

Workshop

Digital Platforms and Boundary Infrastructures

DFG Collaborative Research Centre Media of Cooperation – Siegen, 02/03 November 2017



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Media technologies like credit card systems, smart meters, collaborative online fora, social media platforms, sensor networks and Internet of Things applications are of growing importance for the question of how socio-material worlds relate with each other. A promising though underestimated approach to study these digital platforms has been formulated early on by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star. In “Sorting Things Out” (1999) they presented a research approach which puts the relation between boundary objects and information infrastructures at its centre. Their approach revealed the manifold “categorical” or “classification work” behind the taken for granted practice of everyday media technologies. Particularly, the notion of “boundary infrastructures” explains how forms of standardization enable certain practices to cross larger levels of scale.

The workshop starts with the assumption that Bowker’s and Star’s methodology offers a hitherto unrealized potential for studying boundary infrastructures as enabling “common ground” for digital practices. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from science and technology studies, media studies, social science and socio-informatics, we attempt to reinvigorate research on the concept of “boundary infrastructures”. Examples of media practices which entail boundary infrastructures might be tagging, commenting, filling out forms, cooperative imaging, programming, software modularization, data mining and the handling of interoperability. Boundary infrastructures provide the usually invisible categorization schemes, filters, lists, repositories, ideal types or terrain definitions or interfaces, statistics, algorithms, buttons, search engines, standards, APIs, and formats that mediate cooperation. In contemporary media culture, media practices tend to create, modify, or repair several boundary infrastructures across different platforms, which in turn sets methodological challenges for all practice-based or praxeographic approaches.

We therefore welcome paper proposals and contributions, which investigate the relationships between digital platforms and boundary infrastructures on a media theoretical, empirical, design-oriented and/or methodological level. We invite you to address one of the following topics:

- *The interrelation between boundary infrastructures and social worlds*: What is the value of boundary infrastructure for communities of practice? What kind of bridges across time and space, between cultural difference and different media may or may not be built (e.g. in the case of “echo-chambers”, or “filter bubbles”)? How are they appropriated and worked-around in different social worlds? What happens if they are modified, changed or if they fall out? What kind of socio-material tensions and conflicts have to be dealt with?
- *Classifications – Standardizations – Certifications*: Which elements, tools, affordances and practices of classifying, standardizing and certifying are characteristic for which kind of digital platform? How are they enacted in practice, i.e. who is classifying, standardizing, certifying whom by what kind of coordinative practice through which kind of boundary infrastructure?
- *Basic Definitions*: What is a digital platform, anyway? When is it (not) a boundary infrastructure? What creates its public, semi-public or non-public character? How does it

relate to the creation of boundary objects? Which list could describe the properties of different boundary infrastructures?

- *Platform Mythologies*: All the world's a platform now, but how can we unmask both social-economical power and cultural valence of platform-based media interaction? How to deal with both large social media corporations, and small-scale activism and "platform cooperativism"? Which parameters are needed for a relational and balanced account of given digital platforms and boundary infrastructures? How to do justice to "residual categories", to people, signs, and objects that "do not fit" into platform-based mediation?

Jointly organized by the SFB "Media of Cooperation" projects A01, A03, A05, B03 and B07.