

DIGMEX and The Sigtuna Foundation present

**Digital Existence III:
LIVING WITH AUTOMATION**

A conference about AI, biometrics and the human condition

The Sigtuna Foundation

POSTPONED UNTIL

31st of May – 1st of June 2021

AI (*artificial intelligence*) is mounting on the human horizon, evoking both hopes and fears. Mapping itself onto almost every conceivable realm of human life and experience, AI is however not only a concern for the future: it is already here, at our fingertips. As AI is part of our most intimate lives, quantified self-imaginings, embodied perceptions, and our emergent practices of care and of law enforcement – especially via *biometrics* – our lives are increasingly ‘on automatic.’ But where did this world stem from – historically and ideologically? What founds it philosophically? How can it be (re)conceived, theoretically and artistically, in order for us to responsibly craft AI to serve human kind? What can we learn from attending to how we already *live with automation* – about risks and possibilities – and from how we have lived with its imaginaries on our horizon throughout history, in fiction and techno-progressivist discourse and practice? What are the existential needs and necessities that face us anew with AI? And can we now harness, as scholars in the humanities, those rich sources of insight and wisdom about the human condition, that remain our footing, while mobilising them creatively and critically for a new era with ‘responsible AI’ (Dignum 2019)?

This symposium is motivated by the fact that in increasingly conspicuous ways, leading AI alignment collaborations to develop philosophically robust notions of “benign AI”, are almost entirely absent of any in-depth engagement with humanistic knowledge, whether philosophical, historical, artistic or anthropological. Because these automated technologies provoke immediate questions about privacy infringement, ethics and security, questions about human value, well-being, trustworthiness and ethics in AI design are simultaneously raised globally. The European Commission for example recently proposed an approach “that places people at the centre of the development of AI (*human-centric AI*).” To address these major transformations and broad global concerns the symposium “**Digital Existence III: Living with Automation**” will place the qualitative, philosophical and artistic modes of interpreting, creating, co-designing, critiquing and engaging the emergent automated world equally centrally. AI must be placed in historical sociopolitical contexts, yet their many exigencies and meanings also require looking backward to our history as scholars in the humanities, as much as looking forward and beyond its classic trajectories, to find novel and pertinent framings.

From the perspective of *existential media studies* (EMS), which revisits classic questions and themes in existential philosophy about ‘what it means to be human’ – while upgrading them to our contemporary technologized culture in conversation with posthumanist and new materialist debates – the stakes are foremost *existential*. Technologies define and redefine the human condition. Hence, automated data services are conceived as everyday “mundane data;” they co-condition our world and media are our **material infrastructures of being** (Peters 2015). Yet, automation is simultaneously theorized as a fresh source for embodied disharmony, friction, vulnerability and social injustice. Not only do we use technologies; our lives are increasingly digitally “thrown”, to draw on the language of Martin Heidegger, into a highly connected, fast changing technological world that uses us, threatening to leave us displaced and ever more vulnerable (Lagerkvist 2016, 2017, 2019). In EMS human existence is consequently conceived as an ongoing **moral project** (Kierkegaard 1849/1989; Sartre 1956), stretched out in an anticipatory mode towards horizons of the possible, the contingent

and the imperative. EMS thus maintains that the towering existential and ethical task of our time is to reflect upon, and take responsibility for, the media technologies that we develop, use and embrace, and how that embrace simultaneously raises (as in de Beauvoir's 'ethics of ambiguity', 1947) new affordances and limits; the new resources and risks of modern human life. This conference will thus take existential media studies in new directions, prompting a necessary interrogation of AI and biometrics from creative, imaginary, artistic, philosophical and historical angles, while anthropologically centring on experiences of *living with automation* in today's world.

Keynote speakers: N. Katherine Hayles, Benjamin Peters, Joanna Zylinska, Kelly Gates, Amanda Lagerkvist, Sun-ha Hong, Zach Blas.

BioMe Panel: Amanda Lagerkvist, Charles Ess, Jenny Eriksson Lundström, Matilda Tudor, Jacek Smolicki, Maria Rogg

Are you working on biometrics? During our symposium there will be a slot for *engagement papers by younger scholars (PhD students and postdocs)*. These papers should engage the young field of existential media studies in the timely contexts of biometric artificial intelligence. Please submit an abstract of 500 words to Matilda Tudor (matilda.tudor@im.uu.se). **Deadline to be announced.** Depending on availability, the conference will also be open for DIGMEX network members without papers, at their own expenses. If you wish to join DIGMEX, contact Matilda Tudor and specify your interest in existential media studies.

The contributions to the symposium will be published in a themed issue of a peer reviewed journal. The symposium is an activity within the project "*BioMe: Existential Challenges and Ethical Imperatives of Biometric AI in Everyday Lifeworlds*" (2020-2024), headed by Dr. Amanda Lagerkvist (based in the Uppsala Informatics and Media Hub for Digital Existence: <http://www.im.uu.se/research/hub-for-digital-existence>) and hosted by the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University. This event is the first in a series of three planned symposia entitled "New Directions in Existential Media Studies". It follows on from two conferences organized by DIGMEX (a network initiated by Amanda Lagerkvist in October 2014) in collaboration with the Sigtuna Foundation: "Digital Existence: Memory, Meaning, Vulnerability" (2015) and "Digital Existence II: Precarious Media Life" (2017). *BioMe* is part of the national research program WASP-HS: Wallenberg AI, Autonomous Systems Software Program – Humanities and Society: <https://wasp-hs.org> (2020-2030) financed by the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation (MMW) and the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation (MAW). The conference is co-organized by the DIGMEX network and the Sigtuna Foundation, and co-funded by MMW, MAW, Uppsala University and the Sigtuna Foundation.