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The shifting materialities of Mundania

How the connected home is reimagined during times of crisis

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The Shifting Materialities of Mundania

-How the connected home is reimagined during times of crisis

SIEF2021 15th Congress: Helsinki, Finland 19-24 June 2021

Theme: Breaking the rules? Power, participation, transgression

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The connected home got new meanings during the COVID-19 pandemic. By using the theoretical construct Mundania, an imagined realm based on the process of mundanisation, I will discuss the shifting materialities of everyday life and how domestic worlds were reimagined during times of crisis.

The everyday realm Mundania is generated through the process of mundanisation. When new technologies are introduced, they can appear as utterly fascinating, or they can be experienced as awkward, even disquieting. If successful however, they soon disappear in the muddle of everyday life.

Mundanisation addresses how an imaginary layer between overwhelming, even ominous complexity and commonplace everyday life is engendered when technologies are habitually used. The concept moves beyond understandings of technologies as something that become domesticated. It is not about something wild becoming tamed and domesticated or converted step-by-step into controlled parts of everyday life. Instead it captures how complex arrangements of technologies and human organisation maintain its incomprehensible unmanageability while still being transmuted into the ordinary, the mundane, the commonplace in people's everyday lives. There is a tension between supposed technological smartness and smooth interfaces with happy colours at the prominent foreground and the uncanny lurking beneath and beyond interfaces and screens, in the background noise of speakers and headphones.

During the isolation and quarantine restrictions during the pandemic, digital media were integrated in people's lives in unprecedented ways. By using the Mundania-concept I will take domestic everyday life as point of departure to discuss the emergence of practices evoked by the pandemic, but also the meaning of rule-breaking and how mundanisation can be challenged. The presentation is based on my work mainly in Sweden within the research project "Connected Homes and Distant Infrastructures". I will also discuss how I use artistic practice in combination with ethnographic cultural analysis.