

Meta-Replies

Manfred Broy

A Brief Final Reflection on the Reply of Luciano Floridi to My Reply

In fact, I do not have a deep disagreement with Luciano Floridi. In fact, I agree to most what he writes in his reply. However, perhaps there are some aspects which have been overlooked and left out so far and which deserve some mentioning in the context of what Luciano Floridi is arguing about. I believe that it is important to understand the history of the creation of the digital.

Of course, in the early days, both Zuse and Turing, were involved in the Second World War using pioneering inventions in the field of digital technology in connection with military motivations and applications. This applied also to the next steps, especially in the US, where computers were further developed. However, this was just the beginning. Only two decades later computing machinery arrived at a higher level of maturity such that a quite different group of people from California were more and more fascinated. There were activities such as the whole earth network project and also the home-brew computer club who developed ideas of digital technology to achieve a higher degree of personal freedom in an emerging digital utopia. Those early ideas influenced and were influenced by the creation of the internet and as well as the ideas of personal computing and personal computers. These activities were motivated by some counter culture as a step into cyber culture. The collaboration between San Francisco's flower power movement with these ideas lead to the technological hub of Silicon Valley, and Silicon Valley generated the ideas of the digital age. With the disappointment of many of the early pioneers after the total commercialization of the digital technology and their use for military purposes, it became obvious that in quick movements the idealistic ideas of the pioneers were completely overwhelmed by commercialization by the hyper scalars. As Bruno Latour stated »Change

the instruments and you will change the entire social theory that goes with them.«¹

This explains to some extent what happened with the digital transformation. Digital technology is such a powerful tool and brings in so many inventions and innovations, both for business and for politics. This is one reason, why it is so difficult to define a human project. However, we should not forget that – at least – some of the sources of the visions and ideas of the digital age came out of thoughts which are not so far from ideas of a human project. However, the hippies of the late 60s lost their fight for and their faith into digital utopianism by observing the fast turnaround from counter culture to cyber culture.

¹ B. Latour: »Tarde's idea of quantification«, in: M. Candea (ed), *The Social after Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, London 2016, 145–162, 153.