

CALL FOR PAPERS

**DIGITAL EXISTENCE:
Memory, Meaning, Vulnerability**

Conference October 26-28, 2015 at the Sigtuna Foundation

Confirmed keynote speakers:

John Durham Peters University of Iowa, USA
Johanna Sumiala University of Helsinki, Finland
Andrew Hoskins University of Glasgow, UK

and with final comments by Charles Ess, University of Oslo, Norway.

What does it mean to be a human being in the digital age? How are the basic conditions for human kind negotiated and understood in cultures of connectivity? Questions about meaning and purpose, who I am, and how I am presented before others, are more and more entwined with our digital lives. In addition, digital media have become places where people share and explore existential issues in connection with loss and trauma. Our communication culture, as an existential terrain, offers new spaces for the exploration of existential themes and of the profundity of our lives. But the speed of the transformations of our technologized existence and the affordances as well as vulnerabilities therein simultaneously raises new existential challenges. The point of departure is that digital cultures encompass both the potential for existential meaning making, for experiences that border on or outright express the sacred, and for a loss of meaning: for interruptions and unspeakable affective non-meaning, for ambivalences, tensions and voids. While the existential approach involves 'eternal' questions – such as those that relate to time and space; being, our finitude and the life hereafter; the self and community – the conference also endeavours to examine the particular challenges of the contemporary digital age.

Digital Existence seeks to bring together scholars working in fields where this burgeoning exploration of the existential dimensions of digitalisation are brewing today; media philosophy, media memory studies, death studies, internet studies, and the field of media, religion and culture. The conference will be the first to frame our digital cultures existentially, with a particular emphasis on three keywords; memory, meaning, vulnerability. **Memory** is a key aspect of our technologized lives, often discussed in relation to the mnemonic role of the internet or digital media themselves. In addition, due to the fundamental changes of the very concept and nature of memory wrought by digitalisation, memory seems after the connective turn both individualised and automated at once, provoking new questions about our being-in-the-world. **Meaning** is not only achieved (or lost) through both remembering and forgetting, but also the task of our existence, according to existence philosophy. This goes beyond the individual, as exemplified in the continued role of communal death rituals in the late modern digital age. **Vulnerability** is a fundamental aspect of our existence, but with particular contemporary features highlighted in sociological debates on risk and uncertainty, and in feminist new materialism, but also with particular reference to the digital. Digital vulnerability relates to challenges afforded by both compulsive hyperconnectivity and hyperpublicness (such as instant validation needs, 'revenge porn', cyber bullying), by technological obsolescence and temporal instantaneity. The hauntings of

the potential forever of data also underscores our vulnerability. Is there a right to be forgotten? Will our memories last, and if lost, on our ageing and dying machines, can they be restored? How does the digital affect our sense of *existential security*? Does it bring about heightened senses of anxiety and ambivalence? And in what ways will stressing our embodied precarious situatedness contribute to a revised understanding of what it means to be human, in the digital age?

The conference aims to bridge approaches that encircle our digital existence philosophically with those ethnographically situated approaches that interrogate cultural practices and lived experiences of the digital world. We welcome theoretical as well as empirical paper submissions. Thematically the existential terrains of connectivity span without being fully exhausted by, the following research areas within which we welcome paper submissions:

- *digital memory cultures;*
- *death online; mourning and remembering the dead on the internet;*
- *digital time, temporal instantaneity; our traces online, the longevity of data, and the precariousness of our digital lives;*
- *techno-spirituality in the digital age; online religion, alternative spirituality;*
- *philosophical, theoretical and historical reflections on being digital;*
- *the relationship between digital media technologies and existential public health in the areas of for instance internet and suicide, self-mutilation sites, cyber bullying and blogging about terminal illness;*
- *selfhood today; the narrativised, quantified and wired self, digital storytelling;*
- *technological shifts and media scepticism;*
- *archives in transition (from our personal archives and life logs to play functions, from databases of trauma to heritage).*

Conference format

The conference will take place at the Sigtuna Foundation:
http://www.sigtunastiftelsen.se/index_hk.asp/id/15.

The conference will consist of three keynote lectures (followed by responses and open discussions) and five paper sessions with four papers in each. These thematic paper sessions include individual presentations of 15 minutes. A joint response will be offered to the papers, in turn to be followed by an open discussion. All participants are expected to read longer abstracts (500 words) and contribute to the discussions. The conference is open to members of DIGMEX (et.ims.su.se) and the Nordic Network for Media and Religion, but there will be a slot for external submissions, as well as opportunities to attend without a paper (please motivate thoroughly the reason for wanting to attend). The first day of the conference will be an open public event, advertised through the Sigtuna Foundation.

For paper presenters this event will be free of charge, and lodging and food will be covered by the conference budget. There is an option to participate without a paper: this would imply covering these expenses through other means. **All attendees will cover their own travel expenses to Sigtuna!**

Important dates

I. Early notice of interest. For planning reasons we would need an early indication about your interest in this event. Please e-mail amanda.lagerkvist@ims.su.se and let us know if you intend to submit an abstract or have wishes to attend without a paper, by **February 4**.

II. Deadline for abstract submissions: April 30 2015.

Submit your abstract (500 words) by email to: **Yvonne Andersson** (Conference Organiser):
yvonne.andersson@ims.su.se

III. Decisions on accepted papers are expected by mid-June, 2015. A preliminary conference program will be available in August.

Publication possibility

There is an offer from the Routledge Series on Digital Religion (edited by Heidi Campbell & Mia Lövheim) to publish select papers from the conference proceedings in a volume to be edited by Amanda Lagerkvist.

FUNDING

The conference is organised by the research programme **EXISTENTIAL TERRAINS: Memory and Meaning in Cultures of Connectivity (2014-2018)** (headed by Amanda Lagerkvist, PhD. Associate Professor, Wallenberg Academy Fellow The Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University) and funded by Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation in collaboration with Sigtunastiftelsen.

More information about the research programme may be obtained by Amanda Lagerkvist: amanda.lagerkvist@ims.su.se



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