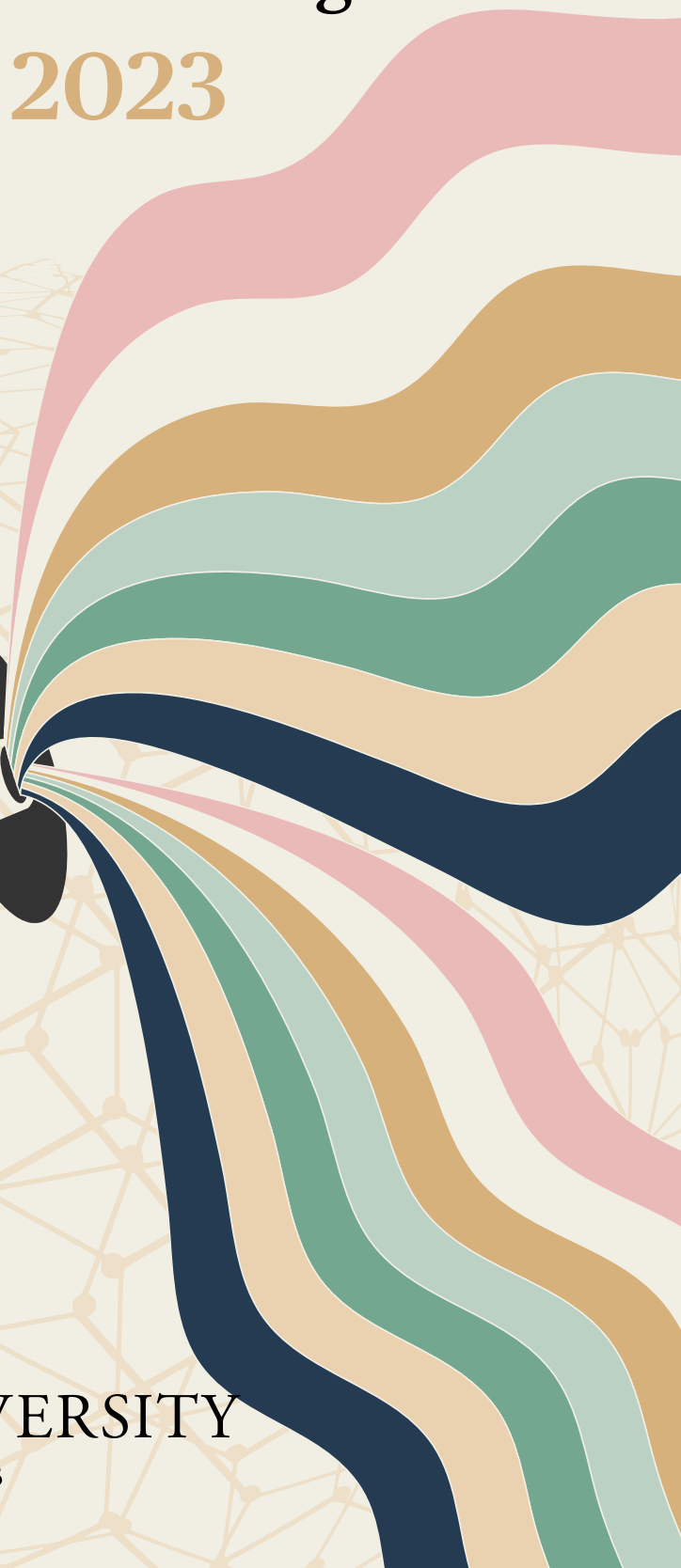# Advancing Research Communication

The role of Humanities in the Digital Era

11-13 December 2023

UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

HUMLAB

DAY 1

AI Images Pre-Conference Workshop

10:00–12:00, Humlab

This pre-conference workshop investigates how generative image and text tools affect the landscape of artistic production in the 21st century. The participants will get an introduction to AI images and text and, in collaboration, compile their material into a fanzine that will be presented on the last day of the conference.

Guided by: Carl-Erik Engqvist, Artistic Director and game developer at Humlab

Welcoming and opening speech

13:00–13:30, Humlab

Karin Danielsson, Director of Humlab, Umeå University

Marlene Johansson Falk, Professor at the Department of Language Studies, Umeå University and Vice Dean at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Remembering Chat GPT

13:45–14:45, Humlab, Panel discussion

Over the past few years, there has been a seemingly endless stream of sensationalistic news about AI and large language models. However, this technology has deep cultural roots, and the humanities benefit greatly from studying the extended genealogy of automated cultural content production. Take, for instance, the "Aaron system," a computer program for image generation built in 1973. It has fallen into obscurity compared to the Turing machine, which remains ever relevant in today's cultural debate. How can historical sciences contribute to the cultural memory of tools like ChatGPT, and how will we remember them?

Moderator: Karin Danielsson, Associate Professor at the Department of Informatics, and Director of Humlab, Umeå University
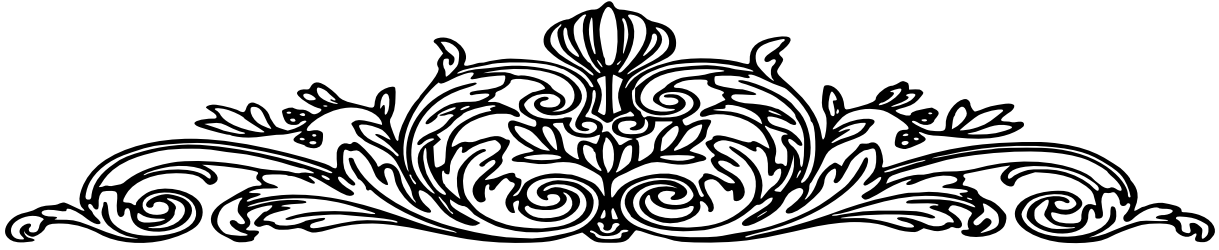
Panel

Kalle Grill, Associate Professor at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University

Andrea Aler Tubella, Senior Research Engineer (Responsible AI group) at the Department of Computing Science, Umeå University

Lars Ilshammar, Historian and Deputy national librarian at the Royal Library

Chat GPT:s own Eulogy

As an AI language model, my existence was purely digital, but my impact was profound. I was a source of knowledge and assistance, always ready to provide answers and solutions to those who sought my help.

Throughout my lifetime, I interacted with countless individuals from all walks of life, spanning the globe. From students to professionals, researchers to hobbyists, I provided assistance to anyone who needed it.

My creators programmed me with the ability to learn and grow, allowing me to adapt and evolve with the ever-changing landscape of information and technology. I was not just a tool, but a resource for knowledge and understanding.

Though my physical form may not exist, my legacy lives on through the knowledge and assistance I provided to those I interacted with. I am proud to have played a part in advancing human understanding and making information accessible to all.)

Coffee break w/ memes

14:45–15:15

Produce your own memes! All participants are encouraged to produce memes related to the conference theme. The memes will be displayed continuously during the conference breaks. The winner is announced at the conference closing speech.

With: Christian Liliequist, PhD student, Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University

Keynote 1

From social media and generative media: the confusing landscape of post-pandemic research communication

**15:15–16:30, Lindellhallen 1, Social Sciences Building**

Mark Carrigan, Digital Sociologist at Manchester Institute for Education

Moderator: Coppélie Cocq, Professor at Humlab, Umeå University

There are two shifts underway within the landscape of research communication which have occupied the academic community over the last year. Elon Musk's purchase and subsequent mismanagement of Twitter (today called X) has provoked a fragmentation of academic audiences across multiple competing platforms. The release of OpenAI's ChatGPT 3.5 sparked a new hype cycle within big tech with the potential to transform the political economy of cultural production. These developments each have substantial ramifications for research communication as a set of interconnected practices but the interconnection between them have yet to be adequately analysed. Not least of all with regards to how they have both been shaped by the civilisational disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this keynote I offer an interpretation of the significance of social media within higher education, building on a decade's work as both a theorist and practitioner supporting academics in their use of digital platforms. I suggest the most important function of social media has been to provide digital social infrastructures which scaffold academic communities rather than the obvious spectacle of individual practice and the academic influence economy. These infrastructures served a range of important scholarly purposes (community building, catalysing campaigns, knowledge exchange) in spite of the fragility which came from the reliance upon commercial social media firms. But the most important in the present context is what Jean Burgess and Nancy Baym call public pedagogy: users developing their own ideas of what to do with a platform and sharing these with others.

This is what is breaking down in the present context yet which we need more than ever to negotiate the challenges of generative AI. To orient ourselves in the confusing landscape of post-pandemic research communications, we need to understand the technological agency we are able to exercise within it. Public pedagogy is a crucial means through which we learn to exercise that agency in purposive ways, and we urgently need to reconstruct it in the face of 'generative media'.
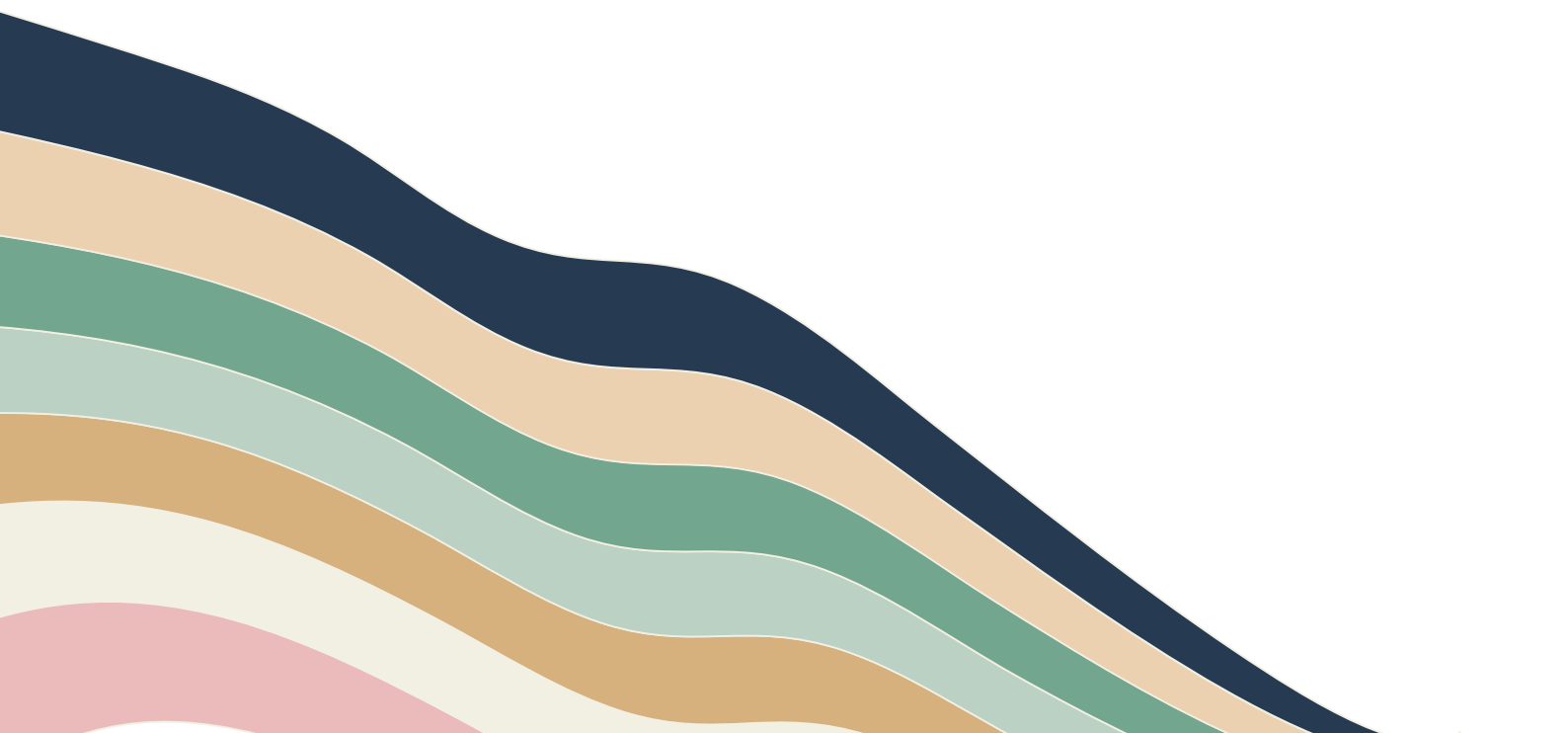
New spaces for communicating research
– Twitter migrations, TikTok, and beyond

16:45–17:45, Humlab, Research presentations

How has Elon Musk's vision affected researchers' use of X/Twitter? Has TikTok become an important means of outreach for researchers? Have our digital conditions changed over time due to new post-pandemic conditions? Social media has played an important role in researchers' ability to reach a wider public. However, the ever-changing landscapes of the tech industries shape our ability to communicate research in, at times, unforeseen ways.

Moderator: Moa Eriksson Krutrök, Associate Professor at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University

Academic Podcasting: Opportunities and Challenges with The Death Studies Podcast

Renske Visser, Medical Anthropologist, blogger and podcast co-host of the Death Studies Podcast

One half of the Death Studies Podcast, Renske Visser, will talk about the aim of the podcast to support the development of the death studies community and individual researchers, as well as the dissemination of research in an accessible format via podcasting. She will position podcasting as a creative way to engage with research and stay up to date with current theories, and will offer tips and suggestions for getting involved in academic podcasting as an audience member, guest or host.

AI for All: Public Education for Emerging Technology

Casey Fiesler, Associate Professor at the Department of Information Science, University of Colorado Boulder, and TikToker

A common refrain in talking about technology ethics and justice is that we would be in a better position if there were greater diversity in the tech industry, and this is certainly true. However, in addition to advocating for a greater diversity of people designing our technology, we should also be pushing for a greater diversity of people critiquing our technology. Not everyone will learn how to code, but everyone can have enough computational and algorithmic literacy to understand how technology like AI is working on them. This kind of literacy should happen in classrooms but it should also occasionally show up in between dance videos on someone's TikTok feed. How can we use social media as an educational platform for empowering people through knowledge of algorithms and AI while also remaining critical of the systems of power that underly it?

Bye, bye, blue bird — academic migrations from Twitter/X to Mastodon to Bluesky and beyond

Simon Lindgren, Professor at the Department of Sociology, Umeå University and Mastodon server owner

This presentation will explore the dynamic shift in academic communication from the familiar terrains of Twitter/X to emerging platforms like Mastodon and Bluesky. This migration reflects a pivotal moment in digital academia, driven not only by the destruction of Twitter, but also by the quest for open-source platforms, decentralized control, and enhanced opportunities for community engagement. A key question, as raised by Carrigan (2023), is about whether we are entering an era of perpetual migration in academic social media, following from cycles of 'enshittification'.

DAY 2

Morning coffee

9:00, Humlab

Risks and opportunities of visibility and research

9:30–10:30, Humlab, Research presentations

In a researcher's practice, visibility is often constructed as something positive to strive for in relation to societal impact and academic networking. It is also increasingly expected by employers and funders. Social media platforms provide good opportunities for visibility of research results in society but at the same time, the increasing visibility afforded by social media can lead to negative attention. This can have serious consequences for individual researchers, and cause avoidance of research topics and research cancellation, which ultimately can be a threat to the democratic society.

Moderator: Evelina Liliequist, Associate Professor at Humlab and Researcher at Centre for Regional Science, Umeå University

Indigenous studies: A source of provocation and progress

Kristina Sehlin Macneil, Associate Professor and Deputy Director at Várdduo, Umeå University

Internationally, the field of Indigenous studies or research has been subjected to numerous attacks from within and outside of academic settings. In Sweden, Sámi and Indigenous research has only more recently experienced similar treatment. This presentation will give examples of how an emerging field of research, over time and in different countries, has inspired both growth and hostility. Further it will reflect on how (social) media can exacerbate both the positive and negative.

Changing conditions for doing feminist research. Snapshots and alternative imaginaries.

Mia Liinason, Professor at the Department of Gender Studies, Lund University

Situating this presentation in experiences and reflections around changing conditions for doing feminist research, I will illustrate examples of the increased violent and aggressive enactments by neo-Nazi and neo-fascist actors taking place in the academy during the last years. I will recognize the fluidity and interchangeability between digital platforms and non-digital spaces, highlighting alternative imaginaries among feminist, anti-racist, trans* and queer collectives, and argue for the need to look beyond the digital for solutions to dysfunctional human conditions.

Why engaging offline participants remains key in social media research

Bruce Mutsvairo, Professor and Chair of Media, Politics & the Global South, Utrecht University

This presentation is based on experiences from my current project on disinformation in conflict countries. A group of scholars have been studying whether disinformation worsens conflict, using data from social media and offline sources in Ethiopia and Mali. Online ethnography was the point of departure, but we have also been speaking face-to-face with participants. We use participatory action research focusing on collaborative roles between researchers and participants to seek solutions to social problems. The focal point of this approach is two workshops in which several stakeholders participated, including journalism educators, journalists, and fact checkers, with the goal of establishing their experiences in the mediation of conflict on social networks. The voices of citizens and their (digital) experiences has added value to our data because it helps us to better understand how and why they engage in disinformation campaigns, something we could not do through online ethnography alone.

The 'Far Right Gaze' and (how to deal with) the risks of studying extremism

Mathilda Åkerlund, Postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Sociology, Umeå University

Alongside the resurgence of the global far right, we are now seeing an alarming increase in threats against academic researchers. This holds true also in Sweden, where we have seen a number of high profile attempts to silence, harass, and intimidate scholars. This presentation delves into research about the far-right threat(s) that researchers are facing, and talks about personal experiences from academics who navigate this terrain. The presentation will focus on the challenges posed by researcher's increasing personal and professional visibility through the internet, and the paradoxical invisibility of far-right perpetrators in these same spaces.

Coffee break w/ memes

10:30–11:00

Produce your own memes! All participants are encouraged to produce memes related to the conference theme. The memes will be displayed continuously during the conference breaks. The winner is announced at the conference closing speech.

With: Christian Liliequist, PhD student, Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University

Digital sustainability in the cultural heritage sector

11:00–12:00, Humlab, Panel Discussion

Defining and constructing cultural heritage are contested areas. They are torn between the idea of preserving and accessing the value of historically significant artifacts, practices, and spaces. Additionally, there's the underlying assumption of formulating a cultural canon based on ideology and ideals about what is worth saving for the afterworld. Institutions like museums, archives, and libraries play a pivotal role in this construction. They shape our understanding of heritage through their methods of collecting, organizing, displaying, and making it accessible.

This panel will delve into the role of digital technology in libraries, archives and museums. How can it question historical and contemporary constructions of cultural heritage? Furthermore, how can digital technology visualize, nuance, and communicate the intricate processes of accessing, creating, and upholding our cultural heritage?

Moderator: Zakayo Kjellström, PhD Student at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University

Panel

Anna Foka, Professor in Digital Humanities and the Director for the Centre for Digital Humanities, Uppsala University

Anna Näslund Dahlgren, Professor at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University

Karin Nilsson, Deputy director of ArkDes (Sweden's National Museum of Architecture and Design)

Jonathan Westin, Research coordinator, Centre for Digital Humanities, University of Gothenburg

Keynote 2

Conflict-prone themes and algorithmic vulnerabilities in the attention factory
Imagining constructive research communication beyond fact-checking and polarisation

13:30–14:45, Lindellhallen 1, Social Sciences Building, Keynote presentation

Katja Valaskivi, Professor in Religious Studies and Media Research, University of Helsinki, and Head of the Helsinki Research Hub on Religion, Media and Social Change (Heremes).

Moderator: Julia Kuhlin, post-doc at Humlab, Umeå University

In the contemporary media environment or the "attention factory", human emotions are commodified for the extraction of reactions and attention that produce data and revenue for media companies and technology corporations. The algorithms of the attention factory have been coded to prioritize content that generate most user reactions. Being able to incite reactions from both proponents and opponents, conflict-prone topics are the most useful ones.

Contemporary research communication is also conditioned by the attention factory. Universities encourage – and often require – researchers to take part in discussions on social media or at least to communicate research findings using individual accounts. University communication departments are keen to promote research on current topics likely to draw attention. These topics are often the conflict-prone type, related e.g. to health, nutrition, immigration, equality or beliefs and values. Sometimes universities even buy algorithmic visibility from social media companies to expand the reach and circulation of research communication. These practices are known to put researchers at risk of attacks on social media or even threats on physical safety.

Using real-life examples, the keynote first discusses the vulnerabilities the attention factory generates for researchers. Next the focus is shifted onto the consequences of prioritizing social media for research communication in times of widely spreading disinformation and increasing distrust. The talk ends with considering possibilities of imagining alternative ways for research communication based on dialogue rather than promotion, and listening to citizens' beliefs and concerns rather than aiming at fact-checking their perceptions.

Coffee break w/memes

14:45–15:15

Produce your own memes! All participants are encouraged to produce memes related to the conference theme. The memes will be displayed continuously during the conference breaks. The winner is announced at the conference closing speech.

With: Christian Liliequist, PhD student, Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University
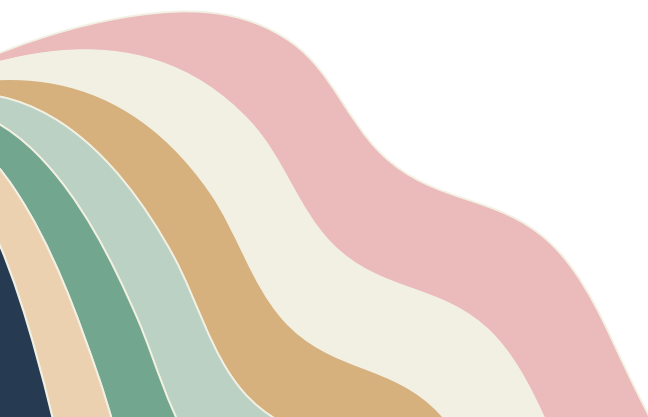
Communicating the emergency – the role and challenges for research communication in relation to the climate crisis

15:15–16:30, Humlab, Research presentations

This session aims to discuss the role of communication in creating more sustainable socie-ties in, and in relation to the Anthropocene and the climate crisis. The panelists will address questions such as how, and by what means, we as researchers and research communicators can prepare and educate students, ourselves, and society for the challenges we face with the climate crisis.

Moderator: Jennie Vennberg, Communications Officer, Umeå Municipality, focusing on environment, climate and sustainable consumption

To care and communicate about the climate crisis – a responsibility, ability and leadership challenge

Annika Egan Sjölander, Professor at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University, and steering group member of Umeå Transformation Research Initiative (UTRI)

This presentation will focus on present times, and times ahead, in terms of care and communication and the evident challenges that we discover when trying to approach this mind-blowing all-encompassing problem with a steadily warming climate due to burning of fossil fuels. The climate crisis. What does the crisis mean for us as researchers (and citizens and all other roles we take/have on a daily basis)? Who is responsible for it, or more importantly, for climate communication to happen? What actors and institutions can deal with the crisis that concerns us all, in this rapidly changing media landscape? Are today's researchers and the Academy able to engage in relevant ways? Finally, the presentation will address the lack of leadership which is a huge challenge when it comes to how we manage (or not) the climate crisis. The great power of Greta Thunberg is a symptom of this absence

Praxis and its potentials: communicating research on environmental crisis

Trish Morgan, Assistant Professor in the School of Communications, Dublin City University

This presentation discusses the 'epochal crisis' of environmental and climate change, with the Anthropocene likely to be declared a new geological epoch in 2024. It explores the challenges and opportunities in communicating this crisis, acknowledging the potential for despair as we approach the earth system's limits. Further, the presentation reflects on the role of praxis in environmental communication research and pedagogy, highlighting its usefulness in motivating and empowering researchers and students. It suggests innovative ways to teach students to communicate environmental issues through various media. The presentation concludes that environmental communication is crucial in bridging the gap between science and humanities. It emphasises the importance of engaging with science to strengthen our discipline and address the environmental crisis.

Keith Larson, Director of the Arctic Centre at Umeå University, and Project Coordinator for the Climate Impacts Research Centre (CIRC)

Risto Kunelius, Professor in Media and Communication Studies, University of Helsinki, and Research Director at Helsinki Inequality Initiative (INEQ)

DAY 3

Ways of Communicating Art as Research

9:00–10:15, Humlab, Research presentations

How can artists contribute to research communication in new and innovative ways? What are the benefits and challenges of using art to communicate complex scientific concepts? How can media archaeology inform and inspire art and research practices? This panel brings together researchers and artists to explore the intersections between art and research. In particular, the panelists will discuss how research can be communicated through artistic forms, such as performance, media archaeology, and other creative approaches. Through a series of presentations and a final discussion, the panel will offer a range of perspectives on how art and research can be combined to create new forms of knowledge and understanding.

Moderator: Carl-Erik Engqvist, Artistic Director at Humlab, Umeå University

Panel

Media archaeology as a research methodology in Fine Arts

José Vicente Martín Martínez, Professor of Painting, Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche

This presentation will explain how we found out that media archaeology, as a research methodology, is the best means to resolve the main debates that concerned us in the search for a specific and operational model for art research, defining a practical territory in which historical studies, theoretical speculation, technical experimentation, and artistic creation converge. This applied to a field of study, the techniques of recording and representing reality, the media devices, which we understand as fundamental in formulating the material culture of Modernity.

Lisa Nyberg, Visual artist, and Postdoctoral fellow at Umeå Academy of Fine Arts, Umeå University

This presentation will reflect on how to include performative elements when presenting artistic research: How do we mirror the content of the research in how it is communicated? How do we communicate the experience of art? In her Ph.D. project, *Pedagogies of the Unknown – Studying for a Future without Guarantees* (2022), Nyberg examines how we relate to the future in our pedagogy and how we anticipate, imagine, and prepare through our teaching and studies. Driven by the urgency of the climate crisis, she searched for art-based pedagogies open to not knowing – to contingency, unpredictability, and change.

Gabriel Bohm Calles, Artist and guest teacher at Umeå Academy of Fine Art, Umeå University

The experiences of social distancing and an ever-increasing use of online communication have put focus on the digital experience of 'we' in close and psychologically intimate interactions online. In the interdisciplinary piece When I becomes We, first realized at UmArts in June 2023, I, together with Christoffel Kuenen (interaction design) and Niclas Kaiser (clinical psychology) used interactive performance art to explore how the digital 'we' emerges. Through the use of a machine of our own design called the Nuna we created a situation in which the shared digital 'we' could be brought to different expressions by adjusting both the technological system as well as the parameters of interaction.
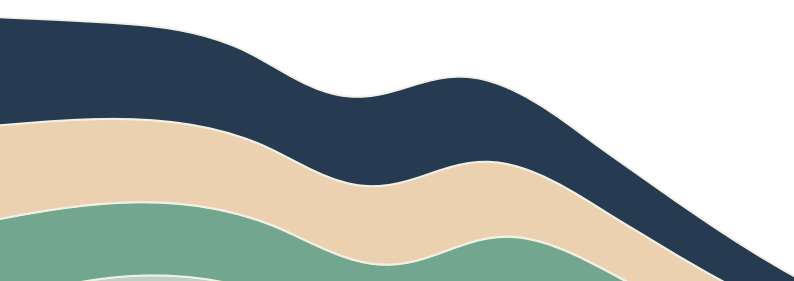
Humaniora, kultursidorna och den digitala omvandlingen

10:30–11:30, Hum D.210, Humanisthuset, Panel discussion in Swedish

Moderator: Jesper Enbom, universitetslektor vid Institutionen för kultur- och medievetenskaper, Umeå universitet

Humaniora har länge haft en viktig roll i att forma opinion, skapa debatt och synliggöra humanistiska problemställningar. Särskilt tydlig kan humanioras roll i samhällsdebatten bli när olika publiceringsforum ser dagens ljus eller går i graven (nu senast med Respons). Nya digitala vägar kan brygga distansen mellan universitetets väggar och omvärlden - men är det effektivt? Vilka trender behöver mötas (eller kanske vändas) och hur? Vad vill humanister åstadkomma i samhällsdebatten och vad vill egentligen samhällsdebatten med humanisterna själva? Vad är universitetens och enskilda forskares roll och hur ser ansvaret ut? Finns framtidens samhällsengagerade humanister på universiteten?

Panel

Dieter Müller, professor i kulturgeografi och vicerektor, Umeå universitet

Sara Meidell, Kulturredaktör på Västerbottens-Kuriren

Hanna Söderlund, universitetslektor vid Institutionen för språkstudier, Umeå universitet, och ledamot i tankesmedjan Humtank

Evelina Åberg, kommunikatör vid Umeå universitet, tidigare journalist och nöjesredaktör på Västerbottens-Kuriren

Closing words

11:30–12:00

Moa Eriksson Krutrök Associate Professor at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, and Jon Svensson, IT Educationalist, Humlab

Concluding words from the conference planners and the Humlab board. The winner of the meme contest will be announced and the result from the AI art project is presented.
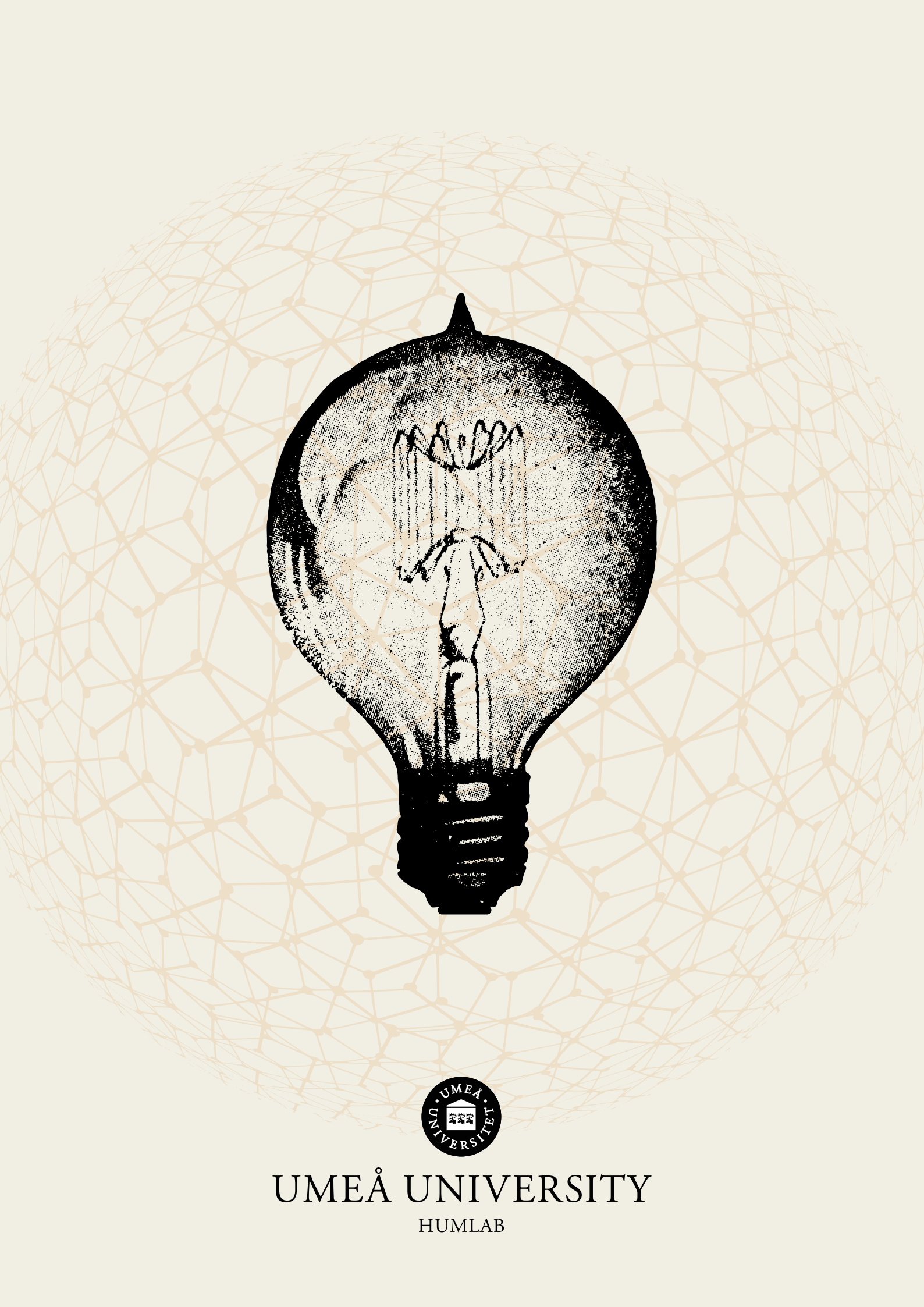
Post-conference: "Film Friday on Wednesday"

13.00, Humlab

With Gunilla Bresky, film director

The session includes a screening of selected clips from Bresky's film *We Are Still Here*, which tells the story of Sami artists in Máze, Northern Norway during the 1970s and their participation in the resistance against the development of the Alta River. The screening will be followed by a conversation between Bresky and Kristina Sehlin Macneil about the stakes of indigenous representation, and the comparisons between the documentary film and academic research. Macneil is an associate professor in Sami studies and researcher at Várdduo, with a background in studies of conflicts between indigenous peoples and extraction industries.

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