

Title of proposed symposium: The 'Future of Serendipity' in a Changing World

Summary (150 words):

Serendipity in research is associated with the now classic experience of looking for a book on a library shelf, and finding another, even more valuable, book. However, our world is increasingly technical – traditional approaches to humanities research must integrate with the tools of scientific methodology and information technology. Nonetheless, there is a continuing need for insight and creativity, even in a world of controlled experiments and algorithms, and people continue to make unexpected and unpredictable discoveries. How does serendipity, a concept born in the humanities, clarify and contextualize the current push toward 'innovation'? How do humanities researchers today experience serendipity? What is the nature of the 'unsought finding'? How can we ensure future opportunities for serendipity? What technologies enable valuable, yet unpredictable, discoveries? This Symposium presses upon the boundaries between disciplines to illustrate how research in all fields will—and should—continue to be a *human* experience above all.

5 Keywords: Serendipity; Innovation; Digital Worlds; Research Technologies; Applied Philosophy

Paper 1

Author(s) name(s): Sylvie Catellin

Affiliation(s): University of Versailles Saint-Quentin – University Paris-Saclay, Cultural and International Studies Institute

Title:

Sérendipité: Entre sciences et humanités, un concept au cœur de la créativité / Serendipity: Between science and humanities, a concept at the heart of creativity

Abstract (100 words):

Venu de la littérature, le mot « sérendipité » a été repris par les scientifiques au 20e siècle. L'enquête sur le long développement historique de sa signification révèle qu'il désigne un processus créatif au cœur de la découverte : l'art de prêter attention à l'inattendu et d'en imaginer une interprétation pertinente. Après avoir permis aux chercheurs de dire l'importance de la liberté et de l'intuition, en réaction aux risques de déshumanisation des pratiques scientifiques, le mot prend aujourd'hui la valeur d'un concept, essentiel pour dire l'importance de la subjectivité dans la découverte, et pour défendre une conception humaniste du savoir.

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Born in literature, the word "serendipity" has been adopted by scientists in the 20th century. An inquiry concerning the long historical development of its meaning reveals that it designates a creative process at the heart of discovery: the art of paying attention to the unexpected and imagining a relevant interpretation. After having allowed researchers to say the importance of freedom and intuition, in response to the risks of dehumanization of scientific practices, the word now takes on the value of a concept, essential to say the importance of subjectivity in discovery, and to defend a humanistic conception of knowledge.

Paper 2**Author(s) name(s):** Emanuele Bardone**Affiliation(s):** University of Tartu**Title:**

Inquiry, chance events, and abduction

Abstract (100 words):

While models of inquiry - inspired by the work of Peirce on abduction - have stressed that inquiries are initiated by a surprising fact, very little attention has been devoted to how chance events can be integrated in the creation or selection of a hypothesis. I will argue that chance events initiate and punctuate the search for what is known as the major premise in the abductive syllogism. This will help me introduce the idea that sagacity can be viewed as an abductive “skill” enabling the inquirer to handle the chance elements in connection with the more deliberative ones.

Paper 3**Author(s) name(s):** Samantha Copeland**Affiliation(s):** Norwegian University of Life Sciences**Title:**

Innovation as serendipity: Distinguishing between novelty and progress

Abstract (100 words):

Serendipity is often praised as a source of innovation. At the level of the individual, both insight and strategic thinking are involved in serendipity: for instance, when observers project the potential value of something unexpected and decide to follow it up. But at the community level, the establishment of networks, effective communication and the equal distribution of agency work together to ensure that potentially valuable observations become valuable discoveries. I explore the implications of these social aspects of serendipity for the epistemology and ethics of innovation, and to think through the differences between mere novelty and real progress.

Paper 4**Author(s) name(s):** Selene Arfini**Affiliation(s):** University of Chieti and Pescara**Title:**

The risks of serendipitous browsing: The exploitation of ignorance in social media

Abstract (100 words):

In social networks serendipitous information encounters often happen, as confirmed by both social sciences and information studies. In information studies, serendipity is defined as the surprising (“unexpected”, “unforeseen”, “unlookedfor”) finding of some interesting or useful data. Thus, serendipity is naturally connected with the ignorance of the person experiencing it. I claim that, in social networks, people serendipitously encounter information because the structure of online networks invites users to exploit their lack of data without contributing to enhance their knowledge. Specifically, I claim that this may decrease one form of ignorance – as lack of information – while increasing another – ignorance as misinformation.

Paper 5**Author(s) name(s):** Sabrina Sauer**Affiliation(s):** VU University Amsterdam**Title:**

Serendipitous search practices of media researchers: Developing techniques to elicit ‘the unforeseen’

Abstract (100 words):

This paper focuses on the relation between serendipity, creativity and search. It presents insights into the role of serendipitous search for media researchers’ unearthing of research ideas and insights. Media researchers increasingly rely on digital access to audiovisual archived material to collect data. This stipulates that to retrieve relevant material, researchers require an in-depth understanding of digital search. Using qualitative (focus group and interview) data, this paper draws conclusions about how media researchers experience and elicit serendipitous search, as a form of craft. These conclusions aid the development of new search algorithms that embrace serendipitous search as a source of innovation.