



## **Approaches to the Internet. The Humanities in Digital Networks**

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Today the Internet is part of a multiplicity of discourses arising from its many different potential uses: as a new infrastructure, as an independent and/or supplementary news medium, as a new kind of marketplace and centerless commercial network, as a medium for private and quasi-private communication between two or more individuals (email/gossip/chat), as a meeting place for sub-cultures with common interests, as an archive of knowledge, as an educational medium, as a dynamic resource for research, as an entertainment medium (net games, cyber fiction), and as a paradigmatic technology. By these means the net makes its mark on our understanding of the relationship between the local and the global. Political power can be exercised and democratic processes developed with the mere intervention of a modem. The need for participation and community might be satisfied equally as well in electronically mediated transmission as in personal conversation and physical presence-Indeed, perhaps better?

At the conference we will focus on the importance of the Internet in public communication, and we will discuss how it is at all possible to understand meanings and functions tied to the Internet in modern society.

On the one hand, the following questions will be discussed: What is the importance of the Internet for the structures of society today-for the relationship between the citizen, the experts, the politicians and public officials, and the different branches of the national and international public spheres. What role does the Internet play in respect to the other-printed and electronic-media? And what effect, if any, do the existing media have on the new media?

On a reflexive level, some other kinds of questions arise concerning the actual approach to examining and understanding the net and digital space. To what extent are we bound by the categorizations of modern society when we speak of the net as a "new, better, and more effective" possibility for "supporting" communication and action? What happens if we let go of these well-known categorizations and instead ask which transformational processes result from using the Internet. One might ask, for example, how the increasing degree of interaction in the simulated worlds of the Internet change our experience of what is real. In short, one should not just ask what the net can do for us, but also what it can do to us. This question may be just as relevant in respect to the behavioral patterns of social groups-for instance, chat groups-or in respect to predominant conceptions of political possibilities. At this reflexive level it becomes meaningful to ask: How can the use of the net transform our daily lives and socio-cultural self-conceptions, and how do we find this out?