

Abstracts for ISMRC Conference: Media, Religion and Culture in a Networked World

Tuesday Panels starting at 8:30 am

Counterpublics

Alexandra Boutros

Reclaimed Religiosity: Constituting a Black Digital Counterpublic

Although the Nation of Islam has been the subject of mass mediated anxiety in the West, the full transnational scope of the deployment of religiosity as a means of building solidarity in African diasporic social movements has gone largely unremarked. Pervasive assumptions that religion and technology are ontologically distinct arenas of experience, knowledge, and action (Stolow 2012) are mirrored by a pervasive belief in “black technophobia” (Everett 2009). While the use of social media in the Arab Spring has been highly visible of late, the digital networking practices among activists of the African diaspora (Gilroy 1993) is considerably less so. Nonetheless, online activists and ideologues often directly address the intersection of race, religion, and technology. Whether Islam is posited as a technologically sophisticated socio-religious system or the spread of Afro-Caribbean religions is discussed in the language of computer viruses, religion is at the fore of conscious constructions of a technologized black subjectivity. These counter discourses intersect with the technological affordances of new media, shaping the online religiosity of African diasporic activism. The infrastructure that governs what aggregates online attention—including search engine algorithms that bump certain websites to the top of any search; social networking platforms that count “likes”, hits or views; or publishing software that allows users to repost blog entries with ease—shapes, at least in part, the religiosity of online black activism, foregrounding some discourses while submerging others. This analysis examines the intersections of race, religion and digital technology through a focus on what has come to be called the Afrosphere, a loosely organized, transnational network of “African/Black progressive minded bloggers.” Known for online mobilization around cases of racial injustice, the Afrosphere has been instrumental in mobilizing transnational grassroots protests, raising legal aid, and getting the attention of mainstream media. Building on a discursive analysis of participatory media I argue that religion is central to the emergence of the Afrosphere as locus of “pan-African” activism. Forms of religious reclamation are instrumental to the creation of a black counter public, engendering a black technologized subjectivity that is embodied, socially situated, and constructed in conscious contradistinction to hegemonic representations of transnational black subjectivity.

Deniz Mut Ari

Media usage and 'left Islam' as the new religious formation in Turkey: The case of Anti-Capitalist Muslims'

Over the past several years the role of social media in promoting, organizing, and responding to protest and revolution has been a hot topic of conversation. From Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring Revolutions, social media has been at the center of many of the largest, most popular demonstrations of political involvement. The protests taking place in Turkey add to this growing trend, and are already beginning to add new layers to our understanding of how social media can contribute to public participation. The Gezi Protest's main difference, at least when it began, was that it was very much "a right to the city" type of a movement themselves. It brings together people from all walks of life, with different political affiliations and agendas, people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The protestors represent various ideologies, including: Anti-Capitalist Muslims, Kemalists (supporters of Turkey's secular founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk), Kurds, LBGT and women's rights groups, football clubs, leftists/Communists and labor unions. This research, with its main focus on Anti-Capitalist Muslims in Gezi protests, aims to study the structure and social placement of the movement named as Anti-Capitalist Muslims which will bring up the question of "can anti capitalism and contemporary Islam go together" and thus it will open up a new perspective to current scholarship which had been mostly focusing on Western experiences. By Internet communication protestors produce shared meanings that constitute collective identities and practices. Protest networks make use of networked technologies in

order to advance their networked form of organization, and they produce novel aspects of network technologies such as the various forms of cyber-protest and cyber-activism.

Alexander Ornella

University of Hull

Cross-media Disobedience. Non-violent Activism In and Across Media Spaces

“Democracy is like love. You need to make it...” is one of the taglines of the feature documentary film EVERYDAY RELIGION (Austria/Switzerland, The Riahi Brothers 2013) and cross-media project <http://www.everydayrebellion.com/>. The film focuses on non-violent activism and civil disobedience featuring examples such as the topless Femen activists, Occupy Wall Street, or 15m. As cross-media project, it offers a rich website and uses facebook and twitter. The rich website offers protest tips, video clips of activists, or *The Protester's Manual* that discusses different forms of non-violent activism and offers examples of activist artists. But the examples of activists is not limited to groups originating in countries with an oppressive regime. The film also features, for example, New York based performance activist Reverend Billy and his Church of Stop Shopping who use religion as medium to criticize western overconsumption. The website's logo resembles socialism's hammer and sickle, but instead of hammer or sickle, the hand in the logo is holding a flower expressing the hope for, one could argue, a religiously inspired utopian future.

Clifford Bob (2005) argues that activists or insurgents who “start a Web site or attend a conference already stand above a multitude of groups who have not reached even these modest milestones.” And he argues that some activist groups either cannot or do not want to internationalize their agenda and rather stay on a local/national level asking “How and why do a handful of local challengers become global causes célèbres while scores of others remain isolated and obscure? What inspires powerful transnational networks to spring up around particular movements?” (2005, 2).

Using Bob's *Marketing of Rebellion* (2005) as a framework, this paper will analyze whether the film and the cross-media project aim to raise awareness for human injustice among a western audience, opens a space for the voices of the many activists groups, or if it rather contributes and continues the story of a few and the role religion plays in this narrative of the few vs. the many.

Religion in the Daily Press: Comparison of Nordic Countries, longitudinal changes and genres

Despite the fact that the large media institutions have been challenged by smaller, more segmented, and digital media, this panel starts from the assumption that the printed daily press is still important area of study for understanding changes and continuities in the public role and coverage of religion. The panel explores religion in the daily printed press by focusing on Nordic countries. It offers case studies on four countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and compares the similarities and differences between them. In the Nordic societies, the last decades have seen a growing diversification of both media and religion. The majority churches have also witnessed a partial loosening of their monopoly due to both migration and individualized attitudes to religion. This development is reflected, analysed and negotiated in the mainstream media. Newspapers have been key agents in negotiating the normative role of religion in society – for instance, its location, public role and relationship with the state. This is why the papers will examine longitudinal changes in the coverage of religion and the methods of studying them. While newspapers are changing over time, they are also internally diverse. Therefore, in addition to studying changes in time, special attention will be paid to different genres in which religion is covered, such as news, editorials, opinion letters and feature articles. By comparing and contrasting the country-specific cases the papers will shed light on the similarities and differences between them over time and newspaper genres.

Henrik Christensen

Aarhus University

Denmark: Few National Papers, Islam at the Fore

In the case of Denmark we take a closer look at all the national printed newspapers and examine their representations of religion. Compared to the representations in the other Nordic countries, the Danish press is generally more interested in Islam than in the majority Lutheran church, albeit with individual

differences. The paper presents and analyses these representations and argues that they can be partly explain with reference to a number of differences among these countries. Among these differences are the relationship between the state and church, the policies regarding integration of immigrants, the public opinion on Islam and integration, and the editorial line of the newspapers. The paper shows that the media does not seem to cover a resurgence of religion in the public sphere, but more a surge in interest in religion by the media.

Alf Linderman (Sigtuna Foundation)

Mia Lövheim (Uppsala University)

The resurgence of religion?! Methodological considerations from a Swedish case study on researching religion and modernity in the daily press

The debate about a “resurgence” of religion in the public life of Western European societies is ongoing in media and academy, yet there is a shortage of systematic and longitudinal empirical studies of the coverage of religion in European mass media. This paper will discuss findings and methodological considerations from the project “The resurgence of religion?! A study of religion and modernity in Sweden with the daily press as case study”. The project consists of a longitudinal quantitative content analysis of indicators of religion, and of core values associated with modernity, in editorials from Swedish daily press between 1975-2010, and a qualitative discourse analysis of cases where religion appear most frequently within these years. The paper will discuss methods for analyzing patterns as to the frequency of indicators of religion and how these relate to indicators of modernity used in the project. We will also discuss how these methodological observations pose new questions to studies of the presence and significance of religion in daily press.

Knut Lundby

University of Oslo

Norway: Many Newspapers, Religion on the Periphery

In Norway, daily press on paper has had a very strong position in international comparison, in terms of number of published titles in relation to the population, as well as in terms of reader consumption. For several decades, until the turn of the millennium nearly 90 percent of the population above 15 years have been reading at least one newspaper on paper every day. Still nearly 3 of 4 Norwegians do, despite the growth in digital versions. The coverage of religion is on the periphery in double sense: it seems to be strongest in those regions where traditional Christian activity is strongest or in the two “Christian dailies”, i.e. in both cases catering for religious reader cultures. However, newspaper loyalty to the majority Lutheran church is on return as Islam and new spiritualities are becoming more visible in society, and even more so in the papers.

Teemu Taira

University of Turku

Finland: The Emergence of Religious Diversity in the Daily Press

The coverage of religion in the Finnish daily presses has become more diverse since the 1990s. This is in sharp contrast with the earlier decades when the Lutheran church dominated the religion coverage and some newspapers were highlighting their moderately secularist agenda. By using newspapers as data, this paper explores the emergence of religious diversity in the daily press in Finland and argues that the idea that we live in a diverse society has become dominating framework for debating religion-related issues in the media. This does not mean that diversity is embraced by all, but it provides a starting point for both media coverage of religion and following debates. The main data is based on (but not limited to) the most influential Finnish newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, especially its editorials and readers’ letters, but the paper also reflects the diversity of Finnish newspapers and differences in genres.

Formation of Values and Attitudes

Elizabeth Aduloju

University of Port Harcourt

New Media and the moral development of the Youth in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Media are the most powerful cultural forces on the planet. Millions of people watch, read and listen for hours on a daily basis. In developing countries like Nigeria, people's lives are transformed as media become part of their culture. There is no doubt that the media particularly the new media such as the Internet, cell phones, computer games etc., have become an increasingly common daily activity of the youth in this contemporary era. Young people across the world are inundated daily with media messages and information that affect them in different ways. The extent may vary depending on the level of development of the country and advancement in information and communication technology (ICT). The fact remains that the advancement in ICT has changed the way we relate with one another and the 21st Century youth has become, as a matter of fact, an "electronic animal" existing in a "global village". The roles of the media cannot be ignored as they provide the audience with information, entertainment and helps in transmitting the cultural and moral values of the society. Despite these benefits, there has been a heightened concern regarding the possible exposure of the youth to the unsafe and inappropriate contents on the new media, such as, pornographic pictures, indecency, aggressive behaviours, etc. These are major challenges to the moral behaviours of the youth in Ekiti State today. Thus the moral formation of the youth in Ekiti State presently is imperative. In view of this, the study took a critical look on the influences of the new media on the morality of the youth in Ekiti. The study employed the survey research design using Ekiti State as the study area and was anchored on the uses and gratifications theory. The findings revealed that the youth in Ekiti State are adversely affected morally due to excessive and improper usage of the electronic/new media. Therefore, this study recommends media education for the youth at different levels of educational system in the state and in Nigeria as a whole. Also, parents should take the moral formation of their children as the priority over their careers among others.

Mary Hess

Luther Seminary

Create, share, believe: Public spaces, digital storytelling, and religious education

Recent research on digital media literacies and learning suggests three shifts: a move from "teaching-based" to "learning-based;" a move from "public and private" to "personal and collective;" and an emphasis on tacit knowing in inquiry-led approaches. These dynamics offer new promise for religious education practice in public spaces, as well as extensive contradictions.

Three paradoxes will be explored:

- (1) The curiosity and passion of digital culture learners is often piqued by a desire to gain access to esoteric forms of knowing (eg. the more obscure the elements of a video game, the more fascinating for long time players). The promise is one of drawing learners into holistic and integrated forms of religious knowing which appreciate the tension of mystery, whereas the contradiction is one of making the study of religion so difficult as to be inaccessible to those who might find it compelling.
- (2) This new culture of learning appreciates tacit forms of knowing. Religious studies scholars and theologians are often adept at methodologies that lift up for explicit engagement forms of knowing are largely tacit. Yet at the same time much of the way in which religious practice is engaged and taught has emphasized cognitive and doctrinal aspects to the expense of the tacit. The promise is one of making religious understanding accessible to generations of people who are increasingly being formed in digital cultures, while the contradiction is that at the very moment in which religious understanding is so needed in broader public spaces, religious scholars and educators are engaging it in ways that keep it outside the comprehension frames of most people.
- (3) There are elements of digital culture which at the same time as they are deeply relational, disrupt our "taken for granted" understanding of embodied presence. These paradoxical tensions emerge in part from increasingly accessible participatory tools that offer significant enjoyment and agency to those who use them.

A compelling and constructive response to these challenges can be found in new forms of digital storytelling which take seriously the "create/share/believe" circle of practice.

Lee-Shae Scharnick-Udemans

University of Cape Town

The role of media in shaping religious and cultural understandings

This paper introduces and offers a critical analysis of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television production, *Siyakholwa - We Believe*, a children's educational multi-faith program. Theory about religion education in South Africa provides insight into the multiple relationships among religion, constitution, education and media in the post-apartheid context. This paper discusses how the constitutional ideal of religious pluralism is mediated through public service television in South Africa. The relationships among the state, religion, public education and public service broadcasting in the light of post-apartheid national and institutional policies are examined. The complexities that colour these relationships have material implications for the ways in which constitutional principles of freedom of religion are articulated both in the classroom and on public service television. By analysing national policy for religion in education and public service broadcasting along with theory about religion education, this paper argues for the pedagogical viability of television for teaching about religion in South Africa. By analysing the scripts of *Siyakholwa* and evaluating their content in relation to national policy and educational theory about religion, I will demonstrate how educational programming on public service television can provide a pedagogical space for achieving the aims of South Africa's national policy for religion in education as well as contribute to the larger nation building agenda.

Anneli Winell

Health and Wellbeing in Women's Magazines – an Arena for the Presentation and Negotiation of Existential Issues, Religion and Spirituality

The aim of my paper is to discuss how discourses on health and wellbeing – in three Swedish lifestyle magazines for women – seem to be a recurrent arena for the presentation and negotiation of existential issues, religion and spirituality.

The discussion attempts to answer the following questions: How do the chosen magazines – as representatives of the media as one of many active agents in society – identify, define and redefine their target group, respectively: women +25, +40 and +50 years of age, in relation to health and wellbeing? How are these women supposed to experience, understand and think about health and wellbeing – as individuals and in relation to their special context? When and why do the magazines' assume that existential issues, religion and spirituality will have a positive – or negative – impact on the health and wellbeing of their implied readers? A point of departure is that the categories just mentioned represent a both individual and social identity, a relational and situational position.

How then do a group of readers negotiate with the ideas about themselves and the magazines' wellbeing discourses? Do they find the magazines' plan of action for better health and wellbeing as a resource? That is, women identified and defined by the magazines, and themselves, as independent emancipated, and competent professional women, mothers and partners.

Gender, age and class are important factors in this study related to the questions of issue. The paper is based on a qualitative study in the sociology of religion exploring women's magazines as actors, arenas and possible recourses for existential, religious and spiritual meaning making. A content analysis and a reception study are complementary.

Networked Communities

Tim Hutchings

CODEC, Durham University, UK

The Bible, Digital Media and Networked Religious Authority

In the last five years, reading the Bible on a digital device has become increasingly common among evangelical Christians in many regions of the world. The rise of the smartphone and tablet has allowed Christian programmers to create apps to access, analyse and share biblical texts at any time. The most popular of these products (YouVersion) recorded its 100 millionth download on its 5th anniversary in the summer of 2013, and a thriving marketplace of rivals has now emerged.

Production of these digital Bibles is driven by traditional evangelical understandings of the Bible as the Word of God, a powerful agent acting to transform the lives of readers, and digital Bibles remediate many traditional evangelical reading practices. However, we can also use these Bibles as case studies to help trace patterns of religious and social change. Digital technologies have accelerated long-term social trends, contributing to the emergence of “the network society” (Castells 2009) and “networked individualism” (Wellman 2012). These Bibles can be analysed as networks, through which new patterns of attention and authority are forming. Early observers suggested that digital Bible reading would undermine hierarchies of religious authority and encourage more individualistic, fluid interpretations of Scripture (Beaudoin 1998, Wagner 2010, 2012), in line with wider assumptions about the democratising power of digital media in politics, business and education. My own research complicates this perspective, arguing that the structures and flows of “networked religion” generated through these Bibles can actually work to expand and intensify certain kinds of hierarchical religious authority.

This paper uses interviews, surveys and software analysis to examine YouVersion as an example of “networked religion”. The creators of this app have leveraged the affordances of mobile media and digital social networks to promote their understanding of Scripture, achieve international attention and attract funding through donations. The app remediates content produced by established Christian publishers while disrupting their business models and marketplace. I will argue that these developments amount to a shift in the relationship between publisher, reader and text, as religious groups and individuals respond to wider changes in the organisation of society.

Francesco Piraino

Istituto di Scienze Umane, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales

Sufism in western societies, between real and virtual communities: the Naqshbandi Haqqani case

European Sufism is currently blossoming in all different aspects of social life: culture, arts and politics. The Internet plays a central role: 1) restructuring the *tariqa*'s organisational forms; 2) acting as a new instrument for visibility and promotion; 3) reducing the distance between Sufi Masters and disciples. The Naqshbandi Haqqani *tariqa* fluctuates between a traditional form, with conservative perspectives, and a modern *tariqa*, strongly influenced by modern religiosity and New Age culture. The latter more developed among converts can be analysed through Troeltsch's category of Mysticism, characterised by the fluidity of relationships, the porosity of theology and a reduced institutionalisation of religious practices.

Naqshbandi virtual life is extremely far-reaching, with an official website translated in 15 languages, a web broadcast and three applications for smartphones; in which you can find history, pictures, videos, prayers, natural remedies for illnesses, and where you can ask for spiritual advice online. Moreover there are hundreds of websites and Facebook groups created by local groups.

In the virtual community, you can participate in all aspects of Sufi religious life: 1) prayers - *dhikr* 2) speaking to the Shaykh, 3) sharing experience on religious topics with other disciples, and 4) even converting to Islam and taking esoteric initiation online.

Nevertheless there is a certain disconnect between virtual and real life, in fact, the Naqshbandi *zawiyas* online do not correspond to the real *zawiyas*. The Naqshbandi digital image over-represents the real communities.

This virtual religious life has arisen from: 1) the de-ethnicisation of religion, with the move towards a universal Sufism; 2) devolved charisma, not reserved to Shaykh Nazim but to many local *muqqaddams*; 3) the push towards expansion and promotion (due to a strong eschatological influence); 4) the vacuum

created by the loss of real social religious life. In fact, the community's fragmentation is compensated by virtual practices and relationships.

Marta Kołodziejka

Institute of Sociology University of Warsaw Poland

Catholic forums- the new frontier of Catholicism in Poland?

The paper will be based on the ongoing research project, innovative in the Polish context due to the analyzed topic and the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods, which aims to answer the following questions: are the users of catholic internet forums (on the portals: www.wiara.pl, www.katolik.pl and www.adonai.pl) a form of community and what meaning do those users ascribe to participating in online discussions? The main assumption is that virtual communities are an exemplification of communication communities (Delanty 2003, Etzioni 2003), i.e. those whose basis, purpose and condition of existence is communication itself. Participation in such communities isn't determined by locality and/or structural factors such as age, sex or occupation, but by individual motivation to partake in interaction. The analysis conducted on the forums thus far revealed that their participants comprise both believers (of various denominations) and declared atheists. In view of such diversity of users, what could be the common base for their interaction? On the basis of analysis conducted to date, it is assumed that the core of communication is the reference (both positive and negative) to the teachings of the Catholic church. During the course of interaction, users exchange not only knowledge, but also experiences and advice: seeking and offering help and support is a vital component of most forum discussions. The last topic which will be touched upon is the crystallization of authority: it was discovered that while it lasts only within a certain thread or topic, it depends to a great extent on the knowledge and interpretive skills one exhibits. While there are members of the clergy present on each forum, they have equal status to other participants and must 'prove' their knowledge in the course of discussion. This shifting authority, characteristic of online communities (Campbell 2012), may be the biggest challenge for the institutional Church in the process of fully utilizing the new communications technology.

Brian Altenhofen, Wendi Bellar and Kyong James Cho

Department of Communication, Texas A&M University

Studying Mobile Faith in App Culture: A Strategic Framework for Investigating Religious Mobile Applications

This co-authored paper presents the initial findings of a project that investigates the variety of mobile apps available that facilitate both religious rituals and meaning-making within mobile culture. This research is part of a larger study, which seeks to map religious app culture and develop methods and protocols for researching religious mobile apps. Drawing on an initial study of 451 religious-oriented mobile applications available in the iTunes app store that represent the five major world religions, this study highlights trends related to the design of religious apps. Initial investigation by team members identified a number of significant challenges faced by scholars seeking to study religious apps. This included inconsistencies within the iTunes app store search function and categories, as well as a limited scholarly literature in both the study of religious and non-religious apps from which to draw methodological resources for such a study. This led an extensive comparative and thematic analysis of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist apps from which a new classification system of religious apps emerged. Drawing on the work of Wagner (2012)* we suggest two parent classifications and 11 unique categories, which seeks to map the most common design strategies related to religious apps. This typology offers concrete resources and suggests a potential research agenda for the study of religious apps. Thus it offers a starting point for scholars seeking to investigate how app developers interpret and integrate religious needs and practices into their design intentions, as well as consider new methods for studying how technology frameworks mediate and shape religious app experiences. This paper also reflects on future directions and agendas for the fuller development of the study of religious mobile apps and culture.

Tuesday Panels starting at 10:15 am

Meaning and Being

Katherine Madden

Critical Studies- School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California

Serving Two Masters: Reality Television and the Moralization of Neoliberalism

The belief that free markets are the economic expression of Christianity has been a long-standing principle among conservative Christian institutions. It was not until the early 2000s, however, that the once outlying sentiments of the Prosperity Gospel movement became common in the nation's largest Christian congregations. The Great Recession of 2008 challenged the tenets of Prosperity Gospel and the free market in which so many Christians and non-Christians alike have placed their faith. Yet since the Recession, aside from the brief Occupy Movement of late 2011, there has been a noticeable lack of representation in popular media of civil criticism despite the American Dream's shattered façade. My argument is that the Prosperity Gospel has so influenced American culture in its moralization of wealth that Recession-era popular media fails to meaningfully confront the notion that a free market is moral. This extension of Prosperity Gospel ideology into the mainstream can be tracked in reality television, which exemplifies the spread of the ideology in the commercial industry.

ABC and CBS found both critical and popular success in their recession-era reality programs *Undercover Boss*, *Secret Millionaire*, and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, which all lionize corporate America. These pro-corporate shows do not question the notion that a free market is moral; as a result, they promote this notion by adopting formal and stylistic characteristics reminiscent of Christian media, as well as by featuring Christian CEOs or millionaires who explicitly practice their faith. Why, then, would a viewer suffering from Recession-era woes tune into shows such as these? Here I borrow from the work of historian Bethany Moreton, who, in her study of Wal-Mart's success, posits that there are greater forces, such as religion, that shape one's economic interest. Moreton's contention brings us back to the Prosperity Gospel movement. If an individual fails to find financial success in life, the Prosperity Gospel movement posits that it is not the fault of corporate America or the government. Rather, his failures stem from a strained or nonexistent relationship with God. This idea fits perfectly with neoliberalism, insofar as failure rests not in the inefficiencies of policy but in the insufficiencies of the citizen.

These popular reality programs appropriate Christianity for the purpose of "giving testimony" to neoliberal policies, such as the privatization of social welfare, the focus on the individual over the community, maintaining an unregulated free market, and an emphasis placed on consumer culture. I will situate these programs within the trajectory of conservative Christianity from the fringes to the mainstream to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between the Prosperity Gospel and neoliberalism.

Lynn Schofield Clark

The Politics of Empathy: Exploring YPAR as a means of developing theories on media and participation

Studies of empathy often focus on its normative and philosophical dimensions. In this paper, I argue that Youth Participatory Action Research provides a means for studying empathy as related to practices that are lived and resisted. Rather than focusing on the problem of defining, identifying, or encouraging empathy, therefore, this paper considers the ways that young people participate in the production and contestation of empathy and the ways that they relate to mainstream 'values.' Recognizing that communication research for social justice is still not widely embraced (Rodino-Colocino, 2012) and briefly discussing one such project that begins with minoritized young people who seek to utilize media to make a difference in their communities, this article argues that Youth Participatory Action Research provides a lens through which to explore the ways in which young people are learning to critically analyze their mediated and lived contexts, engage in meaningful multigenerational dialogue, and participate in resisting repressive ideologies and systems in ways that sometimes do, but sometimes do not, turn on the politics of empathy.

Amanda Lagerkvist

Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University

Grounding the eternal in the ephemeral: meaning making in the digital memory ecology

Our liquid, late modern digital age raises a number of important concerns as regards the fundamentals and foundations of our existence. Through shifts that affect our sense of time, space, community and identity, our life world seems to be assuming a new, and quite vulnerable form (Bauman 2008). And in an era that celebrates instantaneity and hyperconnectivity (Wellman 2012; Hoskins 2013) compulsions of networked individualism co-exist with technological obsolescence amounting to a sense of fragmentation and endless versatility. In this context the very notion of *collective memory* has become precarious, and memory has been transformed into “a matter of elective affinities” (Pinchevski 2011), resulting in a digital memory ecology saturated by an all-pervasive tension between remembering and forgetting (Garde Hansen et al 2009). This paper argues, however, that in our era of absolute presence (Allon 2004), the *infinite* and *eternal* have simultaneously made an important reappearance, precisely in and through our digital memory practices. This is visible in the ubiquitous meaning making practices of personal digital archiving through the urges for self-perpetuation; it is evident at sites where the self may be saved for posterity (www.Itomb); it is discernible in the new practices of directly speaking to the dead on digital memorials (Walter et. al 2012), and in the tendency among some users to regard the internet itself as a manifestation of eternity, ‘heaven’ and the sacred (Jacobi 2012). The paper shows that by approaching digital memory cultures existentially – inspired by the debate on media and religion and its emphasis on new uncharted forms of existential meaning making in our media age (Schofield Clark & Hoover 1997; Hoover & Lundby 1997; Woodhead & Heelas 2001; Lövheim 2004, Sumiala-Seppänen et al 2006; Morgan ed. 2008; Lynch, Mitchell & Strahn eds.2012; Lövheim 2011, 2012) – we may gain insights into important and paradoxical aspects of our existential terrains of connectivity. This makes possible an exploration into how people navigate and create meaning in these terrains, in seeking to ground a sense of ‘existential security’ in online environments (Lagerkvist 2013) at once conceived as ephemeral and eternal.

Grace Chiou

Hegemonic Generosity: Saints and Sinners in the film Millions

Popular media arguments promoting generosity have tied the practice with self-interest. Currently trending is Adam Grant’s Give and Take that promotes being a giver for work place success or the pay-it-forward method that creates chains of goodwill in the marketplace. In 2006, the film *Millions* addressed the possibility of generosity in neoliberalism. Using Catholic ontology as an alternate consciousness, this film exposes how neoliberalism redefines concepts such as need and generosity through the market’s utilitarian ideals. The latter has morphed into a practice of philanthropy (bold statements to gain social capital) and goodwill donations (the opportunity to dispose of one’s useless and disposable items). Acts of compassion such as giving to the hungry or comfort for the discouraged feel unsatisfying and less meaningful. Drawing from this film, generosity is redefined as the communal work of collectively addressing social needs post-Thatcher. This paper demonstrates concretely the way practices of generosity are tied to other cultural values such as consumerism and religion.

Lessons from Playing with Religion in Digital Games

This panel explores the intersection between gaming, media and religious studies by bringing together cutting-edge research that consider how religious games are constructed ideologically, the ways religion is manifest in the gaming genre and how the gaming enterprise can be seen as doing important religious and cultural work through serving a meaning-making role for players. This panel profiles key works from the forthcoming *Playing with Religion in Digital Games* (Indiana Univ. Press, 2014), which maps the current study of religion within digital games and gaming environments. This panel addresses the need for more systematic study of religion in gaming and virtual worlds, and extends such discussions by providing a scholarly map and theoretical framework for this growing conversation, by identifying key issues in current religion and digital gaming scholarship. It demonstrates that careful attention to religious narratives, rituals and behaviors within game studies is required for a greater understanding of the social and cultural impact of gaming on contemporary society. By outlining current research themes within religion and gaming studies, this panel poses provocative new question and highlights key areas of investigation, specifically (a) the study of religiously-themed games, (b) the role religion plays in mainstream games, and (c) reflection on how gaming can be seen as a form of “implicit religion”. Each panelist will be given 12-15 minutes to present their work representing one of these themes, give a

summary of key arguments in their chapters and highlight what their research and approach to studying religion and digital games has to offer the wider field of media, religion and culture studies. This will be followed by a panel discussion and audience engagement on the issues raised.

Heidi Campbell (Texas A&M University)

Gregory Price Grieve (University of North Carolina Greensboro)

Why Study Religion in Digital Games?

Despite the conception among some that religion and games do mix well the presenter will show how popular games have intentionally and unintentionally become spaces to grapple with complex existential meanings and religious narratives. This presentation provides an introduction to the panel, and argues that an interdisciplinary discussion is required. Religious studies scholar bring insights into how video games can serve as religious texts and extensions of religious practice, and media scholars demonstrate how to unpack the religious narratives and symbols popular games employ. A survey of current interdisciplinary work is offered contextualizing the range of approaches taken in this emerging field and the work of panel presenters.

Isamar Carrillo Masso

Bangor University

Locating the Pixelated Jew: A Multi-Modal Method for Exploring Judaism in The Shivah

Using a project-specific multimodal corpus, the chapter analyzes the discourses embedded in the game *The Shivah* (Wadjet 2006) to explore the implications for the understanding of Judaism and Jewish faith-based identities. Religious minorities play an important part in video games, both as consumers and as virtual characters. This chapter studies games and religious minorities as “discursive spaces.” In particular, we shall seek to uncover and discuss representations of Judaism by taking a semiotic approach derived from film studies, and combining it with a new corpus-based critical discourse analytical, multimodal approach. This method, specifically developed for the study of games, explores the representation of Judaism and questions of religious-based beliefs, behaviors, values, ethics and faith in the religious adventure game.

Vit Sisler

Charles University

Procedural Religion: Methodological Reflections on Studying Islam in Video Games

The paper argues that the way religion and its values are integrated into the game is fundamentally determined by a game genre and the procedural forms it enables. It focuses on two separate, yet entangled groups of video games produced in the Muslim world: educational and causal. First, it discusses educational games aimed at teaching basic tenets of Islam and explores the ways in which they communicate Islamic principles and moral values to the youth. Second, it analyzes mainstream and casual games dealing with the history of the Muslim world and/or featuring Muslim characters as heroes and explores the ways these games deal with the sensitive topic of representation of Islam and Muslim identity. By doing so, this chapter examines both the dominant narratives, characterizations and symbols appearing in the above-mentioned games as well as the extent to which mainstream games rely on religious strategies or narratives to frame their game play. Capitalizing on Ian Bogost’s notion of ‘procedural rhetoric,’ this chapter specifically discusses how is (or is not) the concept of religion embedded into the rule system governing the player’s interaction with the game. In other words, it examines to what extent Islam and its moral values shape and limit the choices and decisions player can make in the game, as well as how religion functions on the game’s procedural level.

Rachel Wagner

Ithaca College

The Importance of Playing in Earnest

This paper will illustrate how gameplay may serve as an implicit religious experience for some. This is accomplished especially by countering claims that games and religion are in opposition to each other, based on the assumption that religion is “serious” whereas games are “fun.” Wagner maintains games and religion share a fundamental similarity, as order-making activities that offer a mode of escape from contemporary life, with both inviting an “earnestness” that reflects a commitment to a pre-designated system that defines experience, and offer a system of order that is comforting for its very predictability. The author further suggests that thinking critically about play and “earnestness” affords us the freedom to

take responsibility for the games we choose to play, whether religious or not, and suggest that religious studies may offer games studies important insights into the motivations and outcomes of popular gameplay.

State Policies

Mauro Gatti

University of Bologna

What is Sacred? Religion and Media Freedom in European Policies

This study seeks to demonstrate that the States' views of 'what is sacred' should sometimes be taken in consideration when discussing the way media change the nature of religion and spirituality. Social studies often assume the autonomy of the media, at least in democratic states. Democracies claim in fact to promote media autonomy throughout their religious policy. Such discourse is confirmed in some countries, like the US, where even a large religious organization, like the Catholic Church, is no longer able to control access to its internal matters (Hoover 1998) and where the entire religious landscape could be redefined once minority groups decided to move out from private and domestic spheres of action (Gill 2012; Hoover & Kim 2012).

The autonomy of the religious marketplace is less evident elsewhere, namely in some European countries. It is true that European States accept media autonomy in respect of religious affairs, at least in their external relations. EU Member States have adopted a number of foreign policy documents and statements in favor of media freedom from religion-motivated interferences. They have also put such commitments in practice, for instance by opposing the international ban on 'defamation of religion' proposed by several Muslim-majority countries in 1999.

However, most European States identify in part with a majority religion, which consequently benefits from privileged access to the national religious marketplace. European human rights law allows for limitation of religious expression in public spaces and some States restrain minorities' access to media. Secondly, European law permits partial State control on the framing of religions, which public authorities use to stigmatize certain organizations (the so-called 'cults') and limit criticism of majority groups. As a consequence, minority religions in Europe may have to fight the States' negative framing, while having limited access to media resources.

Stéphanie Wattier

Catholic University of Louvain

Media and religion in European Union Law: a balance between protection and regulation

Article 17, § 1, of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – introduced by the Lisbon Treaty – enunciates that "the Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States". Otherwise put, the European Union recognises the separation between the Church and the State.

However, it is striking to see that the EU regulates the protection of religious and philosophical orientation on television and radio (e.g.: Directive 89/552 "Television without Frontiers"). If one could argue it is quite logical because the EU has been partly given the competence to regulate the media, another could see the risk of violation of the principle of religious autonomy, which is internationally protected.

The aim of my contribution would be to analyse, on a juridical point of view, the way that the European Union makes the balance between the regulation of, on the one hand, protection of religion and, on the other hand, separation or independence between Church and State.

Africanus Diedong

Advocating for Good Governance in Ghana: Role of the Catholic Church

The paper documents significant role the Catholic Church has played towards the process of democratization in Ghana. The process towards ensuring that people are guaranteed their basic human rights and freedoms to exploit their potentials demands commitment from the state and civil society organizations. In Ghana, the period preceding the coming into being of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution, was a turbulent one. The period was characterized by Civil Society Organisations'

criticisms of the military regime continual stay in power. Since 1992, the Church has not relented in her efforts at expressing concerns over issues of public interest, which if not adequately addressed can compromise good governance. The study reviews articles and essays from varied sources and uses in-depth interviews with key Church personalities on major areas of interest for the study. It articulates and puts into perspective the intrinsic interest of the Church on issues of good governance.

Walter C. Ihejirika (University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria)

Andrew Danjuma Dewan (Plateau State University, Bokkos)

Life is Wider than the Screen: Comparing the images from Nigeria's Televangelism and the Lived Realities in the Country

In the past one and half decades, the appropriation of the mass media for various activities by religious groups, especially the new wave Pentecostal churches in Nigeria has been a major research theme which has been widely treated by scholars involved in the field of media, religion and culture. Such scholars as Rosalind Hackett, Ruth Marshall Frantani, Matthews Ojo, Asonzeh Ukah, Walter Ihejirika have done extensive research and highlighted various aspects of this media and religious reality. As these scholars have noted, the main content of Nigerian televangelism include: a) the propagation of the prosperity gospel which posits that 'born-again' Christians are entitled to the good things of life which Jesus Christ have won for them through his atoning death on the cross; b) deliverance from many forms of demonic possession; c) liberation from negative occult forces; d) and emphasis on upright living as an indicator of being born-again. These elements have become the staple media menu served to the many viewers of the televangelists in Nigeria. There is evidence of the growth of Nigerian televangelism on both terrestrial and satellite television platforms. Many of the televangelists have also migrated to internet broadcasting in order to evade the Nigerian broadcast law which forbade religious organizations from owning and operating broadcast media in the country. With the volume of prosperity gospel propagated by the televangelists, the exorcisms performed, the frequency of testimonies of good things received by the adherence or deliverances obtained; one would expect that Nigerian would be a socially developed country populated by very upright citizens. But is this case? This is the problem which this paper seeks to explore. Using data from relevant agencies like the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, the United Nations, the Social Development Institute, we carried out a panel study of the level of social development in the country from 2005 to 2012. Such development indicators as poverty level, per capita income, literacy, health-care delivery and corruption level are presented with the intention of finding out if the country has made significant progress over the years. Data collection is still on-going. The findings will be viewed from the prism of the messages propagated by the televangelists with a view of noting if the messages are in consonance or at variance with the lived reality in the country. The study will be significant in providing some insight into the developmental relevance of Nigeria's growing televangelism.

Social Networking

Suzanne van der Beek

When pilgrims go online

Paul Emerson Teusner

RMIT University, Melbourne

"It's the deep engagement that counts": Locating the audience in social networking!

I intend to present a framework for investigating how users of online social media perceive their audiences and the impact of this perception on their production of religious text. Applying a "nexus analysis" to the content of posts and conversations in thirty progressive Christian blogs, I will show how changes in the interactions between bloggers and their audiences are reflected in the negotiations between Christian attitudes and social media production values of the bloggers.

The authors of the nexus analysis tool, Scollon and Wong Scollon (2004), note that social action occurs at the intersection of three factors: the interaction order, the discourses in place, and the historical bodies of the participants involved. They argue that just as each of these factors impinge of the nature and design of the discourses at their intersection, they are likewise not constant. Thus there is a cycle of change as each factor interacts, which the writers name semiotic cycles. Nexus analysis, then, is the study of how each of these cycles inform and change other cycles to aggregate change in the relationships of people in a setting of interaction, and nature of communication therein.

This research aims to add a perspective to current discussions in our field on options of "networked religion". With each exchange of text between users, there is an exchange of values and, arguably, of power. Nexus analysis is a useful tool for examining how these exchanges help users of social media discern, negotiate and affirm their religious identity and locate themselves within a network.

This presentation will be useful to researchers searching for ways to examine or analyse how users of social media users build their online identities within the context of known, or imagined, networks, or those interested in how a "networked" religious identity is or may be formed. While the study presented focuses on users in the blogosphere, I will show how the analytical method may be applied to social networking and microblogging platforms, like Facebook and Twitter.

Christopher Helland
Sociology of Religion, Dalhousie University

Co-Locating the Sacred in Cyberspace: Examining the Developing Role of Online Ritual within the Tibetan Diaspora

In this paper I will discuss the developing online presence and social networking activity of religious authorities of the Tibetan diaspora community. Despite "geographical" Tibet being subsumed under the Chinese State, the Tibetan government in exile, official religious organizations, and politically and religiously motivated individuals have actively engaged the Internet to promote Tibetan sovereignty and maintain their religious and cultural identity. My paper will utilize a "multi-site networked approach" to explore the complexity of this developing network. This is a multi-site network because it happens in 5 different "spheres" of Internet influence that are connected explicitly and implicitly throughout the World Wide Web. The website groupings are the Tibetan Government in Exile (www.tibet.net); Tibetan News Websites (broadcast in English, Tibetan, and Mandarin around the globe—including "over" the Great Firewall of China); Cyber-sanghas and comprehensive community-based websites; social networking sites and blogs; and Monastic and Religious Websites. In an increasingly online world that has given rise to "networked individualism", this paper will explore the effect these multiple networks have on maintaining community identity, loyalty, common goals and beliefs, and leadership structures. My research is charting the development of a hybridized community that connects deeply rooted traditional structures of power and authority with new social networks. My presentation will also provide an examination of the modifications and transformations that occur in religious activities as they are "digitized" and engaged through Internet networks. This paper will present my developing theoretical framework examining the impact of new media on ritual liminal space, the concepts of co-presence and co-location in ritual, and community perceptions of the sacred.

Rob Rozenhal
Department of Religion Studies, Lehigh University

American Cyber Sufis: Islamic Authority, Identity and Ritual Online

Proposal: Within the hybrid 'spiritual marketplace' of American religious life, Cyberspace offers tech-savvy Muslims an alternative platform for narratives and networking, piety and performance. Since the adoption of the printing press, Sufis have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adopt and adapt to emerging media technologies. Even so, the expanding use of the Internet by global Sufi communities remains largely unexplored by academic scholarship. Drawing on new research, this paper examines how two transnational, diasporic Sufi orders with a growing presence in the United States each employ the Internet as a mediascape for the refashioning of authority, identity and ritual practice.

Founded by Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), the Sufi Order International (www.sufiorder.org ; pirzia.org) was the first Sufi community to take root in Europe and North America. Under the leadership of his grandson, Pir Zia Inayat Khan, the order has accommodated its teachings to the American landscape while amplifying its cultural links to the Indian Subcontinent and the Chishti Sufi tradition from which it emerged. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order of America (www.naqshbandi.org), a complex (and sometimes controversial) Sufi movement led by a spiritual master from Cyprus, has in recent decades morphed into an expansive global network distinguished by its political activism and social welfare projects.

As a case study of digital religion in practice, this paper compares and contrasts the Web presence of these two prominent Sufi brotherhoods. My analysis offers new perspectives on the diversity and dynamism of the American Muslim experience by exploring a number of salient questions:

- How do American Sufi communities from divergent backgrounds employ Cyberspace to initiate conversations, debate issues and expand interpersonal networks?
- In what ways does Cyber Sufism either affirm or dissemble traditional Sufi modes of religious authority, institutionalization, pedagogy and practice?
- To what extent is the intimacy and intensity of Sufi ritual practice possible online?
- In what ways does Cyberspace facilitate (or impede) interpersonal encounters among Sufi networks across national and global boundaries?
- How does the Internet cement (or sever) links to the ancestral homelands of American Sufi communities?
- What is distinctly 'American' about the conversations and contacts among these Sufi netizens?

Tuesday starting at 1:00 pm

Plenary – Critical Reflections on the field of Media, Religion, and Culture:

Participants: David Morgan, Johanna Sumiala, Diane Winston, Magali Cuncha, Mia Lövheim

The study of media, religion, and culture has since its inception in the mid-1990s broadened out from interests in media representation to research on the religious uses and aesthetics of media, the significance of media for religion in public life, and the role of media technologies for religious life and practice. However, robust reflection on what implications these developments have for the broader field have only begun to take shape in recent writing (Lövheim 2013; Meyer 2013; Morgan 2013; Stolow 2013). As an attempt to encourage such reflection, this panel will critically discuss problems in the current conversation and consider what might be done to improve it. The aim of the panel is to: 1) stage critique before the assembled company of the conference; 2) invite advocates of various theoretical perspectives to present their own interpretations of the topography of the field and of desirable interventions; and 3) present working ideas for research projects that will challenge prevailing notions and the dearth of critical reflection.

Tuesday Panels starting at 2:45 pm

Faith in the “Good Life”: Mediatization, identity, and the framing of religion in popular culture

Media and religion are strange bedfellows. From kosher cell phones and halal internet to Christian rock music and twittering evangelicals, the pursuit of spirituality is married to a never-ending array of media forms. Contrary to theories of secularization that prophesied the decline of religion (especially in the public sphere) contemporary religion has re-emerged beyond the walls of church, synagogue, and mosque, and into the mediated public sphere.

Fueled by the availability of digital communication and its synergy with legacy media, people can learn about a plethora of faiths, attend services online, and even chat in virtual pews. On the other hand, for media producers working in a fragmented media environment, religion has become as acceptable a topic for content as police crime dramas or sci-fi fantasy. Put simply, there is little or no separation between media and religion.

With this blurring of lines has come what Hjarvard (2006) calls the mediatization of religion, a cultural space in which religion is incorporated into the logic of the media. Because of its ubiquity, media becomes the primary purveyor of religious ideas—ideas that must be shaped to adhere to popular culture genres.

This panel explores the intersections of media, religion and culture through a series of international case studies, with particular emphasis upon recent iterations of popular culture that are religiously inflected. Reality television (and its concomitant social media) has become a welcome venue for presenting religious themes, and here we examine the Protestant and Amish traditions. In the first case, *Preachers of LA* glamorizes the “good life” and accepts prosperity as the obvious outcome to a life of faith—a message well suited to traditional media; for the Amish, boundaries between media and religion are negotiated with complex results for practitioners. *A Match Made in Heaven* employs the genre of secular documentary (aka reality) in order to present their secret for a “good life”—a good matchmaker. Looking more deeply into social media, Islam is explored through the lens of YouTube with the goal of understanding the conflict between entertainment and scripture in creating the religious self. While traditionally religion has evoked images of abstinence and asceticism, in a media environment, religion suggests there is entree to the “good life,” an ideology that marries well with media mandates that promote happiness, well-being and prosperity.

Nabil Echchaibi

University of Colorado Boulder

Post-Islamist Sounds: Nasheed and Qur'anic Recitation on YouTube and the Modern Muslim Self

In 2013, the London-based record label company, *Awakening* launched a YouTube singing contest inviting Muslims around the world to upload their videos for a chance to become an “Awakening Star”. Video entries came from Qur’anic reciters and amateur singers performing covers of popular nasheed (religious chants) songs by Awakening’s biggest artists. In the last decade pious Muslims have increasingly turned to secular symbols of consumer culture to refashion a modern religious identity. New markets and spaces for ‘halal’ (religiously lawful) entertainment are booming across Muslim majority countries and in Western cities across Europe and North America. This paper explores the complex negotiation of the boundaries of scriptural and popular Islam in emerging media spaces. Specifically, I look at the work of Awakening Records and YouTube and their impact on the cultivation of new entertainment tastes based on a reconfiguration of the role and place of scripture in the construction of the modern Islamic self.

Mara Einstein

Queens College, CUNY

Preachers of LA: Celebrity, Reality and Religion

Religion has awakened in the rise of reality TV. First, glimpses of faith practices were in evidence on programs like *Dog the Bounty Hunter*, where brawny bail bondsmen would pray before catching the con. Later, limited run religious-themed programs appeared: *God or the Girl* tracked four men deciding whether to enter the priesthood, and *Amish in the City* presented an Amish version of MTV’s *Real World*.

Now, *Preachers of LA* is the first reality show based on the lives of religious leaders. It claims to show the “human side” of six high-profile, controversial preachers as they go about their work in the celebrity capital of the world. This paper will use a combination of content analysis, interviews with show producers and publicists as well as online ethnography to examine religion and celebrity within the context of reality TV.

Stewart Hoover

University of Colorado Boulder

The Amish in the Media Panopticon: Lessons for the Rest of Us

America has long been fascinated by the Amish community. A culture that exists physically within the broader mainstream and yet negotiate a place at its edge, the Amish are intriguing also for the way that they have drawn media boundaries. They have strict rules on media use, and have strictly limited media access. They thus also violate the tacit social contract surrounding media absorption and media exposure, walling themselves off from the “media rituals” (to use Couldry’s formulation) that define cultural and social value and participation today. They seem to have a kind of allure for the media panopticon, with at least three current Amish-themed reality shows on the air. This paper will use the Amish case to explore the limits and boundaries of mediated cultures and lived cultures in contemporary life, drawing lessons about the evolving nature of public culture.

Michele Rosenthal

University of Haifa

Ultra-Orthodox on TV and Film: A Match Made in Heaven

Over the last few years, the *Haredi* (ultra-orthodox) community in Israel has been the focus of a number of Israeli films – *Fill the Void*; *My Father, My Lord*; *The Wanderer*, *Ushpizin*. While *Haredim* generally refrain from secular media consumption, their lifestyle provides a dramatic backdrop for a secular examination of diverse existential and social issues from theodicy to child loss. Voyeurism of the other is the not-so-sublimated motif, even when the characters are not actors, but young *Haredim* looking for their life partner through dates arranged by a matchmaker as is the case in the recent television documentary series (notably not defined as reality TV) “Match Made in Heaven.” Based on a critical analysis of these texts, the paper probes these romanticized and romantic representations of *Haredim* in the broader cultural and political context in Israel, where secular/Haredi conflict is always bubbling beneath the surface, threatening to erupt in the latest political or media scandal.

Religion and the Media in China

Samuel Lengen

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany

Below the Threshold: Religions and the Internet in the Contemporary PRC Beyond a Binary Framework of Oppression and Resistance

Studies of religion tend on the one hand to analyze the ways in which religious policy suppresses certain forms of religious practice and on the other hand to describe religious lives in terms of their resistance to the government’s attempts to regulate religion. This conceptual binary is also present in studies of the Internet. Both scholarly works and news media accounts tend to focus their accounts of the Internet in China on repression through censorship and surveillance as well as resistance, relating the use of online resources to civil society and activism. However, the binary of resistance and oppression structuring these arguments is insufficient as an analytical framework. How, then, can we think about the relation between the Internet and Religion in the PRC in a way that moves beyond a binary of resistance and oppression? The exploration of this question is based on a discussion of contributions to the study of religion and of the Internet in the PRC, which will draw on theoretical arguments brought forward in science and technology studies as well as in explorations of power and subject formation after Foucault.

Giovanna Puppin**Lecturer in International Promotional Cultures, Middlesex University, UK***Unexpected Encounters: When Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism Meet Chinese Advertising*

This paper aims at filling an existing gap in Chinese Studies, Media Studies and Religious Studies by investigating a relatively new phenomenon: the use of religious elements in contemporary Chinese advertising.

Commercial advertising started to be criticized after the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and was labelled "the Bible of capitalism" during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It was only thanks to the reform and opening up policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 if the phenomenon was welcomed again to the Chinese soil.

In this paper I will focus on elements related to Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, by drawing on examples from a variety of brands, products and campaigns, which will be analysed using semiotics. Some of the questions I will address include the following: why brands and products choose to use religious elements in their advertising campaigns? Is there a product category that is more easily associated with a certain religion rather than another? How do these religious signs relate to the wider debate on the use of "Chinese elements" in advertising?

Yam Chi-Keung**Research Associate and Assistant Professor, The Chinese University of Hong Kong***The Curious Case of Discovering Noah's Ark in Hong Kong*

In late 2009, the Hong-Kong-based organisation Media Evangelism publicly announced that they had discovered the remains of Noah's Ark somewhere in the mountainous area in Turkey. This claim immediately met with divergent responses ranging from frantic excitement to sceptical criticism. Regardless of harsh disapprovals from some sectors within the local Christian community, the announcement was followed a few months later by the cinema release of the organisation's 'documentary-styled' film, *Days of Noah II*. The film put the organisation's claim of discovery into material form and, more importantly, was taken as an opportunity to preach their particular interpretation of the Christian gospel.

As the number (II) in the film title indicates, this is not the first time that the same organisation had made similar claim. This paper traces the pre-history of Hong Kong evangelistic film and its later development since the turn of the century. Also, using the controversy around *Days of Noah II* as the focus of analysis, I demonstrate how these media products are indicative of the theological outlook and ideological characteristics of the mainstream of contemporary Chinese Protestants both in Hong Kong and overseas.

Stefania Travagnin**Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia, University of Groningen, Netherlands***Dharma in Motion Pictures: Hermeneutics of Animation in Contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism*

This study wants to assess why and how Buddhist organizations use the modern 'expedient' of moving pictures for self-promotion, and will demonstrate that the making of Buddhist films and documentaries can be regarded as a modern form of Buddhist practice that aims to accumulate merits and gain rewards. This paper takes contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhist groups as case studies, and adopts the DVD-documentaries and cartoons that have been produced recently as main sources. Particularly, I will focus on the biographical cartoon of the monk Yinshun (1906-2005) and the other documentaries produced in commemoration of this figure, and show how media facilitated the enshrinement of Yinshun as the founder of the new Buddhism in Taiwan.

This study addresses a number of issues such as the transformation of 'modalities of faith', the 'reinvention of sacred iconography', the 'social discourse of Buddhist visual arts', the 'tension between Dharma history and Dharma plot'.

“Cleansing Prayer - 35 Meter Range, 6% Mana, Instant, Removes 1 Curse, Disease, or Poison” – the Role of Religion in Digital Games

Digital games increasingly come to the attention of religious studies. Many games “play” with religious symbols or construct symbolic universes. The market for digital games is a global market. For instance, cultural “eastern”, Asian artefacts are transported to a global audience via digital games while “western” philosophy and religion provides the background for the morals of many commercial games. Most of the previous analysis focused on game-immanent religious narratives which can be observed in most famous games and mirrors primarily the work of the game-designers. Nevertheless, the questions remain: Do these narratives have any effect on the gamers? Are religious elements just serving the narrative background like other historical figures? Or are religious actions like a spell or praying just a bit more spectacular than just murmuring words? While it is certainly worthwhile to try to gain a deeper understanding of the games and their narratives, we propose a different approach. The dominant and truly global aspects of digital games lie elsewhere. Players of digital games transmit their gaming experiences globally and transnationally in so called “user generated content” on video broadcasting sites like YouTube, or they share opinions and cultural understandings of their gaming experiences within the game itself (as in MMO’s). This is a huge pool of research data just waiting to be approached. This means extending the research and analysis from the games and their possible religious content only to also include the recipients’ perspective, i.e. the discourse on transformations of religious content by the people who perform this very discourse.

“Global Religion” is manifest in this discourse in many forms. This panel highlights the MMORPG “RIFT” and moral and ethical choices gamers face in the game. These choices often are religiously connotated and interpreted by the players. Online discussions, video-broadcasts and in-game action bear witness to this. The panel analyses possible shifts of these religious interpretations of moral and ethical choices by players of different cultural backgrounds. We propose that there is a discussion about the “religious” in contemporary globalized modernity in computer-game-culture and that our examples show the connections between religion, media and the global market in global popular culture.

The suggested panel will deal with three different geographical areas and will compare differences and similarities in their respective approach based on different case studies involving the MMORPG “RIFT”. After a theoretical and methodological introduction to researching gamer-generated content, three different case studies will be presented, including a short description of the game, the cultural areas and their geographical, economical and religious discourse.

Michael Waltemathe
University of Bochum, Germany
RIFT and ‘Western’ Gamers

The MMORPG “RIFT” is played all over the globe. Online-discussion boards pertaining this particular game quite regularly deal with the question of Religion. Players of “RIFT” have to chose affiliations to certain groups, clans, races. These groups favor certain religious practices and religious views. These choices naturally are discussed between players. Preliminary research into online-discussions concerning religion in “RIFT” show, that there is a difference in US-based discussion-boards and German discussion-boards. This difference shows itself especially in the role of the religious “nones”, the non-believers and atheists. The paper will give an analysis on the difference between the two exemplary discussions. The connection between the discourse on religion in discussion-boards and the choices players make in-game will also be discussed. This approach will try to correlate the ethical and moral choices in-game and the religious attitude of the players.

Xenia Zeiler
University of Bremen
RIFT and South Asian Gamers

Digital gaming is increasingly popular also in South Asia and especially in India’s megacities. Globally well received games usually also do well in India, but it needs verification whether this region’s gaming culture still differs from the established “western” (European and U.S.-American) and East Asian markets and whether we see a specific economical and religious discourse. What are the current debates in South Asia on digital gaming and religious issues, such as moral and ethical choice-making, and (how) do they

take place in gamer-generated content? This paper exemplarily contextualizes the MMORPG “RIFT”. It attempts to analyse the specifics within the cultural understandings of certain ethical issues within the game by gamers from South Asia. How is the game’s narrative received in South Asian contexts? But more importantly, how are gaming experiences concerning moral choices debated among gamers in gamer-generated content?

Kerstin Radde-Antweiler

University of Bremen, Germany

RIFT and Southeast Asian Gamers

In 2012 the game company Trion Worlds locally expand their success with the fantasy MMORPG RIFT even further and released an exclusive contract signed with Asiasoft for publication in the following six countries of Southeast Asia: Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. This was all the more surprising since usually western games in the local market contain other game-narratives like martial arts. The interesting question now arises if the reception processes differ from ‘western’ gamers. Or are there any particular game or game narrative elements, which are received differently? Or to ask more critically: do these game narratives play a role at all? The paper will therefore analyze the behavior and actions by Philippine gamers on the basis of concrete case studies and correlate them to the religious identity construction by the players.

Vili Costescu and Sam Neves

Ludoliteracy and Religion: Community Communication within Faith Groups using Mobile Gaming

Coined by Jose P. Zagal in 2010, the term ‘ludoliteracy’ as the definition of game literacy encapsulates three major areas of games studies: a) the ability to play games; b) the ability to understand meanings with respect to games; and 3) the ability to make games. Although Zagal’s work is one-of-a-kind, scholars researching the game phenomenon are embracing the term and use it in their work: Bournemouth University’s Christos Gatzidis or Drew Davidson of Carnegie Mellon University. Ludoliteracy is being researched in two major gaming areas: entertainment and education. However, ludoliteracy and religion never intersected each other before.

From 1440 when Johannes Gutenberg mastered the printing press giving humankind the first printed Bible, the religious message was present on all media platforms, most recently on social media. Although all the analog and digital media platforms generously made space for the spiritual message preached by all faith groups on the planet, gaming and religion seem to stay away from each other.

Heroes The Game is the first mobile game of its kind, and the project I intend to present at the International Society for Media, Religion and Culture. Launched in October 2013, Heroes The Game ‘will bring back some of the forgotten Heroes of the old’, aiming to connect the new generation with the Bible.¹ Build around a quiz type of a game Heroes The Game includes a number of modern features, called ‘effects’ that make the game more entertaining. The competing element is initiated and maintained by The Game Centre, which displays the ranking of all players.

22 weeks after its release 15190 players in 115 countries are playing Heroes The Game. The average player is spending between 3 and 10 minutes for each session, which makes a total of over 10000 hours of interaction between the user and the Bible Heroes.

As part of the small team that designed, developed and produced Heroes The Game, I believe that the paper I will present could open a new chapter in the cross-cultural interaction of religion and the mobile gaming arena.

Film and religion: studying audiences and meaning making

Tomas Axelson

ThD, Assistant Professor Religious Studies, School of Humanities & Media, Högskolan Dalarna University, Sweden

Reflexive viewers, emotional comprehension and moral meaning making: Examples from an audience study in contemporary Sweden

The paper proposes a more complex analysis of the “passionate viewer,” one that combines a narratological approach to fiction film with an investigation of the spectator’s extra-diegetic system of beliefs and convictions. With examples from an audience study and in-depth interviews conducted with adult viewers in Sweden it will be argued that film habits are developing into a more private practice where poignant experiences of narrative fiction (*Avatar*, *Amelie from Montmartre*, *Apocalypse Now*) are dealt with in an individualized manner rather than as a shared social practice. Theories about cinematic emotional responses will support conclusions about audiovisual fiction narration as an important cultural asset for private meaning making, combining affect and cognition, giving space for emotional evaluation and spiritual reflection facilitating reflexivity and the creation of personal moral world views.

Minja Blom

Faculty of Theology, Study of Religions, University of Helsinki

Meaning making through television vampire fandom

Television vampire shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *True Blood* (2008-) and *Vampire Diaries* (2009-) have gathered numerous devoted fans. Many fan forum threads are dedicated to expressing how the shows have changed or saved the lives of fans. Fans have used the shows and fandom as a part of their efforts to make life meaningful. Their values, experiences and current life situations can be seen as a background from which the shows are understood. My paper concentrates on fan meaning making as it is expressed in three major themes I have found in the fan messages: 1. Fans have experienced hope and solace in live crisis. 2. Fan communities have provided support and a sense of belonging. 3. Fans have used the heroes as models to follow in their everyday lives.

Nina Maskulin

Faculty of Arts, Study of Religions, University of Helsinki

Qualitative attitude research method in film reception

Popular film utilises religion as an access point to norms and values. The conceptions of time construct the core narrative in institutional religions as well as in non-institutional forms. The popular apocalyptic film genre with the narrative dimensions of violence and crisis create an imaginary locus where the values and norms are tested in social interaction.

In this paper I describe the qualitative attitude research method in the study of film reception and preliminary findings in the interviews among teenagers. The micro level analysis of film reception of end-of-the-world narratives among teenagers focuses on the interaction of religious narrative and attitude formation. The macro level analysis of mediated environment and the popularity of end-of-the-world narratives enlighten the complex interrelation of religion, young audiences and religion. This will be scrutinized in the frame of religious socialization and Erving Goffman’s frame analysis.

Heikki Pesonen

Faculty of Theology, Study of Religions, University of Helsinki

Ecoapocalyptic themes in popular movies and their reception

The Western environmental awakening of the 1960s brought also ecological threats to the end-of-days movies. Depending on the current topics of environmental debate the apocalypse in these films has been associated with, for example, overpopulation, nuclear holocaust, and global warming. In this paper I shall examine, first, the ways in which ecoapocalyptic movies comment Western environmental debate and its changes. Second, I shall look at how the ends of the world and dystopias depicted in these films are connected to the imagery of the apocalyptic myth. And lastly, I shall examine the reception of these movies by analyzing the Internet Movie Database message boards and user reviews. I shall particularly focus on the discussions about the movies that depict the apocalyptic consequences of human made environmental disasters. These movies include, for example, *12 monkeys* (1995), *Waterworld* (1995), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), and *The Happening* (2008).

Religion and new Media

Samira Rajabi

University of Colorado at Boulder

Powerful Pinning: Gender, faith and meaning making on Pinterest

This paper will examine how use of the website Pinterest allows users to take images from other sources, or their own, and repurpose them allowing for new meanings and contexts of understandings to emerge. The analysis will focus on the ritual aspects of Pinterest use and the way users become devoted to the act of pinning as well as the content of their pins. Specifically this paper will examine the religiosity of Pinterest use both in the context of how religious symbols are being “pinned,” but more substantially the way that Pinterest use itself mimics the ritual devotion of religion. Pinterest becomes an important and interesting site for mediation and re-mediation of original and recycled content. Through the act of sharing new communities and connections emerge online. Among these communities we then see new forms of interactions take place. Often seemingly trivial “pins” open up spaces for community formations that transcend physical boundaries. Additionally this paper will explore how Pinterest, is a continuation of another ritual exercise, that of Scrapbooking, and how this fairly gendered practice has powerful meaning making potentials of its own. Thus, this examination must understand how convergence has taken a mostly solitary practice that is deeply time consuming and ritualized and shifted it to a communal practice of sharing beyond involvement with those who can come into proximal contact with projects. Finally, this paper will examine the way power dynamics shift. Who is able to share what is “pinned?” Since not only the creators of pins can share them we see shifting roles of authority and often co-optation, remediation, and re-making of ideas, objects and images.

Johan Roeland

VU University Amsterdam

New media and the end of a religious media culture: The anti-technology of Dutch conservative Calvinism

Conservative religious movements are often characterized by an anti-technological stance towards new media technologies. Hence they often choose a strategy of avoidance, or only allow limited use of new media in line with religious boundaries and values.

In my presentation, I will explore the ethical stances towards new media of the so-called ‘Dutch Biblebelt’: a conservative Calvinist community of an estimated 200.000 people. In many respects, these Calvinists resemble the Orthodox Jews studied by Heidi Campbell, both in their mostly negative valuation of new media and in their strategies of rejection and/or regulated use. As it is the case with other conservative communities, the ethical stances towards new media by this Calvinist community is strongly informed by a particular understanding of new media: new media are seen as providing access to secular values and ‘sinful’ phenomena such as porn, violence and blasphemy. There is, however, another concern about new media: that they will abolish the particular religious media culture that is fostered by conservative Calvinism. This media culture entails a particular idea of agency (which is believed to be lost when people are surrounded by compelling media technologies such as smartphones and tablets), the trained ability of attentive and close reading (as opposed to the hyperreading of new media cultures), the meaningful spending of leisure time (as opposed to entertainment), and the assumed ‘unmediated’ everyday interactions within families (as opposed to the ‘together alone’ interactions that are believed to cohere with new media technologies).

In my presentation, I will explain that Dutch Calvinist anti-technology is not only driven by a fear of the secular contents of new media, but also by a distrust of the ‘sensory forms’ (Birgit Meyer) of new media and their assumed efficacies on human agency. Calvinist anti-technology is thus a way of conserving a particular religious culture that is strongly defined by and ideology of purification (Webb Keane), that is, a culture deprived of sensory forms that are believed to undermine human agency.

Venetia Robertson

University of Sydney, Australia

The Lurkers at the Threshold: Hybrid Identities and Liminal Space in the Online Other-than-Human Community

For decades now the Internet has functioned as a hub for ‘popular occulture,’ that is, the merging of magic, mysticism, and the media. Cyberspace is, therefore, an ideal environment for the development of communities of individuals claiming supernatural, ‘other-than-human’ identities, for example, an elf identity or a wolf identity, somewhat inconveniently housed in an anthropomorphic body. The Internet provides ever-increasing modes of imaginative and interactive self-construction particularly attractive to individuals who feel that their identities are marginalized in their offline social worlds. This is readily evidenced in the online development of other-than-human identity groups, such as the Therianthropology, Otherkin, and Vampire movements. Shaped by the medium in question, the spiritual ideologies fostered in such ontological communities reflect the fast-paced, innovative, creative, and collaborative aspects of web 2.0.

This paper draws on Homi Bhabha’s notion of third space and hybrid identities to investigate the way in which these part-human, part-other ontologies are conceived. Stewart Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi’s adaptation of Bhabha’s theory with regard to the internet as a third space, as an in-between zone, neither public nor private, physical nor immaterial, will also be used to demonstrate the sympathy between this liminal medium and similarly interstitial identities. It shall be argued that the hybrid or liminal has been configured in this case to be a sacred state, beyond the bounds of the mundane, physical, intelligible world.

The way in which the internet provides dynamic platforms for the development of identity (profiles that can be constantly updated, forums for discussion and debate, blogs for logging the process of self-discovery) supports and even encourages a processual understanding of the other-than-human self. This is a self that is never entirely other nor human, but both wavering and growing between the two, existing, as Victor Turner said, as ‘liminal personae’ or ‘threshold people’.

Miriam Diez Bosch and Josep Lluís Micó Sanz

Faculty on Communication, University Ramon Llull

Cyberethics and Religion. Synergies and reciprocal spaces

The religious attitude towards the digital age could be described as apocalyptic or integrated. New media cause real excitement or strong alarm among individuals, religious communities and faithful groups. Apart from describing the prejudices that media have towards the religious factor (considered troubling or boring) we’d like to highlight here the fears and expectations from religious practitioners towards Internet as a place of freedom or control.

This paper aims to explain the public relations strategy used from different religious communities (monotheism) and the visibility that religion has in digital media. In a world where possession is no longer a synonym for powerful, but connection is, religious institutions need to show themselves in the public life as hubs of multiple connections (cyberchurches, virtual Umma or the Jewish Digital Diaspora are such clusters). The role of media technologies for new forms of religious life and practice is particularly interesting in monotheism communities where the sacredness of the Book is modified, specially by Apps that allow to read Holy Scriptures in places not sacred at all. A special section will deal with Judaism and online Religion, focusing on the idea of the Jewish identity in the Net. Christianity will be also observed, specially the interactive e-vangelizers or the phenomenon of Christian Mom Bloggers and finally we will look at the Digital Islam, the virtual Umma as an example in the Muslim sphere.

We have a special interest in Cyberethics and its impact into Abrahamic Religions. Why religious users give data freely and share their inner live will be also analysed as well which values could be defined in this context where digital servitudes are growing. Monotheism resisting to ITC will also be taken into account, as well as the digital switch-off and the persistence of the religious element as a relationship perennial item even if technology will eventually disappear one day.