

Critical Internet Histories and the Charting of Postdigital Cosmopolitanism: Historiography and the Junctures of Platformization

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Abstract *This chapter contains a variety of methodological arguments relating to the topic of internet histories and how they may be rethought in light of platformization and cosmopolitanism. Part 1 provides an overview of some leading trends within internet histories. It is ultimately argued that Critical Internet Studies could provide a basis for a more unifying approach to internet histories in what would be a new Critical Internet Histories that also centres questions of power relations. Part 2 examines platformization as a theoretical (but also very real) concept and argues that the internet should be seen as a patchwork of (often competing) platforms, in what may be viewed as a (partial) closing of the internet. Platformization has also resulted in the postdigital transformation of the lifeworld and, therefore, platformization has also radically changed the material context of internet histories. Part 3 brings together the topics of globalization, cosmopolitanism and platform history (as a subfield of internet histories). It is here argued that platformization also represents a spatialization of the internet via processes of bounding/bordering, while platformization also remains interconnected with the material postdigital processes of globalization. Platformization, as a type of digital globalization, structurally enables postdigital cosmopolitanism – if only on terms created by the platforms themselves – in a type of platform cosmopolitanism. This chapter ultimately argues for an internet history inspired by methodological approaches to the history of globalization, which would view platform history – as a sub-field of internet histories – as an orientation that engages with the critical junctures of platformization; moments and spaces in which platforms are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued. This would also be a type of internet historical writing examining the shifting contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanism.*

Introduction

The phrase “to understand the present, you need to understand the past” is a truism. Certainly, an informed and critical appraisal of the events that have led to the present remains central to many academic strands and disciplines. This is also true

for both Internet Studies and Intercultural Communication; interdisciplinary fields that have borrowed methodologically from a variety of areas. This chapter sets out the wide recent landscape of internet histories and brings the historiographical-methodological discussion at the centre of internet histories together with areas such as Critical Internet Studies, platformization and the interdisciplinary discussion surrounding cosmopolitanism. The chapter ultimately argues for an approach to internet history inspired by methodological approaches to the history of globalization. This would view internet histories as centring on the *critical junctures of platformization*; moments and spaces in which platforms are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued. This would also be a type of internet historical writing examining the *shifting contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanism*, which takes place on platforms and on the platforms' terms.

1. Internet Histories: An Overview of Some Leading Trends

While internet history, as a form of historiography, is a relatively new phenomenon, it has been marked by a vigorous methodological discussion, and has been heavily influenced by developments within wider Media History and Cultural Studies. Indeed, the very notion of what the internet itself may constitute and how it should be defined and perceived, has remained a central and still very relevant topic of discussion (Goggin & McLelland, 2017: 4; and Shah, 2017: 50); internet theory and understanding how to undertake internet history remain interwoven. Some of the leading trends within Anglophone and German-language internet history will now be discussed, albeit necessarily in a non-exhaustive manner that centres on specific examples.

Wider Contextual-Materialist Internet Histories

The establishment of what actually constitutes the material and temporal context has remained a central question in internet histories. In relation to the then dominant type of U.S.-centred internet historical narrative, Rosenzweig (1998: 1530–1531) emphasizes the wider cultural and intellectual context and the variety of actors involved in the internet's construction, requiring thus, he believes, the adoption of a variety of perspectives; biographical, bureaucratic, ideological, and social. Krämer (2022: 10), on the other hand, extends the temporal context even further in her description of the possibilities of what she calls a cultural history of digitalization. She situates this as not necessarily intertwined with computer technologies, but as also evident in the early coding and the pre-computer mathematical combinations and re-combinations of early modern and 19th century figures, such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Ada Lovelace (Krämer, 2022: 12–16).

Most historiographical contextual widening does not, however, look to completely transform our perception of central internet-based concepts in order to gain valuable extended contextual insights. Haigh et al. (2015: 144) emphasize that the term “internet” has evolved well beyond the hardware and software of the network itself and incorporates “the mind-bogglingly diverse variety of human activities conducted over it.” Intensive and holistic historical study of some of these human activities means extending the perspective to the earlier technologies that directly preceded them (Haigh et al., 2015: 149–159). Thus, a study of the streaming giant Netflix would incorporate the history, for example, of mail order video libraries, cable television and the DVD, while a history of Wikipedia could also investigate the development of encyclopaedias since the 1700s.

A number of authors (e.g. Ning, 2022; Driscoll, 2022) have recently engaged with the “prehistory” of social media, understood as the wider history of computer social networking; here particularly the bulletin board system in the United States which utilized telephone lines to create an early infrastructure of networked social computing. Prior to the wider commercialization and opening up of the internet, a number of localized small-scale systems were hosted throughout the U.S. and Canada and “the fundamental structure of the modern internet was forged on a dial-up BBS”, according to Driscoll (2022: 2). Such methodologies retain similarities to the media archaeology¹ approach within media history which emphasizes the importance of materiality, and the “material ecologies of media objects, systems and processes” (Goddard, 2015: 1762). A media archaeological approach to the internet incorporates technical components but also “the economic, social and environmental relations that both sustain the internet and are generated by it” (Goddard, 2015: 1764).

Text-Oriented Internet Histories

Another orientation within internet histories sees the internet and especially the web as a vast sea of text requiring bounding, archiving and interpretation. Parikka (2011: 54) actually creates a division within wider media history between contextual materialists and those looking to interpret text, essentially seeing two dominant camps: “The German variant of hardcore/-ware media archaeology and the cultural studies Anglo-American style of focusing on content, users and representations.” Indeed, Wellbery (1990: ix) describes the media historical approach of Friedrich A.

1 Thanks to Professor Alexa Robertson of Stockholm University for pointing out the importance of media archaeology following the oral presentation of this chapter during the Second ReDICO E-Co-Conference “Cosmopolitanism in a Postdigital, Postmigrant Europe, and Beyond”.

Kittler as a type of “post-hermeneutic criticism”², while Parikka (2011: 59–60), writing chiefly in relation to the German media scholar Wolfgang Ernst, sees media archaeology in similar terms as a non-interpretive “anti-hermeneutics”.

Yet, this division into something resembling a “German” materialist approach and an “Anglophone” Cultural Studies oriented towards text-interpretation in the widest sense, is surely overly simplistic. Siegfried Zielinski (1986: 37–39) – generally seen as one of the leading figures of German media archaeology – is actually in full agreement with Raymond Williams, one of the founders of the field of Anglophone Cultural Studies, in his doctoral thesis on the history of the video cassette and, like Williams, believes that television needs to be seen as a social process, as part of technological and socio-cultural developments. Writing about the internet of the 1990s, Zielinski (1999: 291) is of the opinion, despite the multimodal nature of the internet, that “text clearly dominates.” Thus, Anglophone Cultural Studies also engage with material aspects of context and German-language Media History is not exactly anti-textual. Indeed, the German scholar Hartmut Winkler (1997: 55), in his media theory of the computer, even suggested – in the late 1990s – that the interconnection of computers would result in the re-invigoration of text, in a potentially universal “Datenuniversum”.

Thus, textual-interpretive and material-contextual approaches to internet histories are not necessarily easy to untangle. Probably the most important work of a textual-oriented approach to internet histories has come from Niels Brügger. A large part of Brügger’s work has dealt with the area of web history, seeing this as an aspect of internet history and wider Internet Studies (Brügger, 2009: 115; Brügger, 2012: 753). He (Brügger, 2009: 115) has sought to theorize web history and website history, including what he calls the constituent components of websites (Brügger, 2009: 116) and the many (textual) “strata” of the web in general (Brügger, 2012: 753–754), while questions relating to web historiography (Brügger, 2012: 755) and web archiving (Brügger, 2009: 116, 122; and Brügger, 2012: 757–759) have also remained central.

More recently Brügger (2016: 1064) has engaged with the nexus of the web, social media and mobile media. A further monograph has re-visited web archival and historiographical issues and views the “archived web” as “a semiotic, textual system” that tells us something about the past but that also requires a “broad perspective”, including “cultural, social, political, [and] technological” context (Brügger, 2018: 7–8). Brügger (2018: 5) also argues for the importance of “digitality”, which he sees as the manner in which a digital medium is constituted as a media artifact and “as a textual phenomenon, in the broad sense of the word *textual* (original italics)”, as digital media are not “necessarily digital in the same way.” Thus, while contextual issues are

2 Winthrop-Young and Wutz (1999: xx) see the early work of Kittler as engaging in a type of Foucauldian discourse analysis, focusing on exclusionary logics.

certainly not ignored, web history is oriented towards the archiving and interpretation of large amounts of (originally) digital text.

Discursive Internet Histories

Another orientation within internet histories diverges from directly examining the internet itself – however one wishes to view this – and engages with the layers of meaning imposed upon the internet, or aspects of the internet, as a collectively understood technological and socio-cultural phenomenon. Methodologically, such internet histories have drawn from a variety of historiographical strands including discourse history, historical semantics, conceptual history, and intellectual history, while some approaches have also been indebted to social scientific methodologies. The central questions here relate to how collective meanings are generated, where these are to be found and indeed how such meanings may be analyzed and depicted.

Discursive internet histories have viewed a variety of aspects and contexts. Fred Turner's (2006) monograph *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, examining Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth Network magazine and catalogue from the late 1960s, is also an intellectual history of digital utopianism and early U.S. imaginaries of the internet, while for example Craig Jarvis (2022) has more recently examined the anarchist and countercultural ideas behind what he calls the mid-1990s “cyberpunk ideology”. Matthew Allen (2012: 261) has criticized the influence of the “discourse of versions” which, he argues, has become the dominant mode of popularly understanding the history of the internet, suggesting that “web 2.0 bears meaning only in comparison to an imagined previous period.” More recently, Miltner and Gerrard (2022) have examined the changing discourse in relation to understandings of the social media platform MySpace.

Further authors have used oral history methods together with discursive historical approaches and have examined nostalgia as a dominant discourse through which early internet users have viewed their own prior usage (Driscoll, 2020). Others have viewed the mid-1990s discourse surrounding the internet, with a clear nod to Raymond Williams, as a “structure of feeling” (Streeter, 2017). Hösl (2019), utilizing Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* or history of concepts method, has traced the changing contours of the meaning given to the term internet itself within selected German media publications over a thirty-year period.

The discursive orientation is, therefore, a varied and important strand within internet histories, shedding light on popular and widely shared understandings of the internet, and/or aspects of the internet.

Internet Histories as Microhistories of Discontinuities

In many ways all internet histories have necessarily become microhistories, as no one would now seriously attempt to write a history of all aspects of the vast global-spanning complexity of the internet. A trend, however, may be noticed by which discontinuities within internet histories – aspects which came to an often sudden end – have aroused interest due to both their uniqueness and their possible influence on later and more fully realized aspects of the internet. This orientation may also be seen as congruent with certain orientations within German media archaeology.

Kerssens (2020: 33) has argued for a “legacy systems” perspective as the “theoretical fundament [sic] for a genealogical understanding of internet history” as opposed to what he calls a “legacy perspective” which traces “the historical origins of *the* (original italics) Internet to establish lineages of continuity that demonstrate how American pasts still operate in and affect our internetworking present.” His (Kerssens, 2020: 33) approach would attend to the “discontinuities of internet histories” and “the historical conditions of possibility that gave birth to now lost, forgotten and obsolete networks”, seeing the history of the internet also as “a legacy of European pasts.” This is a history, thus, of possible alternative paths. A micro-historical approach to discontinuities may also challenge preconceptions regarding notions of media and social media – also in North America – as Stevenson (2016) has shown in his micro-history of *Hotwired*, the web-only publication of *Wired* magazine.

This approach retains many parallels with a media archaeological history. As Parikka (2011: 54) has written, media archaeology has often “been closer to media genealogy: writing counter-histories of such practises, ideas and contexts which are not included in mainstream film and media histories.” Siegfried Zielinski (2006: 34) sees this as an “anarchaeology of media” centring on “a collection of curiosities”, by which he means “finds from the rich history of seeing, hearing, and combining using technical means”, aspects which point “beyond the meaning or function of their immediate context or origin”, and from which we may learn something relating to wider media questions. Counter-histories and “curiosities”, thus, exist beyond the dominant continuities of mainstream media and internet reality, from which scholars may learn more about adopted and dominant realities which have become the mainstream.

Beyond the U.S.-Centric Perspective

The first histories of the internet, especially Abbate’s (1999) important early monograph, centred on North America and the development of early internet technology in the U.S. military and U.S. and Canadian universities, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for internet histories to acquire a wider cultural context. Indeed, in the introduction to the first issue of the leading internet history jour-

nal *Internet Histories: Digital Technology, Culture and Society*, the editors (Brügger et al, 2017: 6) emphasize explicitly the need to “look beyond a sometimes U.S.-centric history and to broaden the scope”; a point also underscored by Turner (2017) and Abbate (2017) in the same issue. Indeed, many of the first German-language internet histories (Bunz, 2008; Schmitt, 2016) also centred on the United States, the development of early Arpanet internet technologies and the internet’s “arrival” from North America.

There have, thus, been numerous calls for a movement away from a U.S.-centric approach to internet histories, as “important gaps remain” (Tréguer, 2017: 8) in the internet histories of many contexts worldwide. While internet histories have still to fully engage with some global regions, there have definitely been advances in the extension of the perspective, with, for example, studies of the professionalization of web culture in France (Schafer & Thierry, 2016), a history of the early internet in the Soviet Union (Peters, 2016), an examination of “revolutionary cybernetics” in 1970s Chile (Medina, 2014), and a transnational history of global wi-fi connectivity (Rikitiaskaia, 2022). In the *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories* there are chapters, for example, on the history of the internet in Israel (John, 2017), Mexico (Gutiérrez, 2017), Poland and Estonia (Kamińska-Korolczuk & Kihewska, 2017), Japan (McLelland, 2017), China (Yu, 2017), Papua New Guinea (Logan & Suwamaru, 2017), and Portuguese-speaking Africa (Salgado, 2017), among other (localized) “global internet histories”.

While the U.S. legacy should not constitute the sole strand of internet histories, it still remains greatly important, however. Röhr (2021) has shown how elements of a dual narrative approach may be taken in his history of the arrival of internet technologies to West Germany in the 1970s and the 1980s, seeing this as a trans-Atlantic negotiation process involving, on the West German side, decentralized communities of enthusiasts (such as the Chaos Computer Club from Hamburg), and centralized state and federal authorities (from the areas of telephone communications, the postal service, and the televisual media). An approach incorporating the study of U.S. legacies in local contexts coupled with localized discourses and discontinuities may provide an innovative contextual avenue.

Critical Internet Studies as a Basis for Internet Histories?

‘Critical Internet Studies’ may provide elements of a unifying orientation from which internet histories could also draw inspiration, with critical internet histories combining a material-contextual and text-interpretive approach with a heightened sensitivity towards power relations in both material and textual internet-based contexts. Such an approach would be close to Zielinski’s (1986: 27) theses regarding an early vision of an integrative techno-cultural history of television and also con-

gruent with his (Zielinski, 1999: 20) later vision of a media history concentrating on “the materiality of the triadic relationship of technology-culture-subject.”

Hunsinger (2020) has set out a vision of Critical Internet Studies that, he believes, should always remain conscious of two things: The very real materiality of the internet, and its use in the generation and rapid distribution of meaning. Thus, he firstly highlights the necessity of viewing critically the materialities of the internet and the power relations inscribed within this technology, “its software and hardware and those owning and regulating it” (Hunsinger, 2020: 273). Secondly, Critical Internet Studies is also inherently textual, he believes, and attends to the meaning frameworks that are central to the internet; “the discourses, ideologies, social imaginaries and fictums” and “the spheres of meaning generation and distribution” which is “one of the primary modes in which the Internet operates” (Hunsinger, 2020: 273–274). But relations of power reflected in the multitude of texts produced in internet communicative contexts also remain central to Critical Internet Studies as a methodological perspective and should be central to critical internet histories. As Hunsinger (2020: 274) writes: “Regarding utterances, as the Internet is a medium of utterances, Critical Internet Studies has a responsibility to ask the perpetual question of ‘in whose interest?’ or ‘who benefits’ from the actions, policies, or utterances.”

2. Platformization

Methodological reflections relating to platform history as a “sub-genre” of internet histories is central to this chapter, but before engaging further with this historical-methodological discussion, we need to firstly engage with the scientific discourse surrounding platforms and platformization. Indeed, it has become clear that this discourse has become central to internet studies, as the “internet” – in terms of its inclusions and exclusions, the organization of software, and the structures of textuality contained within it – should now be seen, it is here argued, as a patchwork of, at times competing, platforms.

The dominating structure of the internet, including both the web and mobile app landscape, is indeed now the “platform”. According to Kenny and Zysman (2016, no page numbers), “the term ‘platform’ simply points to a set of online digital arrangements whose algorithms serve to organize and structure economic and social activity”, while “in a sense, the Internet itself is the foundational platform, with Google as its catalogueer.” A vast variety of platforms structure the internet across potentially a wide series of devices. These include for example social media, app stores, online market-places, payment services, gig economy platforms, search engines, communication services, and streaming platforms. Gillespie (2010: 348) details how YouTube first began describing itself as a “platform” in the late 2000s and how the term gained currency from then on. According to the author (Gillespie, 2010:

348), the “discursive positioning” of the term was ultimately successful, as it was “specific enough to mean something, and vague enough to work across multiple venues for multiple reasons.”

Helmond (2015: 1) was the first author to define the phenomenon of ‘platformization’ which she saw as “the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and its consequences.” The increased algorithmic underpinning of online activity has become evident (Kenny & Zysman, 2016), which Hallinan and Striphos (2016: 119) view in terms of a new “algorithmic culture.” Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276) have also emphasized how “the ‘platform metaphor’ actually obscures the power potential of the platforms themselves”, which do not “just facilitate socio-economic, cultural, and political interaction, but very much organize and steer this interaction.”

Platformization should also be seen as part of an inherently postdigital process, understood in general terms here as the loss of meaning accorded to the dichotomy between the digital world and the material world which should now be viewed as intertwined spheres,³ as platformization not only facilitates the moulding of online interactions, but also penetrates material reality and facilitates the re-moulding and re-structuring of the material realities of distinct lifeworlds. Poell, Nieborg and van Dijck (2019) have advanced thinking on platformization as a postdigital phenomenon by suggesting a two-pronged definition. From Software Studies, Business Studies and -political economy perspectives, platformization is understood as “the penetration of the infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life” (Poell, Nieborg & van Dijck, 2019: 5). From a Cultural Studies perspective, they (Poell, Nieborg & van Dijck, 2019: 6) view platformization as “the reorganisation of cultural practice and imaginations around platforms.”

The postdigital impact of platformization, as a moulding and restructuring process beyond but also intertwined with the digital, is especially evident in relation to cultural artifacts, with Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276) arguing that “cultural production is progressively ‘contingent on’, that is, *dependent* (original italics) on a select group of powerful digital platforms,” in the West at least meaning here Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft. Davis (2020: 84) has built directly on these arguments and has shown, by focussing on Amazon, how the platform has changed many aspects of the publishing industry, arguing that this has involved five concurrent processes: resorting (platforms acting as cultural mediators and tastemakers); transmutation (the aesthetics of form changing to more easily fit a platform); enclosure (bringing new practices into the market, such as public displays of reading habits); surveillance (a data-oriented activity of all cultural platforms); and capture

3 For a more extensive overview of the theoretical postdigital discussion, see Lenehan (2022: 14–16).

(seeking to keep users on the platform for as long as possible). As Davis (2020: 84) notes, these processes do not “somehow replace the human but intersect with human factors in a hybrid post-digital environment where digital and human practices intermingle.” It is important to also note that different platform logics with different postdigital effects and interconnected with various cultural contexts and histories exist world-wide, and this is not just a ‘western’ phenomenon (Davis & Xiao, 2021: 104–105).

The platform, as a digital-informational structure, now also has a fundamental and inherently postdigital role in the global economy. As Cohen (2017: 135) emphasizes “the platform is not simply a new business model, a new social technology, or a new infrastructural formation (although it is also all of those)”, rather it constitutes now “the core organizational form of the emerging informational economy.” Platforms have clearly changed the institutional and working dynamics of the media industry (Ihlebaek & Sundet, 2023), with a “growing macro-trend of platform dependence occurring across the sector” (Meese, 2023: 105), as well as helping to shape new contexts of digital teaching and learning (Garcia & Nichols, 2021: 15). While there are some continuities to be seen between “platform capitalism” and earlier forms of e-commerce (Langley & Leyson, 2017: 17), platforms have also contributed to massively changing many aspects of the forms and institutionalizations of work. As Pasquale (2016: 314) notes, according to one of the most dominant narratives of understanding in relation to platform capitalism, a platform-oriented “deregulated gig economy” is a path towards “precarity, prone to condemn laborers to insecure and poorly paid conditions.”

Indeed, a number of extensive studies have engaged with platformization in relation to the changing world of work (e.g. Huws, Spencer & Coates, 2019; Woodcock, 2021), in what Woodcock (2021: 85), in his study of the platforms Uber and Deliveroo, has termed “an emerging new global composition of platform work.” Zukerfeld (2022: 100) has suggested a practical and convincing “typology of platform-related work” that distinguishes firstly between “work behind and work *through* (original italics) capitalist platforms”, while also highlighting of course the widespread existence of “non-capitalist platformisation”, including “co-operatives, commons-based peer production and state agencies.” Thus, platforms and platformization are central to contemporary phenomena inherent to economic globalization, as well as dominating the infrastructure of the internet, and remain postdigital driving forces that increasingly mould the materiality of the lifeworld.

Platformization has also transformed perceptions of the potentiality of the internet, as well as the realities of usage. According to ten Oever (2021: 349, 345) what he calls the “sociotechnical Internet architecture” has gone from being perceived in the early 1990s as “an engine for innovation”, “an information highway” and “a tool for democratization”, to being now viewed as a contested space in which power is accumulated. As Hesmondhalgh et al. (2023: 297) state, “the internet infrastructure

that underpins so much contemporary media and communication” was framed by its developers as a “common resource available to all” “enabling the creation of an international network of networks, based on values of openness.” They (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023: 301) also believe that the “role played by digital platforms in ‘closing down’ this openness” seems “poorly understood.” Yet, authors such as Cohen (2017: 143) have already theorized the role and function of platforms within the internet landscape and the global economy, seeing platforms as representing “infrastructure-based strategies for introducing friction into networks” and the internet, formerly called the “network of networks”, is becoming a “network of platforms.” Platforms “supply infrastructures that facilitate particular types of interactions”, but also “represent strategies for bounding networks and privatizing and controlling infrastructures” (Cohen, 2017: 144).

Thus, platforms represent the bordering of the internet, the creation of at times exclusive and ‘walled’ micro worlds existing on the wider internet, often in an unsystematic way, and not necessarily connected with other platforms. The contemporary internet is, thus, a (partly) disjointed and haphazard patchwork of platforms, some aspects of which may indeed be interconnected, but this structure does not in any way warrant the term ‘network’ anymore, which is suggestive of a systematic and interconnected structure. Systematic interconnection is now no longer an aspect of the wider internet. This is conducted, rather, *within* platforms.

3. Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and Platform History

Plantin et al. (2018: 295) have argued that the area of digital infrastructure studies – as an aspect of science and technology studies dealing with software and information science – should be brought together with platform studies in a merging of technological and media studies, bringing together an orientation that looks towards the study of internet structure and an orientation dealing with the study of meaning arising from these structures. As we have already seen, Cohen (2017: 144) has convincingly argued that platforms may also be essentially perceived as bounding and bordering structures which bring friction and, thus, exclusion onto the internet. It is here argued that platforms, because of this digital bordering, may also be viewed as a spatialization, as an institutionalization of the internet. The creation of at times exclusive digital spaces remain analogous, in many ways, to the creation of exclusive material spaces, such as nation-states and corporations, while digital spaces are also intertwined with and (partly) constituent of such lifeworld materialities and spatialities.

Indeed, authors have increasingly seen platforms as structures and agents of globalization, with Cohen (2017: 135) even arguing that “the platform is now key” to globalized economic interactions, as “platforms do not enter or expand markets;

they replace them” becoming central agents in the emerging “informational economy”. While in the 19th century corporations emerged as “a means of orchestrating economic activity and organizing markets”, in the 21st century, platforms appear to take on this role (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). According to Canarello et al. (2022: 2333–2334), the third wave of globalization commenced in 1989 as the Cold War began to lose relevance and technology advanced, while other economists – connected to Citi Group – (Citi GPS, 2023: 9) believe that “we are now entering a third phase of globalization based on trade in services, as remote work technologies are becoming increasingly good substitutes for face-to-face interaction.” According to Kenney and Zysman (2016): “Platforms and the cloud, as an essential part of what has been called the ‘third globalization’, reconfigure globalization itself.” Thus platforms are central contemporary processes of globalization.

But how may the relationship between globalization and cosmopolitanism be configured? According to Delanty (2009: 250), globalization “creates a world of enhanced connections” which are not in themselves the “cosmopolitan condition”, but globalization establishes “preconditions for its emergence.” Delanty (2009: 251) writes: “Thus where globalization generally invokes an externally induced notion of social change, such as the global market, cosmopolitanism understood in terms of immanent transcendence refers to an internally induced social change whereby societies and social agents undergo transformations in their moral and political self-understanding as they respond to global changes.” This is an understanding of cosmopolitanism as personal and collective/societal transformation due to increased and wider contacts via the preconditions and structures of globalization; a “transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance” (Delanty, 2008: 218). Thus, cosmopolitanism occurs (Delanty, 2008: 219) “through deliberation”, as a “self-problematization and as learning from the other.”

Platforms, as digital globalizing structures, may also act as agents of contact and thus as agents of cosmopolitanism, understood in the Delanty (2008; 2009) sense. As already discussed, platforms create boundaries within the internet, but also create new forms of interaction – if of course, however, solely on the platforms’ terms – which may also be meaningful and may retain transformative characteristics of cosmopolitanism. Cohen (2017: 149) writes that “platform users can more easily find and connect with others who share their hobbies and passions, their political affiliations and goals, their racial, religious, or gender identities, their affiliations.” Thus platform users may engage in “networked collective action” and “new forms of collective meaning-making”, as well as “new capacities for rapid organization of mass protests, such as those of the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements” (Cohen, 2017: 149); or for that matter the events of 6 January 2021. Cohen is describing here essentially internet-based solidarity-building (see e.g. Hall, 2019): A form of “postdigital cosmopolitanism” (Lenahan, 2022) or indeed more accurately here a

form of platform cosmopolitanism, arising from the inherent postdigitality of platformization, seen here in terms of a type of digital corporality.

So, where does this leave us in relation to our original discussion regarding internet histories and the platform? Approaches to platform history have generally been in terms of a chronological narrative detailing software and infrastructural development, with an orientation towards platforms as a type of extended text. Thus, Brügger (2015) has written a short history of Facebook as a series of extended digital-media texts, Burgess and Green (2018) have charted the development of YouTube, while Burgess and Baym (2020) have written a “biography” of the platform Twitter.

But what if we view platforms as the spatialization and bordering of the internet, and platformization as largely analogous to wider (material) globalization, as well as being a central facet of globalization? An engagement with the historiography of globalization can point us towards new approaches and methodologies for writing platform history and, indeed, critical internet histories. Engel and Middell (2005: 21) have suggested a new way of writing the history of globalization that looks at “Bruchzonen der Globalisierung” (critical junctures of globalization) understood as the “historischen Räume, Momente und Arena von Globalisierung, [...] in denen um die Herstellung *neuer* Raumbezüge gerungen wird” (historical spaces, moments and arenas of globalization [...] in which the creation of *new* spatialities and spatial reference points are struggled over).⁴ They suggest, thus, a new history of globalization concentrating on (new) territorializations, re-territorializations, bordering processes, and territorial and spatial change.

A new method of internet history as platform history is, thus, argued for here which would examine the critical junctures of platformization: The (historical) spaces, moments and arenas in which platforms, as spatializations of the internet, are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued for economic, political or cultural reasons. If platforms and platformization are seen as central to the internet understood as a patchwork of platforms, then such an approach to internet histories would also chart shifting (potentially) global structures which also provide the possibility and potentiality of meaningful online connections and thus cosmopolitanism, understood as transformation due to such connections (Delanty, 2008; 2009). This type of approach would also consist, therefore, of the historical charting of the shifting internet contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanisms. Possible topics could include here – from a western perspective – the movement from MySpace to Facebook (see: Miltner & Gerrard, 2022), the rise of TikTok, PayPal and Uber, and the movement away from Twitter/X and towards platforms such as Mastodon, BlueSky and Threads. Such a platform history would also chart the very real and material dynamics of change which buttress global media power relations and, indeed, economic and cultural globalization.

4 All translations by the author, except where stated. Original italics.

Conclusion

Barmeyer and Busch (2023: v), in the introduction to their extensive overview of Anglo-German intercultural research, begin by firstly offering a common working definition of one of the most central terms of Intercultural Studies: “The term interculturality is used to describe the process of mutual comprehension among people who belong to different cultures or who ascribe to themselves and to each other different identities that are marked as culturally singular.” This has been, traditionally at least for many years, the central interaction at the nexus of scholarly Intercultural Studies and Intercultural Communication: Person A from “culture” A meets Person B from “culture” B, they look to achieve a sense of mutual understanding creating a “culture” C, an interculture. The German media theorist and historian Zielinski (2006: 7) defines media as “spaces of action for constructed attempts to connect what is separated”, while he (Zielinski, 2006: 34) sees media history sees as “the rich history of seeing, hearing, and combining using technical means.” Viewed in this manner, Media History is also the examination of a series of interactions and attempts at agentive comprehension beyond the act of meeting in material space and solely via technical means – means which connect agents who would otherwise remain unconnected. This is actually where Intercultural Studies and internet histories, as a central aspect of Media History, meet: Media History is therefore the examination of a type of wider interculturality via technical means. Histories of the internet may also be, therefore, histories of interculturality via digital means. The present chapter charts one specific methodological-historiographical approach for the examination of the history of digital interculturalities, an approach expressly embedded in discussions surrounding platformization, postdigitality, and cosmopolitanism. It is hoped that other scholars may engage with this perspective and may also advance the study of digital and internet-based interculturalities, looking for further innovative methodologies.

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