



Human Memory in the Digital Age

June 9, 2018

Pufendorf Institute (Biskopsgatan 3, 223 62 Lund), Auditorium

Symposium organized by the Advanced Study group on Human Memory in the Digital Age,
Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies

9:00-9:55 José van Dijck, Utrecht University

10:00-10:55 Taha Yasseri, University of Oxford

11:00 – 11:15 COFFEE

11:15 – 12:15 Vera Zvereva, University of Jyväskylä

12:20 – 13:30 LUNCH

13:30 – 14:30 Amanda Lagerkvist, Stockholm University

14:35 – 15:00 Josepha Wessels, Lund University

15:00 – 15:15 COFFEE

15:15 – 15:40 Åse Ines-Kerr, Lund University

15:45 – 16:10 Sanchari De, Lund University

PRESENTATION TITLES & ABSTRACTS

Jose van Dijck

Fake News, Fake Memory? On social media, public trust and the problem of collective memory.

The recent hotly debated of fake news has raised many questions about how misinformation is affecting public discourse and even democracies. The debate has particularly centered on how social media networks like Facebook, Google and Twitter, and particularly their automated platform mechanisms, can be held responsible for the widespread distribution of fake news and the creation of filter bubbles. Public trust in the veracity and accuracy of media messages has become a serious issue: how is trust social media messages anchored? This question is all the more important when we face the problem of personal and collective memory, which is now mediated by social media who are allegedly creating filter bubbles and echo chambers. This lecture will discuss the complex interrelation between news, social media, automated filtering and human actors.

Taha Yasseri

Dynamics and biases of online attention and memory

The Internet not only has changed the dynamics of our collective attention but also through the transactional log of online activities, provides us with the opportunity to study attention dynamics at scale. In this work, we particularly study attention to aircraft incidents and accidents using Wikipedia transactional data. We observe that the attention given by Wikipedia visitors is influenced by the airline region but only for events with a high number of deaths. We show that the rate and time span of the decay of attention is independent of the number of deaths and a fast decay within about a week seems to be universal. We discuss the implications of these findings in the context of attention bias. We also devise a quantitative model that explains the flow of viewership from a current event to past events based on similarity in time, geography, topic, and the hyperlink structure of Wikipedia articles. We show that, on average, the secondary flow of attention to past events generated by these remembering processes is larger than the primary attention flow to the current event. We report these previously unknown cascading effects.

Vera Zvereva

Digital Memory on Runet: an attempt at historicisation

Contemporary memory studies tend to emphasize the increasing mediation by digital technologies of individual and collective memory. Discussions about digital memory often focus on the cumulative effect of memory technologies on collective and personal recollections and interpretations of the past. However, in the 2000-2010s digital memory technologies have developed rapidly, and their functional range has expanded. These technologies have also altered under the influence of social and political processes. Consequently, the entire system of relationships, cultural forms and social practices arising as a result of the use of memory technologies is also undergoing transformation. This paper emphasizes the importance of the historicising approach to technologies in the discussion of digital memory. Focusing on the Russian-speaking Internet segment (Runet), it aims to answer the question, to what extent one can speak about change both in the social

practices of digital remembering and the content and forms of collective memory caused, on the one hand, by technological change and, on the other hand, by the changing political and cultural context in the 2010s in Russia.

Amanda Lagerkvist

The Pervasive Presence of the Digital Dead: On Human Memory in the Face of The Loss of all Lost Things

What is the fate of human memory and grief in the face of “the loss of all lost things” (as is the title of Amina Gautier’s 2016 collection of short stories) in the age of all-pervasive media and connective memories of almost total recall? This lecture focuses on practices of remembering the dead in the digital age, as a case in point for discussing how our media are or fail to be existential media, and how memory itself is potentially transformed. I will argue that the presence of the digital dead illustrates the tension between existential needs of preservation and what I call techno-existential closure in the post-scarcity memory culture of our time. That way their presence also speaks to the vulnerabilities of being human in particular and significant ways.

Josepha Ivanka Wessels

Digitization of Memories of Conflict

Increasingly people deposit their experiences and memories instantly in cyberspace, selfies, photos on Instagram, video recordings as User Generated Content on YouTube or elaborate annual personal overviews on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and other social media platforms. This presentation deals with digitization and the construction of memory within the context of war & conflict specifically. What does virtual space offer in terms of depositing memories and what exactly are digital memories of war? What is the difference between digital war memorials vis-à-vis physical war memorials? How have interconnectivity and on-line availability of a plethora of visuals, art and creative expressions influenced the way we remember crisis events collectively? With the availability to digitally deposit and record experiences of war, humanitarian crises, how can these methods be employed to memorialize conflict and establish memorials? The digitization of war memory also has potential legal implications. The presenter explores how audiovisual material uploaded as on-line archive can serve as legal evidence in future war crimes tribunals and transitional justice.

Åse Innes-Kerr

Using models from Cultural Evolution as a framework for analyzing digital memories/digital culture

Theories from research in Cultural Evolution can provide a useful framework for thinking about and testing hypotheses within the social sciences. I will give a brief overview of some of the proposed mechanisms with which cultural information is learned and transferred, and suggest some ways in which this can be used as a lens through which to analyze social and psychological phenomena.

Sanchari De

Memory, and Imagination and Paradoxes of the Modern Nation of Bangladesh: A Reflection through the Shahbag Protest

The Shahbag protest that took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, was a mobilization of around 100,000 people. The demonstrators demanded capital punishment for war criminals accused

of crimes against humanity and of involvement in the genocide of almost 3 million people during the 1971 Liberation War, which took place in what was then East Pakistan.

In this paper I will discuss how the Shahbag protest made use of digital media to construct alternative accounts of official versions of sociocultural struggle in the country in the decades before and after the 1971 Liberation War and to disseminate historical and cultural materials from that era. This process made visible personalized memories of injustice and deprivation of civic and cultural rights in Bangladeshi democracy. Using the methodology of digital ethnography and interviews of 22 bloggers/ activists this paper will refer to “paradoxes” enmeshed in the sociopolitical life of Bangladesh which were made visible through the Shahbag protest. The protest underlines the need for human rights such as freedom of expression.

However, the protest started with demands for capital punishment, which cannot be justified within a human rights framework. I would argue that these paradoxes are indicative of a cultural struggle for identity which is based on the imagination of an “ideal” Bangladesh. In this regard, this research considers the Shahbag protest as a symptom of acute tensions and dilemmas across religions, gender, human rights, and the expectation of justice for the genocide.