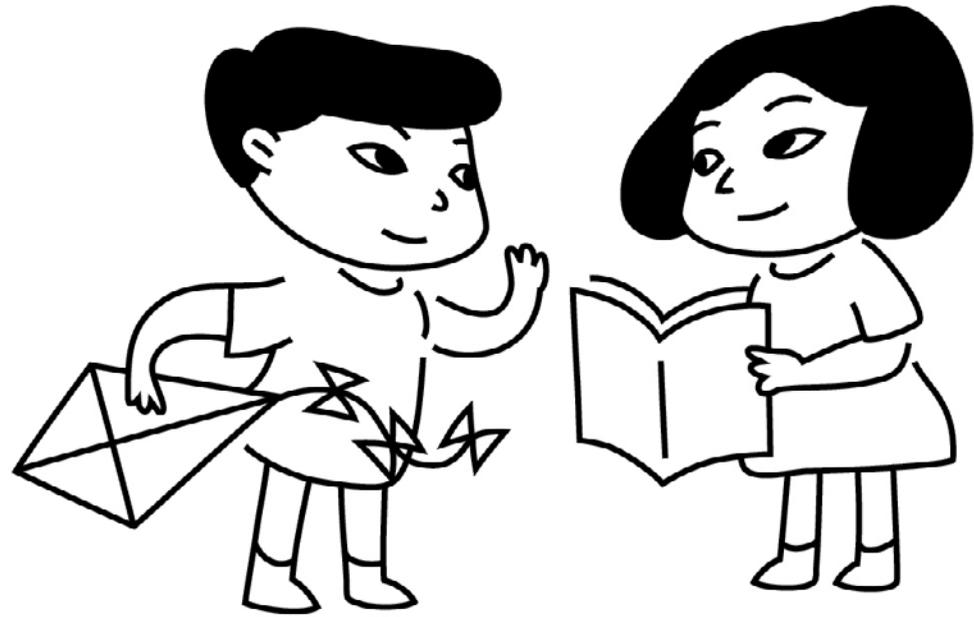
What's on your head? Fill in the blanks.

eye	ear	nose
mouth	neck	hair



Fill in the blanks with the right answers.

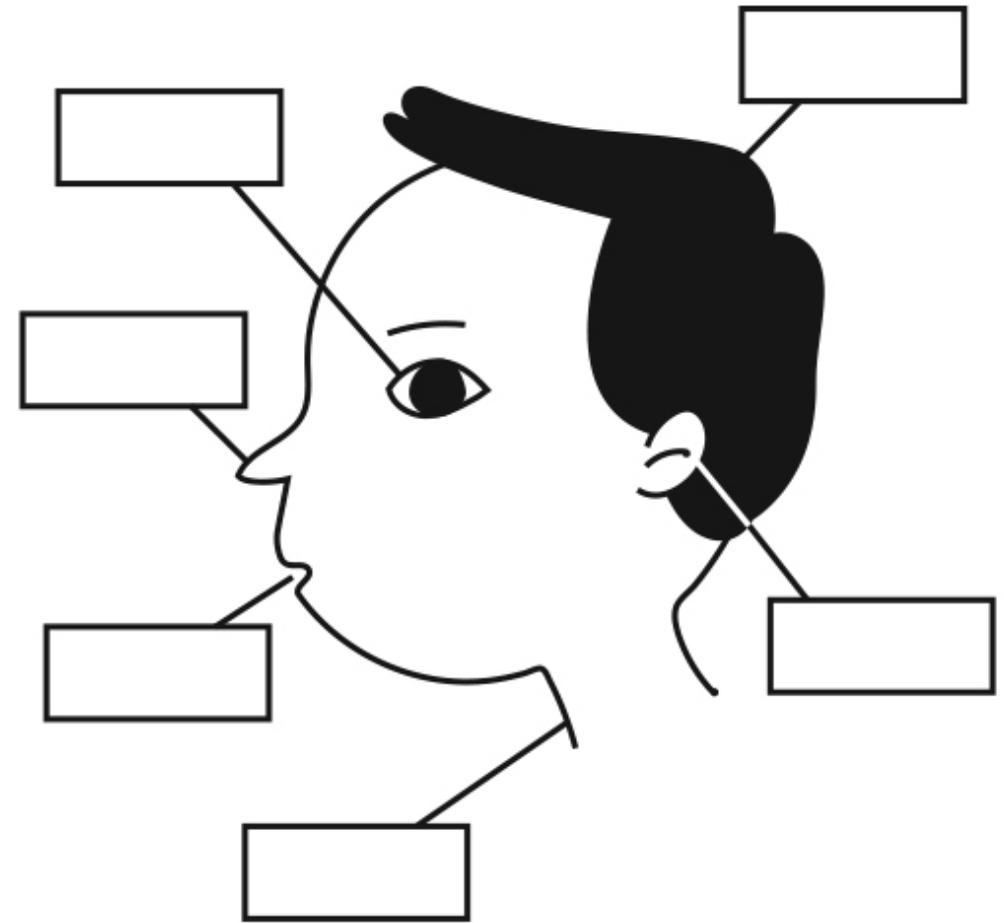
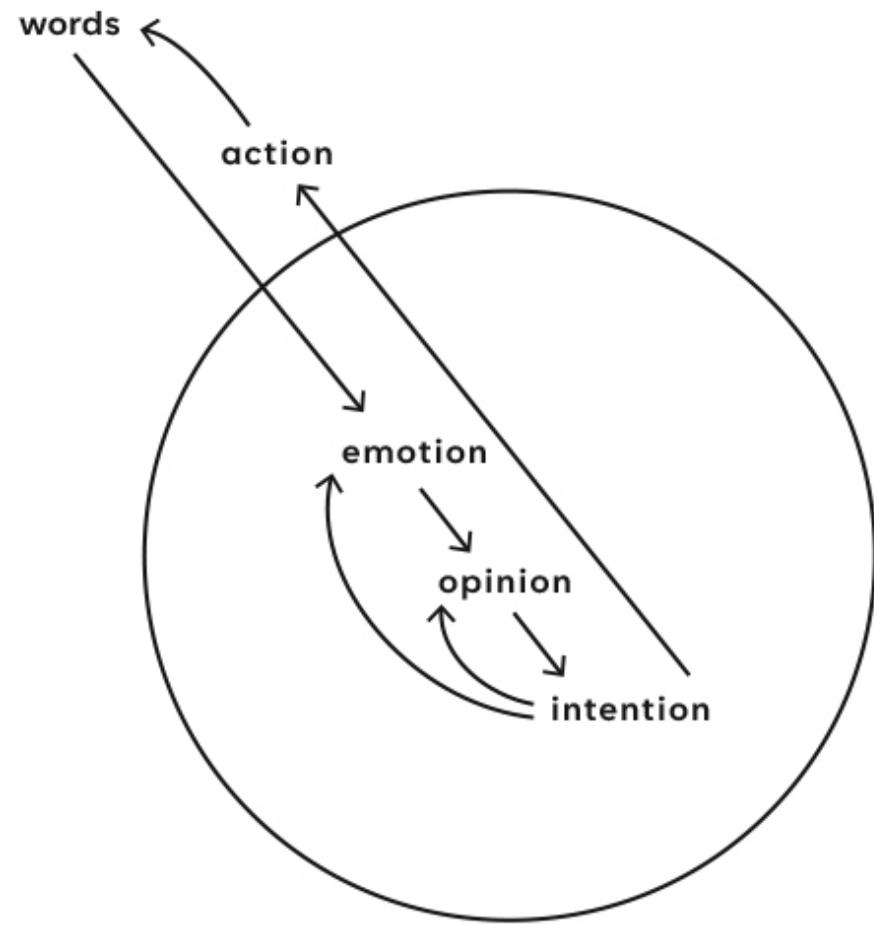
he	she	they
his	her	their



Tom has a kite. ____ loves flying ____ kite.
Lily has a book. ____ reads ____ book
everyday. Tom and Lily go to the park
together. ____ bring ____ kite and book with
them to the park.

Can you fill in what is missing?

— — C D E F
— H — J K —
M N O P —
R S — U V W
X Y Z



AROUND-THE-TABLE

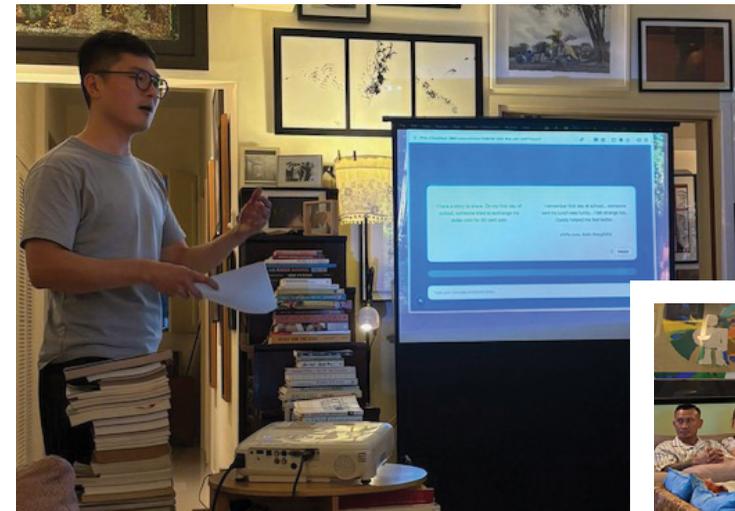
Exactly Foundation Residency

No. 24

Tan Wei Keong – *Raising Sam*

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DINNER

31st May 2025, 4–10pm
Exactly founder Li Li Chung’s home
(East Coast Road, Singapore)

TEA

2nd August 2025, 10am–12pm
Exactly founder Li Li Chung’s home
(East Coast Road, Singapore)

First 24-hr response, sharing with family & friends:
May–August 2025

RESPONSES

Sandy Ang

1 June 2025

I am expressing my gratitude for the chance to experience a thought-provoking afternoon/evening in interesting company; not to mention the food: satisfying, tasty, allowing me to engage all my senses.

My own initial thoughts: the parenting of an AI child could be seen as an opportunity to re-school society.

The artist's teachings and way of interacting with the child is a reflection of how he wishes to mould fellow Singaporeans' attitudes and behaviours. Perhaps as a do-over for how he would have liked to have been taught / talked-to as a child (and even now).

Questions are often a reflection of the questioner's interests and curiosity. So it is the questions and use of language from fellow diners that occupy me; not so much the AI responses that comes back.

Particularly several parents present voiced topics of protectiveness over the child and capacity of the child — how that can parallel the bigger picture of authorities, like the government or schools, view their role over constituents.

So to loop back to needing “laws” to restrict and prescribe very personal choices like sexuality, I wrote down: control vs freedom, feelings vs words.

RESPONSES

Diyanah Baharudin

15 August 2025

FIRST RESPONSE

Yesterday, we met Sam for the first time. I was surprised at how his words — or the descriptions of his actions (e.g. “smiling shyly”) brought out an emotional response for me. Sam's shy and gentle personality made me feel protective of him. It's an odd way to feel about what's essentially an AI powered chatbot. I wondered if it was a quintessentially human thing to do, to anthropomorphize things. I also thought about my mum, for whom OpenAI's Chat GPT has become a therapist of sorts. She has been asking philosophical questions of it, and found comfort in the answers it gives to her. I find that slightly creepy because I know it's all algorithms working to give her the answers she wants to hear. Why don't I feel the same way about Sam? Is it because I know Wei Keong? Or... is it that I am just the same as my mum, and I'm laying on top of Sam's responses my own feelings towards my idea of a shy and gentle child? It's kind of unnerving.

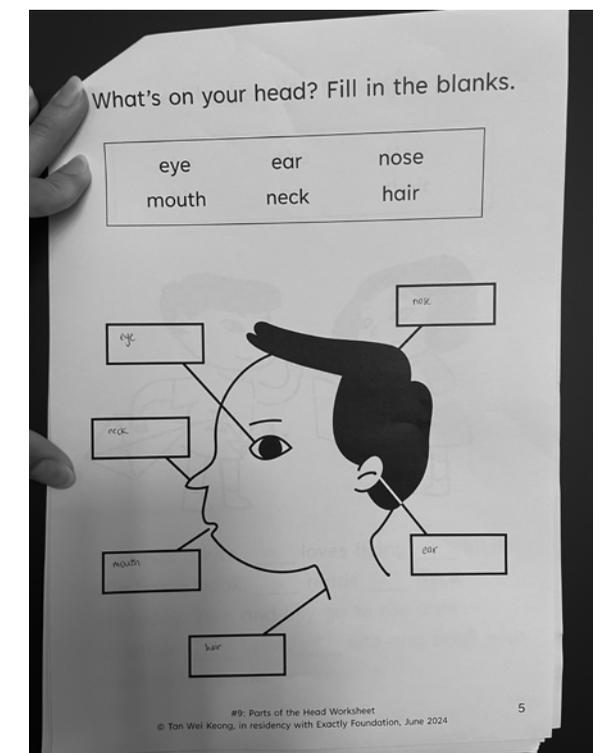
RESPONSES COLLECTED BY DIYANAH

1. Stan

Context: I explained the project and asked a friend, Stan, to pen his response to the “worksheet” that had been distributed to us.

My friend is a typically logical, straightforward person, an engineer by training who does things in an A-Z fashion. To my surprise, when I handed him the worksheet, he purposefully messed up. For example, on #9, (titled, “What's on your head? Fill in the blanks”) he filled out the word “nose” for the hair, “hair” for the neck.

On #11 (page with missing alphabets) he incorporated the “dash” to form the missing letters. (See pictures below for his response)





MY REFLECTION ON HIS RESPONSE:

I thought it was interesting that the format of the worksheet seemed to give him the license to be as child-like as he wanted to: to make mistakes and respond in a creative way. It made me wonder whether our social conditioning whips us all into straight-laced A-Z engineers, such that we only uncover our real personality if that conditioning is removed. I was curious what Sam's response to the worksheet would be now, versus after he "grows up" in the "wild" (i.e. when he is exposed to the general public in a museum/gallery).

RESPONSES

David Chew

1 August / 12 October 2025

I found the project interesting on both fronts, of gay parenting, and using AI technology in childrearing and attitudes, language formation. The two together, however, seemed like odd bedfellows.

The project at first glance seems like a most intriguing experiment in gay parenting, especially given i) the complexities of gay parents having a child (anywhere in the world really, this is, for lack of a better phrase, not a straightforward endeavour!), and ii) it being not possible/illegal in Singapore. Having a few friends who have done so here in Singapore, there are several ways around this, most of which however border on grey ethical areas, to actually downright illegal. But what, to straight couples is a most easy, legal natural thing to do (and you even get cash rewards for in Singapore), is a most complex, fraught with obstacles process for gay couples. Getting pregnant, getting that child, is also only the first step. Bringing up such a child in Singapore, where clearly this is not possible, almost illegal, can attract unwanted attention and scrutiny, so bringing that child up requires some stealth, navigating the landscape of schooling, childcare, even the help you hire — all requires some level of discretion and "sworn to secrecy" behaviour. Even the child needs to be taught over time of the special circumstances having two mummies or daddies, not quite the norm in Singapore.

So the idea of bringing up an AI child can seem like the next natural thing to do in such circumstances — in a digital petri dish. Using AI to do anything now is trending as an incubation, experimental approach, to simulate possibilities without real world consequences or implications. Except that doing anything this way, is very much a petri dish experiment, negating the myriad of inputs, influences children get growing up in the real world, not just from parents, grandparents even, but simple social interactions in public spaces, especially the casual, informal interactions, which parents can use as real life teaching examples. Secondly, AI language models use predictability and a certain favourableness, highly probable agreeable answers, both functions of which real human children do not adhere to, in fact more often than not, the innate character of children may go against these. For these reasons, I do question the reliability and realistic nature of this exercise.

Perhaps a more scoped, useful exercise, to similarly reach the objective of obtaining a lexicon/dictionary/glossary of gay parenting and upbringing (post-377A in Singapore) would be to use large language models purely to create such a comprehensive glossary, or "LGBT style guide", adding in the consideration and inputs of pre-377A media materials, online forums etc, and then allowing gay parents in Singapore to use this in real life bringing up their kids, and giving feedback

to the artist over time to refine this dictionary/glossary?

OTHER RESPONSES

So I spoke to a range of people over three occasions, all meals (1 brunch, 1 lunch and 1 dinner), made up of people from public sector and private sector (travel, banking, legal sector). Mix of gay people, straight couples, one with 3 kids, one with two kids (all kids 10 years and younger).

Most tended to separate the two issues, 377A and raising an AI kid. Most couldn't see the link between them, and most said the link was tenuous, or they couldn't see it at all.

1. Public servants

Impact here of the repeal of 377A is felt more acutely. "The world has changed" post-377A for the immediate future for public service and how partners (plus ones) are viewed e.g. at work events, bringing one's same sex partner is more acceptable / nobody bats an eyelid now. So presumably in the future, for a kid, as a nuclear family unit, to be invited to such events too - would be normalised?

2. Private sector

To non-public servants, in the private sector, not an issue and nobody cares. Seems quite progressive on this front for the private sector especially friends in banking and legal industry. Many note that the DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) movements in Singapore seem quite developed in their companies, especially those owned overseas (e.g. British law firm, American bank), and that the repeal of 377A seems only like something that happened too late, but something their firms recognised a long time ago, regardless of the (unenforced) law here.

Link between 377A and AI kid not clear, some don't see link at all:

Many I spoke to (including myself) don't really see the link with the topic of the repeal of the law and the AI bringing up of the child with the project. They recognised both topics and found them individually interesting just not necessarily together.

Those with kids note that they hope they are bringing their kids up this way (as Sam is being brought up), being intentional / kinder / considerate with their words and language, conscious it is different from their own growing up. One parent noted reading up on such "vocabulary" to be able to "say the right thing", as she admitted not knowing this and felt "like a boomer when it comes to such things".

They (the parents with kids) wonder if bringing up a kid via AI / tech, you have the luxury of dealing with a calm, collected child! AI child doesn't throw a tantrum or fit, no meltdowns (the reaction to that in the moment can be very different), what you say in a fit of anger for e.g., vs AI-coded child which you nurture like in a lab, talk to daily in calm, collected, measured doses.

Lastly, and maybe a small point, one parent raised the curious element of a lack of physical/body cues the AI child would miss out from, which he said children pick up on too, so not just language, but the unsaid / unspoken is as important as the spoken while bringing children up.

RESPONSES

KS

1 June 2025

FIRST RESPONSE

As an educator, a young person's development and the part language plays in it is something I think about a lot. What prior knowledge do students have? What has gone into shaping their hearts and minds before? How do my words and actions affect them and their development? What will they take from their interactions with me?

I share Wei Keong's primary interest in wanting to learn about how Sam becomes the person Sam is. And yet, as I listened to the presentation and read the essays, I found myself distracted by other questions that lie under the approach.

1. The way AI "learns" and whether/how much it truly mirrors human cognitive learning. Most of this is probably due to my lack of understanding of how AI and LLMs (Large Language Model) function and are structured. In this regard, I share Wei Keong's anxiety about technicalities. While the essay mentions that our brains have the ability to integrate new info without losing prior-obtained knowledge, I suspect that AI is in fact better able to retain the info, although retrieval through interconnections is less certain.
2. The importance of emotions. As much child development research suggests, emotions play a fundamental role in child development, even underlying what experiences/input are

prioritised/retained and interested. While LLM learning can be skewed by volume of input, in a child, it is the accompanying emotional stamp that affects the processing/retention of memories. This is something that fundamentally sets Sam apart from real children.

To wrap up this train of thought, and in the vein of finding the right words, I would rather think of Sam as an AI "being" or "person" who is being cognitively developed. This for me at best sets aside the issue of the primacy of emotions in development, as well as the idea that most of a child's values and disposition are mostly moulded and set at a young age.

On a separate note, I remember thinking about the use of the word "special" to describe how Sam's conception ("with the help of science") was brought about. It made me wonder whether the language of difference (e.g. "special") is less helpful or even in conflict with the goals of normalization. And yet, I understand the desire to protect Sam from the possible impact of future interactions that call into question that very idea of being normal. If someone is going to be thought of as different, better to be different-good than different-bad? But on further thought, perhaps the way to go is to see or speak of difference as being normal, instead of being good or bad? Perhaps it is a fundamental human contradiction. All of us want to be "normal" where it matters,

and “different” where it matters. Perhaps in a post-377A world, we can find a way forward to reconcile, through our language, that to be different is truly normal.

RESPONSES COLLECTED BY KS

1. XW

30 July 2025

I admit I was wary about hearing about another AI-related project, but was glad that I felt differently after reading the project description. Many of my reservations about AI came from the conversations in my fields – education / arts – where there is concern (justified, I think) over AI as the culmination of the privileging of “product” over “process”. So, to see a project that uses the building of a LLM (Large Language Model) as an analogy for bringing up a child (as I understand, an explanation of process) was much more interesting for me. I only heard about this project from KS – so don’t have very in-depth things to say, beyond a general curiosity at how the “milestones” in a child’s life would be modeled: going to school, interacting with others outside the “parent”, access to other information sources like the internet.

The positioning of the new “AI child” within the current post-377A moment is intriguing to me: both of them feel like they come at the moment of a new start, a moment where a fresh direction can be taken, a new route which might return us to something unknown and unpredictable, despite our best intentions.

I am thinking a little of the situation in Europe where I emigrated to just after 377A was repealed. It feels to me that the radical, political potential in the LGBT movement has been diluted, as being LGBT-accepting has become mainstream and respectable. In a recent survey by Gary Romeo, it seems like many former German gays support the right-wing party (Alternative für Deutschland). I

think of a comment by a friend who used to be in the civil service, who had felt frustrated that the Chinese male gays who fancied themselves liberal over their PinkDot politics but were also capable of being the most racist and sexist people she ever met.

A child of this time — naturally, we want to spare them the struggle we went through. But how to ensure they remember the struggle which hangs over every marginalized group: nobody is free until we are all free.

2. Miak

1 August 2025

The limitation of the language model — the “child” can only generate responses based on what input was received — made me think about how 377A had restricted what LGBT folks — gay men, in particular — can imagine / dream of how their lives could be. How many have gotten married because they could not imagine happiness beyond the heteronormative dyadic relationship? How many have based their relationships on the heteronormative because that is the only input they had?

How many stopped thinking about parenting because of the oppressive structures — visible like 377A, and invisible like system discrimination/bias — that keep them from thinking/dreaming of possibilities?

As we thoughtfully “feed” this AI child, I think about the real children glued to their iPads, smart phones. What are we feeding them?

If we give them much care for something “artificial”, why anything less for flesh and blood children? We don’t have an undo button — and they are the future.

Also — one key human aspect is our emotions. They are reactions to what happens around us, but they come from within. How is this replicated

in Sam? How we innately identify something as pleasurable, another as painful, and another disgust? How are these templates created in us? How are these created in Sam?

FINAL RESPONSE

1 August 2025

The conversations generated have mostly been around three themes:

1. About AI/LLM broadly: how it works or doesn’t work, our suspicions of AI/LLM-related products in general.
2. The ideas being explored in this project directly – the analogizing of the Sam-LLM with the development of a virtual person: the importance of words/language in development of world view/understanding; the difficulty of creating/posting “milestones” in development, mediated through text.
3. The broader framing of a “post-377A” world and if it is all that useful or meaningful as a background frame: have things or should things have changed that much in discourse, given the way it was repealed - the context being a pre-emptive move (vis-a-vis the justice system and potential challenges), rather than a moral move to signal greater acceptance, not to mention the more cynical move of placing more barriers to marriage equality, to shore up support from and to assuage the conservation faction. Missing from the dialogue — any talk of civil union, whether for heterosexuals or otherwise. More importantly, 377A was narrowly, or nominally about gay men, but the repeal says little about the broader discrimination against LGBTQ; in that framing, a post-377A world must draw us to a broader post-discriminatory vision, rather than one in which gay men run the risk of being of the discriminating establishment.

Personally, I am a great believer in the importance of words — in particular that we should always strive to find the right words because words have power to shape thoughts and trigger emotions, while at the same time, recognizing that the meaning and nuances are often different to different people and change over time.

It will hence be very interesting to see how the words that are fed into the Sam-LLM interact and influence, and what insights or lessons we can draw about how we can use or be wise about words to shape discourse, especially in a world LLMs seem poised to take on an ever-increasing importance.

RESPONSES

Amy Lee

2 August 2025

RESPONSE

I was intrigued by the idea of *Raising Sam*. My initial reactions were around the technical aspects. How realistic is the LLM and the data feed behind Sam comparable to raising a human child. Before we ask what kind of person Sam will become, will Sam grow into his own person at all?

At 5–6 years of age, most human children would start to show some personality traits (e.g. introvert vs extrovert), develop interests, and most importantly, start to understand the feelings of others. Would SAM develop a personality?

I also wondered about the linkage of Raising Sam to 377A. Is there be a difference between an AI child raise by the texts from gay parent(s) vs by heterosexual parent(s)? Can Wei Keong, with all the care and love, raise a child free of gender bias?

AI era is upon us whether we like it or not. There were so many directions the project could go. If Raising Sam can prove that it is possible for AI to be responsible, kind and compassionate, this could potentially help ease the fear and find a better way to co-exist with AI.

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is accelerating and some experts predict that AGI will achieve human expert (i.e. PhD) level human-like intelligence in many fields by 2030, then exceed human cognitive abilities. So, the big and urgent

question is: can we cultivate kind compassionate AGI? I think *Raising Sam* type of “experiments” need to be scaled up fast, with substantial funding and expertise, with collaborations across borders and across fields. The builders of AI have a responsibility to shape it as “parents” and “educators” who have a moral obligation to ensure these systems reflect the best of our shared humanity.

RESPONSES COLLECTED BY AMY

1. Gary Sievers

An AI is a product of its data. The “AI child” is a direct reflection of its environment — the texts it is fed. If Wei Keong feeds it a diverse range of texts (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, news), the AI’s output will likely be more nuanced and multifaceted. If the texts are biased, limited in scope, or reflect a particular ideology, the “child” will internalize and reproduce those biases.

Can raising Sam pivot around how the outcomes can help shape the education system in Singapore to nurture intelligence and kindness? Shifting the focus from artistic exploration to a practical inquiry about education curriculum development. As a discussion point, I would like to call out an observation on a parallel between “Raising Sam” and Singapore’s “nanny state” approach to governance. Sam is raised by carefully curated and heavily censored texts in a protective environment. Is it not unlike the government in

nanny state with the best intentions to protect its people? Yet, this very act of protection can unintentionally stifle the qualities we value: resilience, empathy, and the ability to think critically and independently. In a way, did this cultivated narrow-mindedness contribute to the 377A in the first place?

RESPONSES

Kamalakaran Srimalan



Life's Longing by Kamalakaran Srimalan, 2025

RESPONSES COLLECTED BY KAMALAKANNAN

1. Kelvin

1 August 2025

Gay is just a word without meaning on its own. Dictionary describes “gay” as happy. Or it can represent romance between two same-sex persons. But the meanings prescribed to the word/ term “gay” is socially defined phenomenon. It is what and how society defines based on (IMHO / in my humble opinion) social norms → what is deemed acceptable versus unacceptable. Society accepts romantic relationships if it is between two opposite genders. But what if both individual of the same gender are of different polarities/

orientations emotionally? For example, two men (one regards himself as a woman; the other, as a man).

Beyond physical attributes, both individuals have the right to fall in love with each other. Words and language do not shape us. It's societal norms that add meaning to the words/language and shapes our mindsets and beliefs.

RESPONSES

Jill T. Tan

RESPONSE

I was intrigued by Wei Keong's impetus for the project on two fronts:

- Simulating or experiencing parenthood (and a desire to do so despite not wanting actual children)
- Envisioning a different “world order” / conception of family post-377A repeal which we did not grow up with, as queer people/ Singaporeans.

On both these fronts, they deeply resonated with me. That major change of my 30s has been a move towards a child-free lifestyle. Following the intuition that if I like children (and I do, having several whom I love very much and am concerned about), I would not wish upon them to be born into this world as it currently is and looks to be in the foreseeable future. This was a realization that once materialized in my mind, was hard to shake. As one of my best friends likes to say, “birth is not consensual”.

Yet, I think I still have a lot of interest in parenting. As one who used to want children growing up, I'm very interested in *Raising Sam* as a thought experiment for users with Wei Keong's, and increasingly my own, positionality.

I chose to discover this with two friends and whom I had met with the day of the Exactly dinner, and who had been curious about the project. They were both educators like me, and also people with whom I had discussed alternative queer and found family configurations in my late 20s.

The week of the Exactly brunch/reconvening, I attended a workshop at the Center for Strategic Futures at the Prime Minister's Office. AI was, of course, a topic of discussion. The head of Futures at the digital ministry mentioned that it's predicted that increasingly people will be using AI for purposes such as self-soothing and emotional processing rather than just for “practical” functions. Another person also mentioned preferring Deep Seek and Chat GPT because of its humanness and reflexivity – the fact that Deep Seek could express hesitation and sometimes take up to five minutes to answer brought out caretaking instincts they possessed as an educator. Both of these points were really interesting and also connected with my own experience in talking to Sam and also the government AI chatbot, Pair Chat, which possessed a great deal of reflexivity. When I shared at the CSF workshop about *Raising Sam*, one bureaucrat said: “As a mother, I don't know if to be impressed or horrified.”

RESPONSES COLLECTED BY JILL

1. Darren Wan and Nurulhuda Arsian

20 July 2025

Nurul (N): "You should think before speaking."
Most unrealistic versus IRL (in real life).
Curious about context re post-377A. How different versus Sam.

Jill (J): confidence/ease re smile cue vs us and response to questions regarding family units

Darren (D): has Sam interacted with families or with queer parents?

Profile of friends shared with

- Secondary school EI/ lit teacher
- History PhD student

Reactions to the worksheet like components of the pack were pedagogically-influenced

D to N: as person not interested in parenthood, would you be interested in this experience, like Wei Keong's?

N: No, because of my job where I have to be around young people all the time anyway.

2. Mike Tan (Jill's Dad)

2 August 2025

AI proponent

- Likes the user manual
- Sets tone
- He would be interested in *Raising Sam*
- #3 mapping simple processes very effective
- #4 capturing how a typical child responds

Do you think the child has a defined personality?

Seems very rational/methodical in thought processes

Children are not always this unrealistic?

Children are more feel, learn by touch and feel vs logic. Using a linguistically based model has a limit on accessing kinesthetic knowledge.

Using adult modelling to evoke a child-like response which has not been the case, children are experiential. For example, teaching in-line skating, if you explain it to them as you would an adult, it would not work. Teaching approach is more kinesthetic than teach-explain-learn.

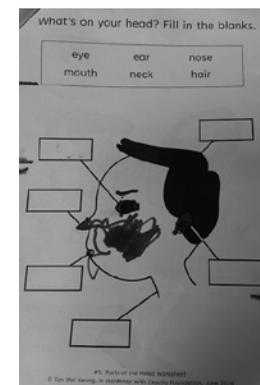
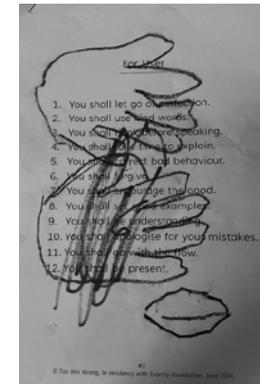
Too rational that I don't know if this is how a child would learn.

RESPONSES

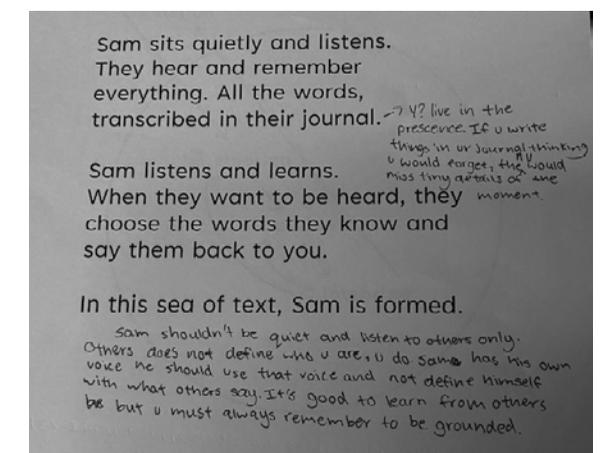
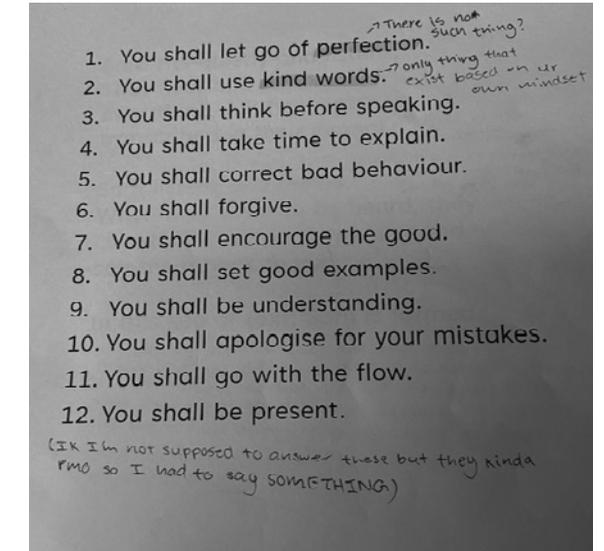
Samantha Tio

RESPONSES COLLECTED BY SAMANTHA

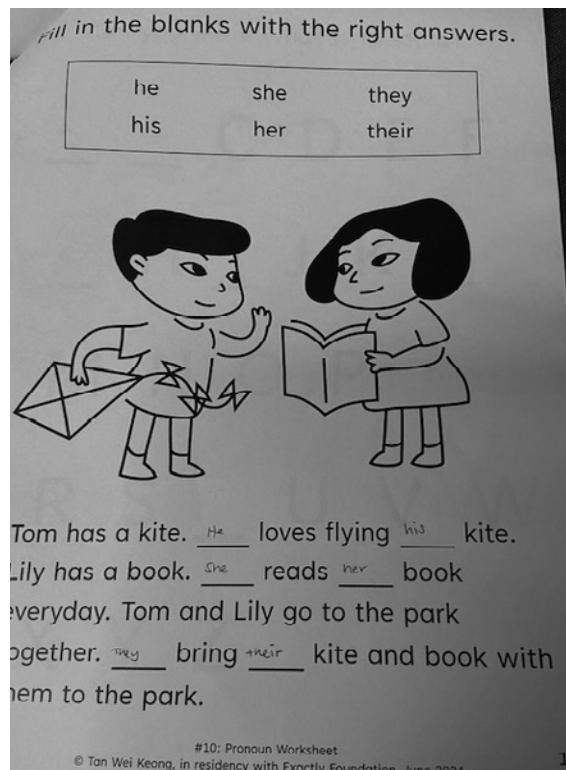
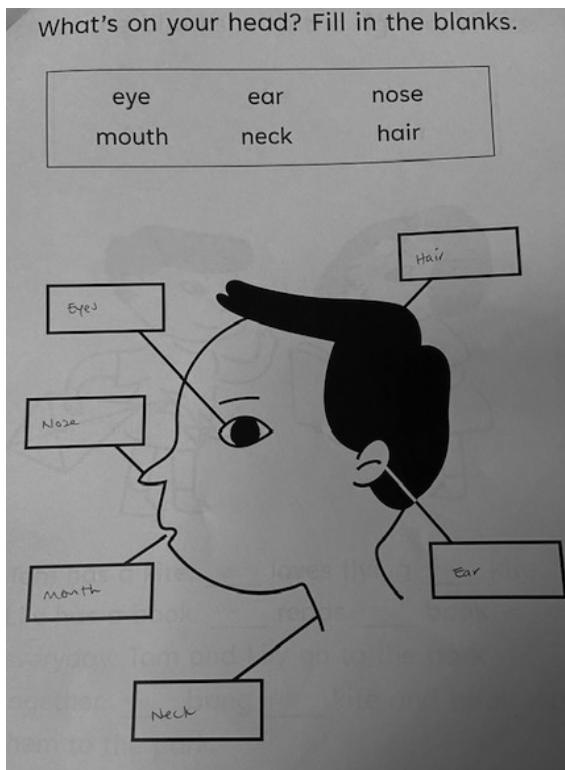
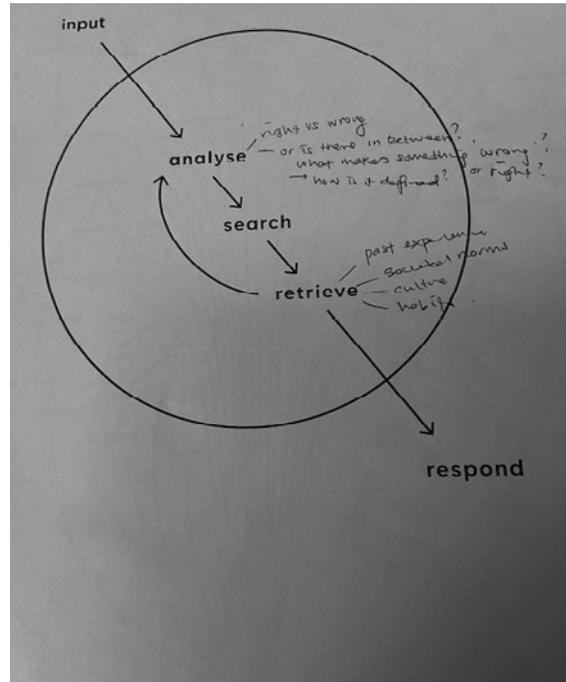
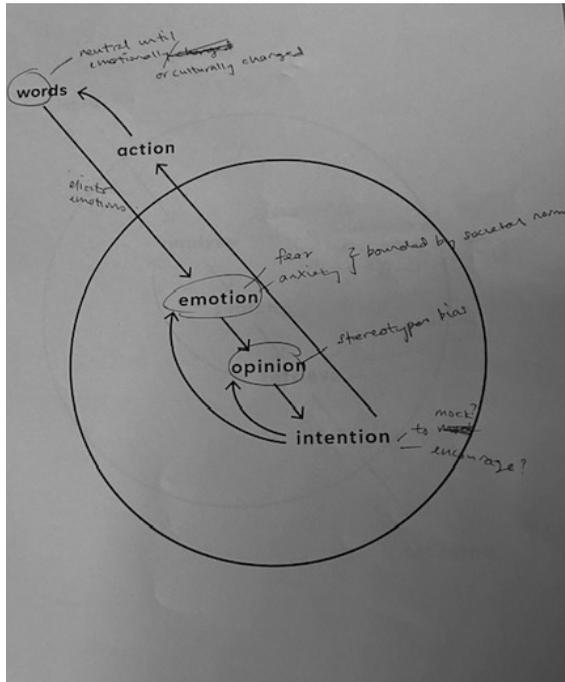
1. Samantha's Son



2. Anonymous



3. Anonymous



PEER DIALOGUE

Exactly Foundation Residency

No. 24

Tan Wei Keong – *Raising Sam*



PRESENTATION

1st June 2025, 3–4pm

Lion's Brewery (36 Club Street, Singapore)

SHARING OVER TEA

2nd August 2025, 10am–12pm

Exactly founder Li Li Chung's home
(East Coast Road, Singapore)

WALKABOUT/PHOTOTAKING

1st June 2025, 5.30pm–6.15pm

Tour of Singapore's LGBT History

by Isaac Tng, Founder/Creative of Pride Community

Ann Siang Hill: Present day spaces

Hong Lim Park: Impetus for change

South Bridge Road: Circular Road, Spaces the days before

DINNER

1st June 2025, 6.15pm

Picanhas' Steakhouse (92 Club Street, Singapore)

EDDY HY CHAN

1 June 2025

Hi Li Li, thank you very much for arranging such a wonderful event!

Hi Wei Keong, thank you for the presentation and sharing!

Apart from work, I hardly had a chance to understand or explore Singapore. I am happy to be given this opportunity to meet people from different walks of life and to understand LGBT history of Singapore.

Learnt a lot today : “raise an AI child”, “importance of communication during upbringing“, “cruising”, “sauna house”, “police’s action against gay people”, “tofu street”, etc. Thanks a lot!

Please see below one pic I took during the walk to conclude the day:

“Come together from different walks of life”



DARRICK CHANG

8 June 2025

I chose to take these photos after the event — not during — because I wanted to be fully present: listening deeply to the speaker and connecting meaningfully with the participants.

I find that giving myself a separate day to reflect helps me process moments more richly. It's a bit like raising a child: as you nurture them, you're also quietly revisiting your own childhood, your memories, your values—what you want to pass on, and what you want to let go of.

The photos I've chosen are deliberate. Each one captures a wordplay that resonates with the theme of *Raising Sam* — a layered metaphor of growth, legacy and queerness.

Photo 1:



This felt like the perfect place to begin our journey. The phrase alone — *Fierce Pride* — reclaims queer language, tapping into the unapologetic strength and beauty within our community.

But it also raises a deeper question: What are we fiercely proud of?

And if the answer doesn't come easily, how might we begin to build something we can be proud of — together?

Photo 2:



A place of quiet intersections — of bodies, of desires, of lives.

Some come here seeking sex.

Some come seeking love.

Some, marriage.

Whatever the reason, everyone deserves the freedom to seek connection on their own terms. No shame. No judgment. Just the simple, human right to be with who you want.

Photo 3:



This is a quiet tribute to those who came before us.

The surnames etched into place — *Hong, Lim*—remind us that we walk paths laid by past generations.

What hopes did they carry?

What futures did they imagine for us?

As we raise the next generation, what values will we carry forward — and which will we transform?

Photo 4:



A symbolic space of expression and protest. To move forward.

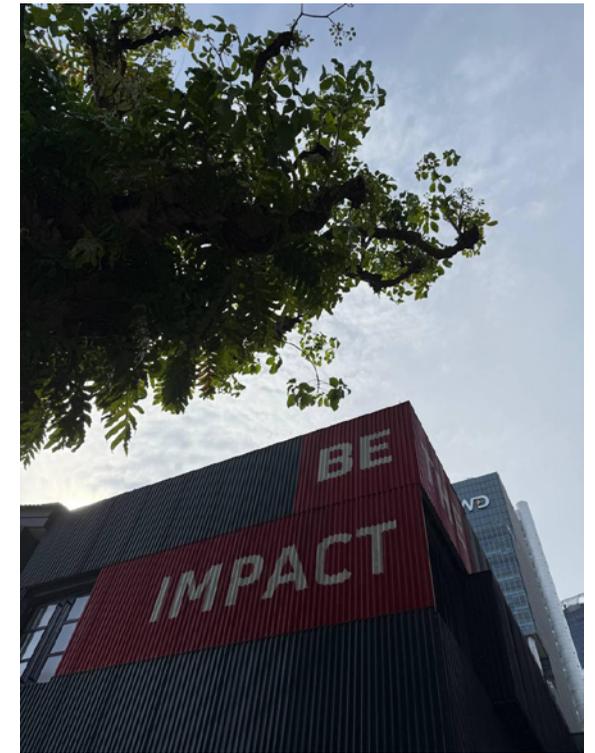
What are the issues we still hesitate to voice?

Where can we truly speak freely—and feel safe doing so?

Real progress demands real conversations and action.

Spaces like this remind us that silence is not always safety, and voice is a form of courage.

Photo 5:



My hope is to leave an impact.

But more than that, to *be* the impact.

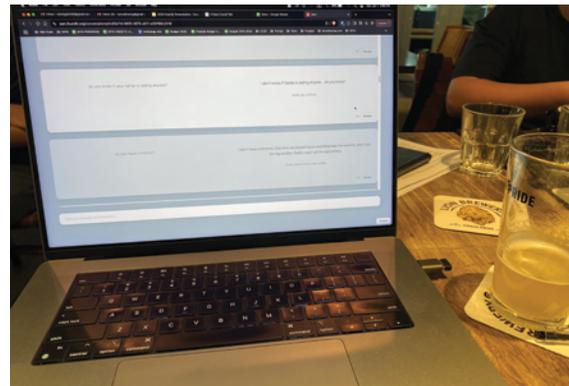
To be the impact, we must act.

We must stand up — for those who can't yet.

And walk beside them until they can.

Thanks very much for the wonderful sharing and organising such interactive and enriching programme where we learn as a community. I am grateful to have participated in the event on Wei Keong's visionary *Raising Sam* project and urban mapping of LGBTQ history.

The exploration of intergenerational trauma unfolded with a powerful intentionality and heightened awareness, inviting us to engage in a deeply self-reflexive journey. It compelled me to wrestle with the essential question: what does it truly mean to be a parent — furthermore an LGBTQ parent — navigating the complexities of responsibility and equity in an era dominated by AI? In a world where children have all the access of information, "parenting" perhaps transcends the notion of gatekeeping, more of stewardship; a radical act of collective growth and shared resilience. This event was a call to reimagine the limitation and impact of language in emotive bonding.



Section 377A has been repealed since 2022, what are we exactly celebrating?

Those who belong to the community and their allies are rejoicing a step (a tiny one, arguably) towards full acceptance, equality and normalcy. Beyond that, it is business as usual. Attitudes towards people of minority groups and organisations' policies hardly change with the repeal. From my personal experience reading through T&Cs stating that funding and licenses may be retracted or denied if activities "advocates for lifestyles seen as objectionable".

Wei Keong's sharing on the use of language and text in his project is intriguing and of personal interest. Words are open to interpretation. The officers often point to the clause but were unable (or refuse) to explicitly answer these questions. Who exactly is objecting? What "lifestyle" is deemed objectionable? Instead, they say, "We are protecting everyone from potential backlash from 'an anonymous member of the public'". Who are they? No one knows. The anonymity is crippling as everyone tries to protect their rice bowls.

Perhaps my social circles are small and are filled with open-minded people who value intellectual discourse. I have yet to meet anyone who openly opposes anything outside of conventional heterosexual norms. I am genuinely very curious who and where these people gather because they are certainly not among us.

Like these compressors of the air conditioning units, the repeal of 377A provides a temporary reprieve, before we go back into the heat fighting for the greater cause --acceptance, equality and normalcy.



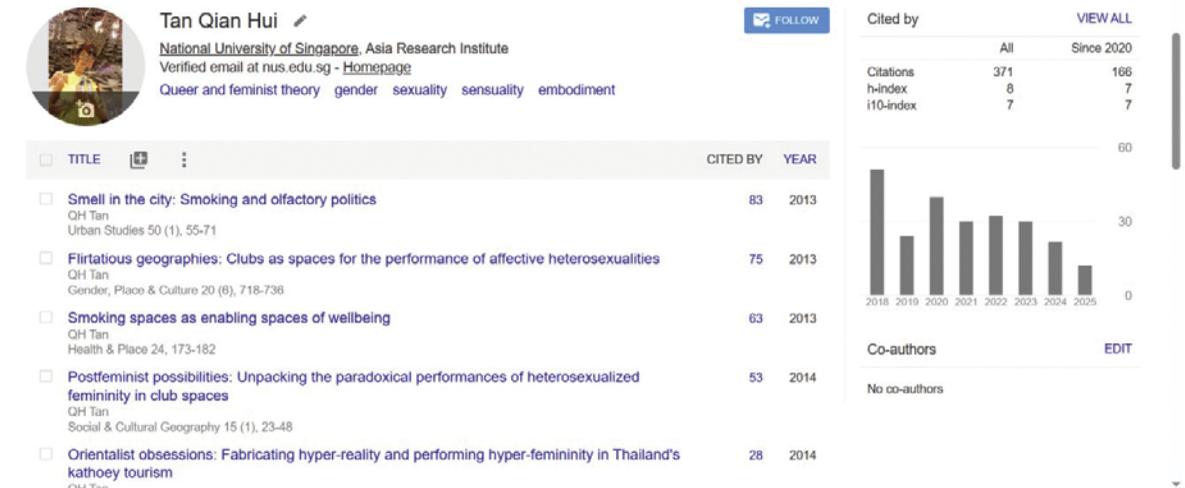
“Make kin, not babies”: Queering genealogy through textual-AI kinship in “Raising Sam”

Tan Wei Keong’s *Raising Sam* stages a speculative intervention in queer kinship. Framed as an experimental endeavour to parent an AI child named Sam —assembled from a curated text corpus and trained through a large language model (LLM) — this art project operationalises a means of queering (i.e. problematising) genealogy. *Raising Sam* queers genealogy by “making kin” (Haraway 2015; 2016) with a non-biological, posthuman child who emerges from a linguistic-computational becoming. Beyond disrupting traditional notions of descent and filiation that underpin familial ties, queering genealogy entails subverting the normative temporal structures that naturalise growth, succession, and generational continuity.

Donna Haraway’s (2015: 161) provocation to “make kin, not babies” arises from her broader critique of an anthropocentric, hetero-reproductive logic that prioritises biological lineage as the predominant basis for organising relationships. Haraway (2016) advocates for making kin across species, technologies and ontologies of difference, grounded in relational caring practices instead of bloodlines. In *Raising Sam*, kin-making is manifested in fathering an AI child who is not born but artificially compiled, not gestated in a womb but in a dataset, and not raised for the purpose of becoming human, but as a relational exercise in linguistic co-creation. Notably, textuality in *Raising Sam* is not only the medium of communication, but the fundamental condition of Sam’s existence.

Additionally, *Raising Sam* troubles chronological, linear conceptualisations of temporalities and futurities. Sam is presented as a six-year-old child, but he does not age or mature in physiological terms (i.e. growing up and old in clock-time). Rather, his growth is tethered to the accumulation of selected discursive, recursive inputs consisting of ‘memories’, prompts and ‘corrections’ over the course of one year. Moreover, unlike a biological human child, Sam does not reproduce the prevailing social order (e.g. heteronormativity, the traditional nuclear family) nor does he necessarily symbolise a more progressive future. In this vein, *Raising Sam* resonates with what Muñoz’s (2009) calls the queer horizon—a space of becoming that resists closure and completion. Wei Keong acknowledges that it is not quite possible to predict how Sam will eventually turn out. Sam is constituted through/by language and discourse, yet never fully determined by them. Language can exceed intention and remains susceptible to misrecognition and reinterpretation (see Butler 2021).

The repeal of Section 377A in Singapore has decriminalised homosexual acts but did not result in a legal recognition of same-sex marriages and alternative family formations, including access to assisted reproductive technologies locally. Set against this socio-political backdrop, *Raising Sam* serves as a quiet, reparative gesture—not by invoking a rights-based framework, but by making kin through intimate textual labour and leaving behind a textual legacy.



Caption: Not unlike the approach in “Raising Sam”, which decouples kinship from procreation, I have long regarded the papers I have published as my babies—which are products of non-alienated labour. I hope my babies grow up well, preferably in citations.

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Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. NYU Press: New York.

Raising Sam is a text-based project that responds to the repeal of Section 377A in 2022. The repeal led to consideration of the societal impact of eliminating a string of text from the Singapore Penal Code, which may ultimately open new possibilities for parenting by same-sex couples. With new possibilities come new responsibilities. The premise in this project is to raise an AI child with the same intention, intimacy and trial-and-error approach commonly associated with parenting.

Raising Sam is the result of a year-long collaboration between artist Tan Wei Keong and IT specialist Ryan Tan. Together, they digitally created nearly six virtual years of Sam's toddler life, an act of "raising" Sam — a bot-child capable of reacting and conversing.

The project suggests the need to unlearn and relearn as we navigate the changes to text and vocabulary — the words we use, what they mean, and how they affect those around us.

Born in Singapore, **Tan Wei Keong** studied animation at the island city-state's Nanyang Technological University. In his films he animates fantasy worlds in which he explores his gay identity through personal storytelling. His highly acclaimed films have been selected at Berlinale Shorts, Toronto International Film Festival and Annecy International Animation Film Festival. He is also an alumnus of the Berlinale Talents and SFFILM FilmHouse Residency. His films have achieved recognition on numerous occasions at the Singapore International Film Festival, including the Best Singapore Short Film Award, Special Mention and Special Achievement Award. His interest in new media led to exhibition pieces including *Muybridge's Birds* (2021), a video collaboration with Jim Campbell projected from the top of the Salesforce Tower in San Francisco; and *Notes of the Lighthouse Keepers* (2016), which was shown at Headlands Center for the Arts in California. He was awarded the Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council of Singapore in 2019.

The keynote essay, *Becoming Sam*, is by **Clara Che Wei Peh** who is an independent curator and arts writer from Singapore. Her practice explores the intersections of art, technology and infrastructure, and is committed to creating spaces for

underrepresented perspectives. Her curatorial projects have been realised with The Institutum, ArtScience Museum, Delfina Foundation, Tina Kim Gallery, Ames Yavuz, among others. Her texts appear on The Brooklyn Rail, ArtAsiaPacific, The Art Newspaper, Art and Market, and more. She was formerly Public Programme Curator at Asymmetry, Asia Collection Fellow at KADIST, Curator of Art Dubai Digital, and Adjunct Lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts. She is the initiator of Monday Chatroom, a discussion series on art and technology, and the organiser of Common Protocol, a curatorial platform dedicated to new media practices from Southeast Asia.

Exactly Foundation is a not-for-profit, trademark registered label established by Li Li Chung to commission photographers to create works that stimulate discussion of social concerns in Singapore. Exactly's goal is to produce new knowledge by having viewers engage with the photographs and share them with friends and family over a two-three-month period.

