New Memory Cultures and Death: Existential Security in the Digital Memory Ecology

Amanda Lagerkvist

Stockholm University

Abstract

It is often claimed that modern media massively return the repressed yet unavoidable fact of death, which modernity had institutionalised and placed out of sight. Death is everywhere in the media age: in news, in fiction, and not least in the budding practices of sociality and memory on the internet. This article will revolve around what we may learn about media and death from the vantage point of how memory cultures are currently being transformed. Spanning a heterogeneous terrain, the 'digital memory ecology' comprises among other things the construction of a digital afterlife, commemorative communities of grief and remembrance, interaction in guest books, digital candles and commentary fields on digital memorials. This article argues that today death is far from the hidden supplement to culture as Zygmunt Bauman contends or that it is even making a mediated return to us, but is rather ubiquitous in the digital age. As such it is both de-sequestered and deferred. By launching the deliberately ambiguous concept of *existential security*, the article outlines a research agenda for how we may approach these tendencies.

Introduction

> The two key existential facts about modern media are these: the ease with which the living may mingle with the communicable traces of the dead, and the difficulty of distinguishing communication at a distance from communication with the dead.

> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 149).

One common account of the relationship between media and death is that the modern media return to us the repressed yet unavoidable fact of death, which modernity has institutionalised and placed out of sight. To quote a recent Swedish anthology of media and film scholars at Stockholm University entitled *Döden i medierna: Våld, tröst, fascination* (*Death in the Media: Violence, Comfort, Fascination*):

> To claim that death has become taboo in public life, however, ignores the steadily growing presence of death in the media. The connection between the two is in fact quite strong. In

> tandem with the removal of death from our public sphere, from streets, squares and the home, death is becoming more and more showcased in the media. The media have thereby become the new space where death is harboured (or contained?). This applies particularly to fiction – on American television the number of visible deaths has increased by more than one hundred percent since the 1980s. (Hirdman 2012, 11, my translation)

Hidden away and sequestered, removed from everyday experience, death has made a mediated return to the public sphere. The argument draws on Anthony Giddens (1991), and the claim is that the abundance of death in the media has to do precisely with the fact that the everyday has become completely dissociated with any connections to, or even notion of, death. The media provide *the* domain where existential themes of loss and grief may be addressed or worked through. At the same time television's serial format – cyclical, repetitive crime fiction serials – presents and contains death in a soothing and predictable form (Hirdman 2012, 73–75). We might thus conclude that in news, anniversary journalism, and fiction (crime novels, television serials, and fictional film) death is a haunting disposition in our modern media age. Death is, as it were, what is present in the absent, and absent in the present (Degen & Hetherington 2001). This corroborates John Durham Peters's even wider claim for pairing death with communication. He posits that '[i]ndeed, all mediated communication is in a sense communication with the dead, insofar as media can store "phantasms of the living" for playback after bodily death' (Durham Peters 1999, 142). The dead are thus all around us, thanks to their ghostly traces in the media. And the media and modern forms of communication are around because we have routinely sought communication with the dead in modernity: 'What sex was to the Victorians, death is for us, the ultimate but inescapable taboo' (ibid., 147).

This article argues that today death is far from hidden away, and it is simultaneously more than the tabooed making a scandalous and profuse mediated reappearance. In the budding practices of both sociality and memory on the internet, death has become ubiquitous, and this phenomenon – in particular how people commemorate the dead – is one crucial example of the fact that digital media increasingly saturate all spheres of our contemporary existence. Paying attention to memory constitutes one piece of the puzzle. Yet the connections among death, mediation, and the mnemonic obviously prefigure both the era of modern media and the digital age. The memorial quality of media is a general aspect of human history and of the history of communication. The Egyptian pyramids for instance, which Harold Innis conceived of as *time-biased media*, are both sanctuaries for the prominent dead and technologies of memory that sustain culture and society over time (Innis 1951). Similarly, in many ancient cultures tombstones exemplify how since the dawn of historical time media have been storage devices for memories of the dead. In addition the tomb-like quality of the written *word* has often been remarked upon in a variety of cultures.[1]

Today our tombs are also digital, and our memories of the dead sometimes viral. What can we learn about death and the media today through the vantage point of how memory cultures are currently being transformed, owing to mediatisation and digitalisation? In line with recent findings and theoretical discourses on virtual mourning and digital memory, I propose here that, in the digital age, death is both de-sequestered and deferred – perhaps even to some extent redefined – in and through these digital memory practices. Below, I will expound on the value of such an ambivalent position.

Existential terrains

Increasingly, digital memory cultures pervade our contemporary everyday and life world. These include, for instance, the mundane activities of storing images, video clips, and texts on SNSs; our personal portable archives of images, photographs, music; databases of all kinds; photographs taken by digital cameras; text messages, digital television news casts, blogs, digital storytelling, and computer games (see Garde-Hansen et al. 2009). They also relate to the extraordinary – in services to manage the digital afterlife, digital shrines, web memorials, and communities of the bereaved. Despite their pervasive

presence in the life world, we have scant understanding in media studies of what these new cultures of memory mean for people *existentially*. In our age of digitalisation – and with the advent of new memory forms and practices such as YouTube memorials, digital shrines, web communities of grief and remembrance, identity work in profiles on social networking sites, and personal portable archives – fundamental existential issues have new, critical, and as yet largely unresearched implications in people's lives.[2] These implications are not inconsequential, since they involve our fundamental sense of time, space, identity, and community (McIlwain 2005). They also impend the ultimate abyss before our finitude. The line between life and death – the mystery of the finite and the infinite – is accentuated as people deal with their own illnesses or imminent deaths in digital storytelling about terminal illness, and as they construct living memories online of their departed friends and relatives. Death is dealt with on the internet, and our online environment is simultaneously increasingly mobile and increasingly imbricated in the life world.

In the aftermath of the tragic death of a young woman killed by her peers in the Stockholm suburb of Stureby in 2009, whose death triggered enormous public expressions of online grief and remembrance, a debate ensued that stressed the urgency of addressing and analysing these existential terrains emerging in our societies. It was argued that website owners and parents, as well as society at large, have a responsibility to address how young people work through and encounter death in their digital lives (Ahlinder & Agebäck, *DN Debatt*, 9 Sep. 2009). Another poignant example of the urgency with which we need to engage in these matters is the alarming case of a young boy who in 2010 committed suicide online on the Swedish online forum Flashback (www.flashback.org/t1322408) (Westerlund 2013). The incomparably most important matter of all – *the question of his very existence* – was on display and subject to the influence of others, onlookers, and those who were virtually present and active in the commentary field. The role of technological affordances, and new patterns of sociality, publicness, commemoration, ritualisation, and communication, and their clout in such tragedies, as well as the situation of a heightened sense of evaporation between the public and the private are currently debated both in media and in bereavement studies.

From a media studies perspective the question of the consequences and implications of the internet was initially polarised between utopian versus dystopian camps (Rheingold 1993; Kraut et al. 1998). While many more nuances have been added to the discussion over the years, to this day the established traditions in media studies (cultural studies versus political economy, for instance) tend to reproduce this binary division. In order to be able to interrogate the fast and furious technological developments that render abundant phenomena such as bereavement by suicide online, blogging about terminal illness, and online communities of grief and commemoration, we need to ask questions about the roaring *human* consequences of digitalisation. We need to embrace these emergent existential terrains of our society as inherently ambivalent and as affording tremendous challenges as well as new conditions and possibilities. Hence, I suggest that a different angle is of the essence.

This article sets out to provide a theoretical framework for this approach, by outlining some of the most important challenges, predicaments, and possibilities for studying digital memory cultures and for examining their role in the changing relationship to dying, mourning, and commemorating the dead. In assessing these emergent tendencies, I argue that we need to approach them existentially and allow ourselves to be inspired by existentialist philosophy.[3] Moreover, we are also in need of a transdisciplinary and trans-sectorial approach in which media studies engage in new dialogues, for example, with death studies, bereavement studies, sociologists and psychologists of religion, anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, and the field of social medicine. Such an approach is needed not only to grasp public and mediatised rituals of dying, mourning, commemoration, and so on, but also to understand the internet or digital cultures more broadly.

The rapidly changing realm of digital media occupies centre stage in contemporary media and communication studies across its broad research framework. With varying degrees of optimism and pessimism, digital media have been studied as enabling a play with identity, as making possible the emergence and strengthening of new communities and social activism, as enabling new forms of participatory cultures, as setting off new forms of citizenship and diasporic communities. Social media have been explored in terms of how they affect everyday life and create new forms of sociality and networked publics, enabling self-expression among the youth. Political economy scholars have critiqued powerful corporations and shown how these organisations contribute to systems of surveillance. Others have looked into the corporate role both in political control and in the potential democratisation of authoritarian states. Within the digital humanities scholars have explored, among other things, the changing cultural and philosophical meanings of archiving and storing heritage, thanks to the ever-increasing accessibility and mobility of memory in the digital age.

To a far lesser degree, researchers have focused on how users experience the internet and digital media *existentially*. When scholars have sought to generalise the uses of the internet from an audience perspective, for instance, they have generally identified two main uses: information gain and the quest for 'virtual togetherness' (Bakardjieva 2005, 169–80). While questions of *community* and *meaning* were key in early ethnographies in networked cultures (Baym 1995), their full existential implications have not always been elaborated on. Anette Markham details the lived and embodied experience of online community memberships in *Life Online*. She concludes that the online experience is both a tool and a place, and a 'way of being' in phenomenological terms (Markham 1998). There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to push this focus on *being* one step further. Firstly, in general, in the footsteps of Raymond Williams, cultural studies approaches conceive of culture as 'ordinary' and people as being involved in meaning making practices within the this worldly or secular everyday. As is common – and *comme il faut* – in cultural studies, questions of meaning and community are drained of any connection to the human experience of or quest for spirituality or transcendence in any form (cf. Cvetkovich 2012). With important exceptions (e.g. Durham Peters 1999; Rothenbuhler 1998; Axelson 2006; Pinchevski 2011; Sumiala 2013), in mainstream media studies existential issues have not been given due attention.

Secondly, while it should be noted that death is a topic that interested scholars in the early days of internet studies (Hutchings 2012), today these musings are in need of a different contextualisation and concomitant theorisation, due to the Web 2.0 environment. Existential issues have been touched upon in research on online memorials and digital remnants (Roberts 2004; Hess 2007; Wahlberg 2009; Haverinen 2011; Walter & Hourizi 2011/2012; Hutchings 2012; Refslund Christensen & Sandvik 2013; Moncur forthcoming), in work on the internet and suicide (Ozawa-de Silva 2008; Westerlund 2010), and in studies on blogging about lethal disease (Andersson 2012). From a psychological viewpoint, critical reassessments of patterns of behaviour in our cultures of connectivity have stressed the loneliness and a-sociality implied by digital media use and thereby address existential issues indirectly (Hodkinsson 2007; Miller 2008; Johansson 2011). According to the psychoanalyst Sherry Turkle (2011), we now inhabit a world where the *self itself* is tied to, and emerges through, constant connectivity and instant validation, while leaving individuals emotionally deprived and ultimately alone. Furthermore, to *exist* as an individual and a social being through digital media forms seems to be a normal state of affairs for many younger people in our media age ('If you're not on MySpace, *you don't exist*', argued an informant quoted in boyd 2007, italics added).

Approaching these matters from an existentialist perspective will complement the psychological approach in this burgeoning debate and bring out other crucial facets of the analytical object. This will push us to raise questions about how users explicitly or implicitly inhabit these media cultures as existential terrains: firstly, as private and/or public spaces for individual and collective commemoration and grief, and secondly, for creating and archiving the networked self. The theoretical framework is inspired by the basic themes in classic existentialist thought (see Hong & Hong eds. 2000; Dreyfuss

& Wrathall eds. 2012), which highlight the fundamental anxiety and dread of nothingness that we are faced with in existence, the absurdity of life as a contingency, and the pervasive alienation of our modern world, societies, and lives. As a point of departure, humans are conceived of as existential beings, torn between freedom and necessity, who constructively and actively seek meaning in the face of these conditions. The objective is to identify both the exigencies and the potential for pursuing existential issues through memory practices among media users of the digital age. The point is that while digital memories may serve existentially to secure continuity, to pursue meaning and value, and to enable profundity (in terms of human growth or transcendence), they may also, existentially speaking, potentially bolster the sense of a void – a loss of meaning.

Existential security and ambiguity

The important question is to what extent digital memories may bring about a sense of cohesion, meaning, continuity, or profundity – what I call, highly aware of the ambiguity of the term, *existential security*. This oxymoron acknowledges that human existence is in fact uncertain and that existential security is never unconditionally realised. The concept thus focuses on the quest for it, rather than on its actuality. Existential security differs slightly from Anthony Giddens's (1992, 92) *ontological security*, which has to do with the phenomenological and emotional sense of 'being-in-the-world', trusting through routine and habit that people and things will remain roughly the same, and relying on the continuity of one's own self-identity. Set within a liquid modern frame of the digital age, where constant flux is the norm, existential security adds to this emphasis on the social, individual, and material the prospects for individuals to integrate their being-in-the-world into a meaningful unity, involving a sense of purpose or direction in life or a sense of cohesion and dignity. In other words, existential security involves the extent to which experiences can be integrated into a functional meaning-making system, which can involve both this-worldly and other-worldly experiences of profundity *or* spirituality (cf. Melder 2011).[4] In addition, existential security is not solely an individual quest (although it can be), but also a matter of seeking meaning and continuity through/as inspired fellowship – that is, through *communitas* (Turner 1969).

This approach also relates to important debates within the science of religion and the subfield that studies religion and the media, where such issues have been approached through the culturalist emphasis on the need for a broader understanding of the meaning-making and mediated qualities of religion and the religious qualities of the media (Sumiala-Seppänen et al. eds. 2006; Morgan ed. 2008; Lynch, Mitchell, & Strahn eds. 2012). This debate has emphasised the need in an ostensibly 'secularised' Western society for a new understanding of people's changing relationship to transcendent and existential dimensions in life (cf. Woodhead & Heelas 2000). Sharing this point of departure, the existential approach to digital media cultures acknowledges that the exploration of existential themes takes place within the structures and through the rituals of institutionalised religions, but more importantly, it occurs also in other more uncharted contexts (cf. Hoover & Lundby eds. 1997). Here it is conceived of as occurring vividly and ubiquitously within the realm of digital media (cf. Lövheim 2004), and within digital memory cultures in particular.

Instead of seeing the internet as inherently positive or negative, liberating or controlling, democratic or undemocratic, meaningful or trivial, I conceive of it as an existential and ambiguous terrain. This terrain provides avenues for exploring the fundamental human condition of being faced with the contingency and absurdity of our lives, and the issues of meaning and meaninglessness, remembering and forgetting, individuality and collectivity, loneliness and sociality, the finite and the infinite. Digital memory cultures, I argue, reside exactly at this point of tension: while they may serve existentially to secure a sense of cohesion, continuity, and profundity, they may also bring about an enhanced sense of dis-connection or lack of meaning. In this way they may even call for alternate approaches, rooted in existentialist thought, to communication altogether. For instance, emphasising the breakdown of communication, the impossibility of dialogue, John Durham Peters (1999, 127–135) argues that Søren Kierkegaard saw 'communication as a mode of revealing and concealing, not of

information exchange', since human life is an unresolvable paradox involving both accident and necessity and containing inescapable tragedy. Durham Peters stresses the sense in which communication must be conceived 'never as the touching of consciousness, only as the interpretation of traces' (ibid., 153).

In light of the contemporary rhetoric of sharing and connecting, such a stress on the difficulties and intrinsic quandaries to communicate fully (whilst acknowledging the human longing for connection), or even the value of alterity and interruptions themselves (Silverstone 2003; Pinchevski, forthcoming), seems especially pertinent and may hold the potential for providing a timely and seemly optics for media studies. Furthermore Amit Pinchevski stresses that in the material traces of mediation, we will find the residues of meaning making as well as unintentional meanings, and we may discern how the production of meaning is often interrupted by inevitable non-meaning (ibid). Through this lens we may be able to appreciate and describe important aspects of what digital memory cultures afford, but even more importantly, how they may fail to deliver meaning or produce cohesion. That is how they may obstruct or suspend any resolution or intervene in short cuts to a desired equilibrium of incontestable unanimity of meaning – the Rheingoldian utopia of community – in relation to death, loss, and mourning.

Memory, mediatised death, and the temporality of instantaneity

My point of departure is the premise that when we think about death and the media, new memory cultures are an intriguing place to begin. As Johanna Sumiala discusses in *Media and Ritual: Death, Community and Everyday Life* (2013), studying how mediatised death rituals are employed in our media-saturated society as a means of coping with death, creating community, and restoring order is of primary importance, both for understanding the shape of rituals in our age and, in turn, for understanding the role of the media and the mediatisation of our societies. These rituals also create moments of ultimate meaning in relation to loss – often but not solely through collective acts of remembrance (Sumiala 2013, 91–92).[5] And yet mediated or mediatised death is much more than a question of memorialisation or the urge to remember someone. The online suicide mentioned above, for example, demonstrates that death rituals are not confined to the commemorative aspect, but also include rituals of dying.[6] But most important, the suicide occurs in the present tense and alerts us to the question of real-time death and the way our digital culture operates through a temporality of instantaneity, as death is, as in this case, instantly communicated (cf. McIlwain 2005). As our life world seems to have been highjacked by the 'absolute present' (Allon 2004) the suicide can be described as a rampant and highly disturbing example of what we might call in the tradition of critical phenomenological approaches to technology, the 'tyranny of connectivity'. This may provoke an analysis of *existential suffering* (Ozawa-de Silva 2008), as arguably co-constituted by public and instant mediation and interaction. And yet such phenomena have something to do with mediated memory, since as has been recently acknowledged, they simultaneously point to the changing nature of memory itself (cf. Garde-Hansen et al. eds. 2009). Hence, beginning with death as it is mediated digitally or is digitally subjected seems to lead us into contemporary discourses about memory.

If we begin with collective memory, in turn, death also seems to be in the vicinity. As societies construct social, national, or public memories, traumatic and transformative events that become milestones for the collective memory of a national community, often involve loss of life, as for example, in terrorist attacks, school shootings, and natural disasters, which become important iconic events in a nation's history (Leavy 2007; Volkmer 2009; Sumiala 2013). This is also true in the case of the formation of transnational mediated memories, or what Anna Reading has called the *globital memory field*, in which a new logic is emerging for how events become 'memory'.[7] In this new media ecology and memory culture, death is also prevalent. One of Reading's examples is the death of the Iranian student Neda in June of 2009, whose dying moments were filmed and communicated through acts of mobile media witnessing, leading to the posting of her death on Facebook, and then picked up by news organisations and printed out as posters that were used within hours in protests in streets around the world (Reading 2011). As Reading argues, these features of the new memory ecology also underline the role of the

instantaneous in the era of absolute presence, yet this regime of memory seems challenged by fragmentation, evaporation, and loss.

I hold that the basic themes in existentialism are actualised in three tensions that arguably constitute contemporary digital memory cultures. Firstly, users' identities are shaped through increasingly *fragmented and versatile forms of individual and collective remembering*, and this constitutes a major challenge for the study of collective memories. This is due to the fact that digital media are pervaded by the combination of connectivity with instant, easy, and affordable publishing possibilities that create endless avenues for sharing, exposing, participating in shaping, selecting, editing, revising, and revaluing, individual and collective memories (Maj & Riha 2010). Digital memory cultures generate vernacular memories that are a matter of 'elective affinities' (Pinchevski 2011, 263). The second, and related, tension is that networked publics that group around memories of individual and collective trauma and grief for instance, contribute to an accelerated *evaporation of the public and the private.* This amounts to a widespread, unprecedented new sense of mediated publicness, offering possibilities for the public mediation of private experiences and memories, and for the emergence of new constellations of communities of memory – often on a global scale (Reading 2011; Conrad and Assmann 2010). Third, when our lives become increasingly digitised, this terrain may be haunted by the fear of *information loss*, since the speed at which we live and work compels us to practices of constantly updating ourselves constantly while 'keeping track, recording, retrieving, stock-piling, archiving, backing up and saving' (Garde- Hansen et al. 2009, 5). This constitutes *a fundamental tension in our contemporary existence between remembering and forgetting,* keeping and losing, saving and deleting (van Dijck 2007; Hoskins 2009a; Garde-Hansen et al. 2009). And yet, for media users these tendencies may also constitute an impetus for entering into existential terrains of connectivity.

The digital memory ecology

These versatile, vulnerable, and visceral digital memories are embedded in our existence. José van Dijck (2007) has launched a holistic and integrative framework for analysing mediated memories in the digital age. Moving away from a focus on memory as cultural and shared, she looks into what she calls our digital 'shoeboxes' and finds our private and personal memories preserved in digital archives equally valid for cultural analysis. Mediated memories in our digital age are always *embodied* and sensuously felt, *embedded* in social contexts, and *enabled* by technologies (van Dijck 2007). Media scholars belonging to such diverse theoretical traditions as phenomenology, cultural studies, audience studies, and social theory, have been fecund in conceptualising this situation: in *media life* (Deuze 2012), the media have become *ubiquitous* (Featherstone 2009), which implies that we are here facing a situation in which we must study *the mediation of everything* (Livingstone 2010), as we are today embedded in a diffuse and uncertain *media world* (Couldry 2012).

In order to tackle these all-encompassing digital environments, memory studies has re-engaged with the media (cf. Lagerkvist 2013a), and media studies, in turn, with the concept of *media ecology.* This latter approach to digital media shares a lineage with the main representatives and precursors of medium theory and of the media ecology paradigm, such as Marshall McLluhan, Walter Ong, and Neil Postman. Seeing the media or media technologies as environmental means to study complex communication systems as environments that encompass interactions between different realms. These include 'communication technologies and processes of human value, feeling and behaviour' (Strate 2004, 5). Moreover, according to Neil Postman (2000, 11), the concept of media ecology describes an interest in 'the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings give a culture its character and, one might say, help a culture to maintain symbolic balance'. The digital age seems to have revitalised this ontology of interacting realms and techno-social embeddedness. This means that in studying digital memory cultures we need to dispose of the thinking that long conceived of *the media* as a discrete unit, separated from the social, as well as from memory. The post-broadcasting age is, according to Andrew Hoskins, dominated by a new digital memory ecology in which the media or media technologies are ubiquitous and at once both accessible and fluid, revocable and diffused (Hoskins 2009a, 2011). In our contemporary situation new media technologies have proliferated

and have accompanied 'mediatised regimes of memory that effect a new texture of the past that is driven, maintained and replenished through its connections and aggregations' (Hoskins 2009b, 31). From this perspective we are no longer retrieving memory nor are we constructing pasts through representational practices in the present. Instead, memory is seen as 'embedded in and distributed through our socio-technical practices…' (Hoskins 2009a, 92). The dynamics of mediated memory makes memory 'created when needed, driven by the connectivities of digital technologies and media and inextricably forged through and constitutive of digital social networks: in other words, a new "network memory"' (ibid.). It must be stressed that an environmental focus on the existential terrains of connectivity will not, however, imply falling into the trap of assigning sovereign agency to the technological aspects of this network memory, neither in the means of achieving a balance in the culture, nor in failing to do so. Technologies are not conceived as deterministic, nor are they simply affording possibilities, but are somewhere in-between. They imply and inform new technologically-enforced life world situations, yet they do not determine how people use them. In other words, the approach does not preclude the force of human meaning making (and resistance), the role of human embodied experience, or the will to establish meaning.

Another highly relevant and interesting approach to the same phenomenon is proposed by Dorthe Refslund Christensen and Kjetil Sandvik (forthcoming 2014a, forthcoming 2014b), who develop a neo-materialist and broad media concept. Starting with Joshua Meyrowitz's 1973 media definition (media as conduits, language, and environment), Klaus Bruhn Jensen's recent media theorisation, in which media are of three orders, namely physical, mass-mediated, and virtual, and Richard Grusin's discussion on premediation, Refslund Christensen and Sandvik (2014a) put forward an approach whereby 'media to a great extent influence and inform the way we perceive the world and that, for example, the lines between physical, mediated and mediatized experiences of death become blurred as they are part of the same continuum...' In highlighting a continuum between the physical and the mediated, this perspective implies that in our new media ecologies neither death nor any other phenomenon is unaffected by the logics of the media/mediations, by mediatisation (cf. Hjarvard 2008) or by the technologisation of the life world. To an unprecedented extent information and communication technologies have entered into the production of events and into the fabric of daily and social life. For our present purposes we may add that these media are thoroughly integrated into practices of memory and rituals of dying and mourning. In relation to death the ecological approach implies moving away from emphasising how death is mediated, represented, and socially constructed *in* the media to a perspective that regards death and how we ritualise or make sense of it, as integrated into and imbricated with digital media or as embedded in the media ecology. According to Tim Hutchings, in a similar vein the digital has profoundly affected the social and cultural construction of death, as well as the environments in which dying occurs: 'online networks and digital media have been *integrated into contemporary processes of dying, grieving and memorialisation,* changing the social context in which dying takes place and establishing new electronic spaces for the communication of grief' (Hutchings 2012, 43, italics added). Our new media ecologies compel new attention to, and theorising about, the mediated and commemorative aspects of death and mourning. This will be dealt with in the next section.

Sharing and deferring death

Among a range of other functions and affordances, digital memory cultures contain new commemorative communities of grief and remembrance on social networking sites (for example, http://www.vsfb.se/Pratbubblan or memorialised profiles on Facebook). They also showcase and invite interaction at digital shrines and memorials, where guest books and candles are often found and where mourners may leave notes (http://varaminnessidor.se/; Tillminneav.se). Here digital memory cultures are involved in the fundamental existential relationship between the past, the present, and the future, as well as our relationship with those absent. According to Joanne Garde-Hansen, Anna Reading, and Andrew Hoskins (2009, 4), digital memories are also 'engaged in a series of the deferrals' – among others '*the deferral of death*'. Another important example of this is what I call *the management of the digital afterlife*. This entails services in which you can manage your own future memory ('If I die', on Facebook, for instance). Death can be 'deferred', or as Bauman (1992) would say, 'managed through a life

strategy', on I Memorial, which is a service that offers users the opportunity to manage and build their memory for posterity, through the following secured storage possibilities:

> My Memorial, where people can use text, audio, and video to tell the story of their lives and leave their testimonies. The result will become their I-Tomb and be posted on www.i-tomb.net, The World Virtual Cemetery, the day they depart. It will be preserved for generations and accessible worldwide from any internet connection.

> My Messages, where users can leave posthumous messages for family, friends, and colleagues. T After a person's passing these messages are made accessible after their passing only to those who are designated and can answer security questions. Personal messages can be sent at specific delivery times in the future, such as when a son turns 21, and can contain documents that one wishes to pass along securely.

> My Last Wishes, where users can leave instructions such as how and where they want to be buried or cremated, the music to be played at their funeral, and where important printed or digital documents such as insurance policies and investment dossiers are located, as well as where passwords to personal, financial, business, and social media accounts are stored. Last wishes are communicated to designated loved ones and associates immediately upon passing.

> In addition to the above, i-memorial.com offers a secure digital lockbox called Safe Box to store and conveniently retrieve important and confidential documents during one's lifetime. (www.Imemorial.com)

Here we may construct a self for the future to remember. In this language of managing how people will, should, or may remember you, or how you can assure the way in which you bid farewell to your loved ones, there is the feeling in which death or your memory, like everything else, is in your hands, thereby deferring a sense of absolute loss of control before one's own finitude. The example illustrates both the quest and the potential for existential security in the digital memory ecology.

John Durham Peters argues that the deferral of death in media culture at large is both cause and effect of the fact that that we are in effect *unable to mourn,* and modern media have a role in corroborating and suspending this deficiency: 'We lack the cultural and religious practices that would protect us from being lonely psychological agents. Our perfunctory grief bespeaks a disturbance in that most crucial of all relationships, our relation to the dead. Perhaps in a time of video- and tape recording, photoalbums and home movies, death seems less final.' (Durham Peters 1999, 147–48). This is clearly a pre-Web 2.0 position, and there are reasons to problematise some of these premises (see below). Yet Durham Peters's point seems confirmed by the all-pervasiveness of the digital ecology, leaving nothing outside its orbit. Today the deferral of death is to be found in the realm of virtual mourning, web cemeteries, and communities of grief and remembrance online. Beyond biological death the departed's social and digital self may be kept alive online (Moncur forthcoming). On the web memorial site Till Minneav.se ('In memory of') the memorials are often written like obituaries. There is also a blog function, and users may upload films/videos and light a candle. Mourning, which is literally in the hands of users through their mobile devices and screens, who may share in the grief – or keep someone socially 'alive' on memorialised profiles on Facebook – seems to be part of broader patterns of the networked self (Wellman 2001) in a quest for existential security.[8] Moreover, these movements occur in the absolute present. This has a bearing on the process in which death is both de-sequestered and deferred.

Most of the memorials are not very detailed in describing the departed; instead, they convey strong feelings of grief, emptiness, and loss. But most important, they communicate directly with the dead:

> In memory of my lovely Jonas, who passed away far too early.

> Your heart, big enough for the whole world, has now stopped beating. You are my first big love and my best friend. I have always envisioned a whole life by your side. You were probably too good for this world. You are needed somewhere else.

> Rest in peace, my heart, I will never forget You. One piece of my heart died with You, but one piece of my heart will always beat for You too.

> I will change the world – for You!

> Love and miss You….

> (www.tillminneav.se, accessed August 7, 2013)

Work in this field almost unanimously stresses the role of web memorials in creating existing *ties* both to the dead and the living, relationships, and feelings of community, despite the fact that sometimes they are designed with limited interactive possibilities. In bereavement studies web memorials have been suggested as an important addition to traditional bereavement practices (for an overview, see Krysinska & Andriessen 2010; see also Roberts 2004; Refslund Christensen & Sandvik, forthcoming 2014c). What is pivotal here is that the relationship does not end: it is simply transformed. As in grief work in general, bonds with the deceased are kept, while the relationship is both deconstructed and reconstructed:

> Grief work is the means through which such revision takes place. The psychosocial transition involves both deconstruction and reconstruction. Deconstruction requires accommodation of expectancies, beliefs, and goals linked with the attachment to the deceased, including the relinquishment of the attachment as it was, in line with the new life situation. Reconstruction involves the construction of a new meaningful life that can include a new relationship with the desceased based on the acceptance that the bond is an exclusively internal connection. (Field 2008, 117)

However, such a bond, as articulated online, seems to be exclusively internal, yet widely exhibited, often before an unknown throng of potential witnesses. In offering support by sharing similar experiences of loss, in web communities, and at online memorials, benevolent strangers are present for the bereaved in a spirit of unique comradeship – perhaps even in the spirit of *existential communitas* (see Lagerkvist 2013b). A community member at VIMIL is given advice, while perhaps also being indirectly and gently 'pushed' in the direction of moving into a phase of acceptance. In the interactions one may trace a sense in which members are finding a new meaningful relationship both with the deceased and with other bereaved:

> Lea:
> *How?*
> Soon three months will have passed. I am standing and walking, but sometimes, like tonight, it feels as if I'd prefer to crack. The hardest part is not being able to see a future. Earlier, when life was as it should be, the feeling of an empty calendar was positive and exciting. Then it meant

expectations and the chance of doing things with the person I loved the most and with whom I had constructed a meaning in life. Now the empty calendar is frightening. A big hole in something I'm not sure I can cope with. I don't understand how I can manage all this loneliness. I'm so scared of it. I never liked being alone, and now I'm forced into being this way. By cancer.

Selma responds:I recognise myself so much in what you are writing. Soon, it will be six months since my dear husband died suddenly. During the week things are pretty OK, but Friday nights are horrible, and now the first summer is approaching, and vacation and everything should be as usual for the kids and NOTHING is usual for me.... I've listened a lot to classical music; taking walks is also good. And you are not alone! We are here. Many hugs!

Lea:
THANK YOU! I feel warm inside to read all the comfort you want to convey. That you, who do not know me, are so honestly and compassionately sharing your experiences. Sometimes it's hard to believe that things will ever get better. But the fact that you, who know what mourning is all about, say that things will get better with time makes me want to embrace what you are saying. Strength and hugs to you too!
<div align="center">(www.vimil.se, accessed August 5, 2013)</div>

The mediated publicness of these correspondences in which intimate experiences of grief are shared is worth further examination. In her seminal work on web cemeteries Pamela Roberts argued that a number of positive rewards come out of these communities: the bereaved may stay in touch with the dead person, bonds are strengthened with the living, and a new sense of community is created with others (Roberts 2004). Indeed, Roberts maintains that the rheingoldian utopian vision of the internet as a realisation of an ingrained human need and desire to create a working and gratifying community is fulfilled. She also stresses the sense in which web cemeteries demonstrate an awareness of the fact that the authors are members of a community. *You are not alone, we are here,* is the crucial message of consolation underlining this awareness. These interactions are examples of the evaporation of the public and the private, and they also demonstrate new types of virtual co-presence. Scholarship on digital memory cultures similarly stresses the idea of connectedness as a 'fundamental value that matter[s] in the process of global and virtual self-description' (Maj and Riha 2009, 29). Active participation and sharing is the key to thinking about digital memory practices, argue Joanne Garde-Hansen et al. (2009). Moreover, Walter et al. hold that Facebook defragments a dead person's social networks and allows mourning to re-emerge as a group experience, a communal activity. In sum:

> Pre-modern societies tended to produce a bereaved community, modern societies tend to produce bereaved individuals, and post-modern mutual help groups (online or offline) produce a community of the bereaved, that is, connections with previously unknown others who have suffered the same category of loss—the death of a spouse, of a child, of a relative by suicide, etc.... SNSs such as Facebook, however, can produce what pre-modernity did: a bereaved *community.* (Walter et al. 2011/12, np)

Walter et al. thus identify a break with earlier technologies in terms of how death and grief are brought back and are being de-sequestered and reintroduced into the everyday. Through social networking death is made communal again. Here, I propose that we may discern a quest for deeper forms of community/communitas and for existential security. These

interactions may bring about meaning and cohesion, a cathartic uplift, a sense of healing or of the sacred, through moments of sincere or significant community (Lagerkvist 2013b).

Hence, today death seems far from the hidden supplement to culture as Bauman contends, or that death is even making a mediated return; rather death is ubiquitous in the digital age. It also seems that new virtual practices of mourning testify to a new situation, refuting Durham Peters's point that people are unable to mourn at all. On the contrary, a whole new range of public mourning practices seem to be proliferating (Walter 2008). According to the digital anthropologist Anna Haverinen (2011, forthcoming 2014), there is an abundance of virtual mourning practices and rituals, including memorialised profiles in social media, virtual chapels in online gaming environments, and virtual candle websites. What these types of mourning demonstrate, for example, is that the death of a co-player in a game world is a *real* crisis, both for the player and the character. Although the relationship may be virtual and the persons may never have met in physical life, this does not preclude strong feelings of grief. Haverinen concludes that: 'Online mourning and honouring answer to a larger need for communal support and ritualistic behaviour that the mere burial code does not offer' (forthcoming 2014).

As I have argued earlier, memory work in the digital age is taken up in the face of three challenges, which deal with the temporality of instantaneity, an all-pervasive networked individualism and concomitant technological capacities that subject memory to endless revision, and an accelerated blurring of the private and the public. This may lead to the conclusion that digital memory cultures are vulnerable – both in individuals and in society at large (see Maj & Riha 2009). Death, dying, grieving, and remembering are becoming communal, ubiquitous, and overflowing, and this may corroborate the sense in which there is a vanishing and ephemeral dimension to *all* digital culture, as it is situated in the absolute present. But paradoxically, in the teeming mediated publicness of death, new cultures of memory may also contribute to the paradoxical *solidification* of these existential terrains. It cannot be denied that from the vantage point of human experience, there appears to be a surprising steadiness, permanence, and unexpected rootedness in these aspects of web memorialisation. These may contradict the features of the new memory ecology discussed here, namely as being endlessly versatile, flexible, created when needed, fast, and short-sighted. Perhaps this poses a challenge to the burgeoning discourse on network memory, as *a priori* fragmented and interminably proliferating. Similarly, social networking allows us to transcend the sense in which there can be only a liminoid or temporary sense of community (Walter et al. 2011/12). New cultures of memory are also cultures of sharing stories, experiences of bereavement, and working communally through death and loss, offering at least some kind of continuity and stability. These cultures may be approached as echoing a quest for coming together and for sharing significant moments of 'ultimate meaning', corroborating that, as Johanna Sumiala (2013, 18) straightforwardly observes, 'communication connects'.

This new accessibility of stories and narratives of death and experiences of loss is, according to Charlton McIlwain (2005), an important shift, thanks to technological innovations that provide us with helpful knowledge previously lacking. But there are other implications within the existential terrain, less positive, and perhaps obtrusive for users in problematic ways. To acknowledge that communication also *dis*-connects is to pose questions about the extent to which cultures of connectivity contain disruptive and, for their members, sometimes downright disturbing aspects. For instance, Facebook, as Anna Haverinen (2013) points out in her auto-ethnographic approach to virtual mourning, may act in invasive ways and, for mourners and bereaved communities, in a distressing and offensive manner, by resurrecting threads and interactions and thereby interfering in memory work long after the bereft has put these matters to rest. The integrity of these private memories has been breached. When developments involve aspects that are hard to digest emotionally or address existentially, existential security may be compromised. One example is when bereaved persons who post their condolences in a guestbook on a web memorial page are tracked by the funeral home offering the service with commercial ads, thereby disrupting the sensitive, delicate, and for many people austere process of grief. More research is needed on whether these developments

disturb the dignity of keeping someone in loving memory and how this may obstruct the sense of existential security. We also need to hear more testimonies of how bereaved parents cope with being approached by individuals in the dispersed network who offer condolences several months after a child's death, which may disrupt the temporality and rituals of mourning, as well as the process of reorientation.

In conclusion

From a media and communication studies perspective the consequences and implications of the internet have often been polarised. This article has argued that an existential approach is needed to grasp fully the complexity of the developments in digitalisation. Approaching the internet as existential terrain *par excellence* will provide avenues for exploring the fundamental human condition of being faced with the contingency, absurdity, and simultaneous quest for profundity and meaning in our lives. If, in our time, we are encountering and exploring these larger issues of meaning and meaninglessness, loneliness and sociality, the finite and the infinite on the internet, then we need to study it from the vantage point of *being*, rather than reducing these phenomena to aspects of the political, cultural, or economic dimensions of mediated human communication. I have discussed the inherent tensions in digital memory cultures. These cultures 'suspend' death, while simultaneously affording unparalleled possibilities for exploring or working through the unknowable within the everyday, both individually and collectively. In the digital age it appears that the two key existential facts about digital media, to paraphrase John Durham Peters, are these: the deferral and even possible annihilation of death as people stay socially alive (in living and accruing memory) on the internet after they die biologically, and the overabundance of personal memories, narratives, images, and interactive affordances about death, dying, and bereavement that are instantly at our disposal, yet always in the hands of powerful corporations and their decisions. Both imply critical consequences for our digital existence, and the question is ultimately to what extent these facts may bring about or destroy any sense of existential security in the new digital memory ecology.

1. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer for this point.
2. This article outlines the overarching theoretical approaches in my project Existential Terrains: Memory and Meaning in Cultures of Connectivity, which is conducted within the Wallenberg Academy Fellows-programme at the Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University (2014-2018), financed by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation. In addition, it shares a few examples from a pilot study in progress that is being carried out through both online ethnography and textual analyses in the autumn and winter of 2013/14.
3. Here I endeavour to bring some of the classical themes of existentialism into the debate on digitalisation. Retaining a focus on the lived experience of digitalisation, and moreover focusing on the intersections of lived experience, technological apparatuses/discourses and symbolic content, the approach launched here is thoroughly socio-technological and sociophenomenological (see Lagerkvist 2013c). I acknowledge, however, that there are other important strands in existential philosophy and phenomenological thinking that will be essential to relate to in exploring the existential terrains of connectivity, such as the philosophy of technology of Martin Heidegger (see the introduction to Dahlberg & Ruin eds. 2011) or Karl Jaspers (see Verbeek 2005). The existential terrain may also be discussed in relation to the moral or critical strands of the media ecology paradigm (see the outline in Postman 2000). In addition, recent approaches to mnemotechnics and teleologics in Bernard Stiegler's work or the work of N. Kathryn Hayles on post-humanism may also provide important trajectories for exploring the relationships between the digital and being.
4. Such a meaning-making system need not be completely cohesive or in all respects consistent, since spiritual identities are seldom one-dimensional, and as with all types of identity they are often in movement, fragmented, contradictory and constituted by multiplicity. I am indebted to Mia Lövheim for this point.

5. When thinking about the connections between death and new media/the internet, we may also ask the questions, what is new, what is different from before, and what is perhaps not so new, given that patterns representing death, rituals of mourning and commemorating may abide from the mass communication age or from even older traditions. How are the online and offline environments related, for example, in the case of gravestones, which today also contain a link to a digital shrine, QR codes, and corresponding links to online memorial sites (see http://www.chieftain.com/news/1694286-120/digital-codes-legacys-company)? And how do these rituals of mourning relate to 'the new public mourning' of celebrities or other people whom we have never met (Walter 2008)? How do the practices of mourning online resemble or affect new offline rituals, such as roadside memorials (Petersson 2012); new patterns of commemoration in material culture emerging on graves in cemeteries in physical space (Refslund Christensen & Sandvik eds., forthcoming 2014c) or memorials where people leave flowers, objects, and messages at sites of trauma, such as that of a school shooting (Sumiala 2013)?

6. These include funerary rituals. Today new patterns of screening funerals online and allowing for virtual presence at the funeral service are emerging; or a funeral home may display the deceased's Facebook site. See Walter et al. 2011/12.

7. Reading develops these six dynamics beginning with: (1) transmediality: memory as an assemblage of discursive formations across different media; (2) velocity: events are witnessed, archived, remembered, and communicated simultaneously; (3) extensity: global witnessing, deterritorialisation; (4) modality: memories are forged at once as organic, visual, aural, and captured as data; (5) valency: multiple bonds to other memory assemblages; (6) viscosity: memory as liquid modernity, endlessly fluid and changeable (Reading 2011).

8. This is also the case with digital storytelling about terminal illnesses, where one's illness or imminent death is worked through while being 'managed'.

References

Ahlinder, Kristina & Agebäck, Ann Katrin. 2009. Sajtägare har ett ansvar för döden på internet. *DN Debatt*, September 9, 2009.

Allon, Fiona. 2004. An Ontology of Everyday Control: Space, Media Flows and "Smart" Living in the Absolute Present. In Nick Couldry & Anna McCarthy (eds.), *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, 253–274. London: Routledge.

Andersson, Yvonne. 2012. Bloggarna och döden. In Anja Hirdman (ed.), *Döden i medierna. Våld, tröst, fascination*, 188–212. Stockholm: Carlssons.

Axelson, Tomas. 2006. Film, livsåskådning och identitet. In Göran Larsson, Mia Lövheim & Alf Linderman (eds.), *Medier och religion. Några perspektiv*, 205–225. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Bakardjieva, Maria. 2005. *The Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life*. London: Sage.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1992. *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Baym, Nancy. 1995. *The Emergence of Community in Computer Mediated Communication*. London: Sage.

boyd, danah. 2007. Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. In David Buckingham (ed.), *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume*, 119–142. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Couldry, Nick. 2012. *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. London: Routledge.

Cvetkovich, Anne. 2012. *Depression: A Public Feeling.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Dahlberg, Leif & Ruin, Hans (eds.). 2011. *Fenomenologi, teknik, medialitet*. Huddinge: Södertörn Academic Studies.

Degen, Monica & Hetherington, Kevin (eds.). 2001. Spacial Hauntings. *Space & Culture*, 11(12).

Deuze, Mark. 2012. *Media Life*. New York: Polity Press.

Durham Peters, John. 1999. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dreyfus, Hubert & Wrathall, Mark A. 2012. *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Field, Nigel P. 2008. Whether to relinquish or maintain a bond with the deceased. In Margaret S. Stroebe, Robert O. Hansson, Henk Schut & Wolfgang Stroebe (eds.), *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 113–130. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, Reading, Anna & Hoskins, Andrew (eds.). 2009. *Save As...Digital Memories.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late-Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Consequences of Modernity*. New York: Polity Press.

Haverinen, Anna. 2011. *Changed Death Rituals.* Paper presented at the University of Durham,

Department of Theology, November 1–2, 2011.

Haverinen, Anna. 2013. *Actual(ly) Mourning: Using Autoethnography in Virtual Mourning Research*. Paper presented at the Death & Media Symposium at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, June 6, 2013.

Haverinen, Anna. Forthcoming 2014. In-game and Out-of-game Mourning: On the Complexity of Grief in Virtual Worlds. In Dorthe Refslund Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds.), *Mediating and Remediating Death*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Hess, Aron. 2007. In Digital Remembrance: Vernacular Memory and the Rhetorical Construction of Web Memorials. *Media, Culture and Society*, 29(2007), 812–830.

Hirdman, Anja (ed.). 2012. *Döden i medierna: Våld, tröst, fascination*. Stockholm: Carlsons.

Hjarvard, Stig. 2008. The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change. *Nordicom Review*, 29 (2008), 105–134.

Hodkinson, Paul. 2007. Interactive Online Journals and Individualization. *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 625–650.

Hoover, Stuart & Lundby, Knut (eds.). 1997. *Rethinking Religion, Media and Culture,* London: Sage.

Hoskins, Andrew. 2009a. Digital Network Memory. In Astrid Erll & Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory,* 91–106. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Hoskins, Andrew. 2009b. The Mediatisation of Memory. In Joanne Garde-Hansen, Anna Reading & Andrew Hoskins (eds.), *Save As . . .Digital Memories,* 27–43. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoskins, Andrew. 2011. Anachronisms of Media, Anachronisms of Memory: From Collective Memory to a New Memory Ecology. In Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers & Eyal Zandberg (eds.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, 278–288. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hong, Howard V. & Hong, Edna H. 2000. *The Essential Kierkegaard*. (Originally 1978.) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hutchings, Tim. 2012. Wiring Death: Dying, Grieving and Remembering on the Internet. In Douglas. J. Davies & Chang-Won Park (eds.), *Emotion, Identity and Death: Mortality Across Disciplines*, 43–58. Farnham: Ashgate.

Innis, Harold. 1951. *The Bias of Communication,* Toronto: University of Toronto press.

Johansson, Sofia. 2011. Connection or disconnection? Two Generations in Sweden Discuss Online Sociality. In Cecilia von Feilitzen & Peter Petrov (eds.), *Use and Views of Media in Sweden and Russia, A Comparative Study in St Petersburg and Stockholm*, 271–296. Huddinge: Södertörn Academic Studies.

Kraut, Robert; Patterson, Michael; Lundmark, Vicki; Kiesler, Sara; Mukopadhyay, Tridas & Scherlis, William. 1998. Internet Paradox: A Social Technology that Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53(9), 1017–31.

Krysinska, Karolina & Andriessen, Karl. 2010. On-Line Support and Resources for People Bereaved through Suicide: What Is Available? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 40(6), 640–649.

Lagerkvist, Amanda. 2013a. *Media and Memory in New Shanghai: Western Performances of Futures Past*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Memory Studies).

Lagerkvist, Amanda. 2013b. *Revisiting Communitas: Rethinking Mediated Collective Memory Existentially – from Televisual Anniversaries to New Media Memories*. Paper presented in the Temporary Working Group on Media and Religion. Nordmedia2013 University of Oslo, August 8–11, 2013.

Lagerkvist, Amanda. 2013c. *Media Studies and the Turns to Sociophenomenology,* Paper presented at the symposium Art as Matter of Affect, The Department of Media and Cultural Studies, University of Utrecht, December 10, 2013.

Livingstone, Sonia. 2010. On the Mediation of Everything: ICA's Presidential Address 2008. *Journal of Communication*, 59(1), 1–18.

Lövheim, Mia. 2004. *Intersecting Identities: Young People, Religion and Interaction on the Internet*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Lynch, Gordon & Joylon, Mitchell (eds.). 2012. *Religion, Media and Culture: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

Maj, Anna. & Riha, Daniel. 2010. *Digital Memories: Exploring Critical Issues,* Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Markham, Anette. 1998. *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space*. Altamira Press.

McIlwain, Charlton. 2005. *When Death Goes Pop: Death, Media & The Remaking of Community*. New York: Peter Lang.

Melder, Cecilia. 2011. *Vilsenhetens epidemiologi. En religionspsykologisk studie av existentiell folkhälsa*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis.

Miller, Vincent. 2008. New Media, Networking and Phatic Culture. *Convergence*, 14(4), 387–400.

Moncur, Wendy. Forthcoming. Digital Ownership across Lifespans. In Chiara Garratini & David Prendergast (eds.), *Ageing and the Digital Life Course*.

Morgan, David. Ed. 2008. *Keywords in Religion, Media and Culture.* London: Routledge.

Neiger, Motti; Meyers, Oren & Zandberg, Eyal (eds.). 2011. *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ozawa-de Silva, Chikako. 2008. Too Lonely to Die Alone: Internet Suicide Pacts and Existential Suffering in Japan. *Cult Med Psychiatry*, 32(2008), 516–551.

Petersson, Anna 2010. The Production of a Memorial Place: Materialising Experiences of Grief. In Avril Maddrell & James D. Sidaway (eds.), *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembering*, 141–160. Farnham: Ashgate.

Pinchevski, Amit. 2011. Archive, Media, Trauma. In Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers & Eyal Zandberg (eds.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, 253–264. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pinchevski, Amit. Forthcoming. Levinas as a Media Theorist: Toward an Ethics of Mediation. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*.

Postman, Neil. 2000. The Humanism of Media Ecology. *Proceedings of the Media Ecology Association* 1 (2000), 10–16.

Reading, Anna. 2011. Memory and Digital Media: Six Dynamics of the Globital Memory Field. In Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers & Eyal Zandberg (eds.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, 241–252. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Refslund Christensen, Dorthe & Sandvik, Kjetil. 2013. Sharing Death: Conceptions of Time at a Danish Online Memorial Site. In Dorthe Reflslund Christensen & Rane Willerslev (eds.), *Taming Time, Timing Death. Social Technologies and Ritual*, 99–118. Farnham: Ashgate.

Refslund Christensen, Dorthe & Sandvik. Kjetil. (eds.) Forthcoming 2014a. *Mediating and Remediating Death*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Refslund Christensen, Dorthe & Sandvik, Kjetil. Forthcoming 2014b. Introduction: Mediating and Remediating Death. In Dorthe Refslund Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds.), *Mediating and Remediating Death*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Refslund Christensen, Dorthe & Sandvik. Kjetil. Forthcoming 2014c. Death Ends a Life, Not a Relationship: Objects as Media on Childern's Graves. In Dorthe Refslund Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds.), *Mediating and Remediating Death*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier.* Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Roberts, Pamela. 2004. The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery. *OMEGA,* 49(1), 57–76.

Rothenbuhler, Eric. 1998. *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Silverstone, Roger. 2003. Proper Distance: Towards an Ethics for Cyberspace. In Gunnar Liestol, Andrew Morrison & Terje Rasmussen (eds.), *Digital Media Revisited: Theoretical And Conceptual Innovations In Digital Domains*, 469–490. Cambridge, MA:

The MIT Press.

Sumiala-Seppänen, Johanna. (eds.) 2006. *Implications of the Sacred in (Post)Modern Media*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Sumiala, Johanna. 2013. *Media and Ritual: Death, Community and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.

Turkle, Sherry. 2011. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Eachother.* New York: Basic books.

Turner, Victor 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.

Van Dijck, José. 2007. *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wahlberg, Malin. 2009. YouTube Commemoration: Private Grief and Communal Consolation. In Pelle Snickars & Patrik Vonderau (eds.), *The YouTube Reader*, 218–235. Stockholm: Mediehistoriskt Arkiv.

Walter, Tony. 2008. The New Public Mourning. In Margaret. S. Stroebe, Robert O. Hansson & Wolfgang Stroebe (eds.), *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 241–262. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Walter, Tony; Hourizi, Rachid; Moncur, Wendy & Pitsillides, Stacey. 2011/12. Does the internet change how we die and mourn? *OMEGA*, 64(4), 275–302.

Verbeek, Pieter-Paul. 2005. *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency and Design*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Wellman, Barry. 2001. Physical Place & Cyber Place: The Rise of Networked Individualism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25(2), 227–52.

Westerlund, Michael. 2010. *Självmord och internet. Kommunikation om ett livsfarligt ämne*. Stockholm: Stocksholms Universitet.

Westerlund, Michael. 2013. *'alright lets do it': Alarming communication about suicide on an internet forum*. Paper presented at the IAMCR Conference in Dublin, June 25–29, 2013.

Woodhead, Linda & Heelas, Paul. 2000. *Religion in Modern Times. An Interpretative Anthology*. Oxford, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Biographical note

Amanda Lagerkvist is an Associate Professor of Media and Communication Studies, and Wallenberg Academy Fellow at the Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University. Having worked in a project financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the 'Times of Television', focusing on and the existential dimensions of anniversary journalism and televisual commemoration in Sweden (2010–2013), she is now setting out on a five year project financed by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation: "Existential Terrains: Memory and Meaning in Cultures of Connectivity" (2014–2018). She has published numerous articles on mediation, space and memory, and is the author of Media and Memory in New Shanghai: Western Performances of Futures Past (published by Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2013) as well as the co-editor of Strange Spaces: Explorations into Mediated Obscurity (published by Ashgate, 2009). Contact: amanda.lagerkvist@sh.se.