

Workshop

Digital Platforms and Boundary Infrastructures

DFG Collaborative Research Centre

Media of Cooperation

November 2-3, 2017

Herrengarten 3, 57072 Siegen

Room 217/218; Room 211/212



**MEDIEN DER
KOOPERATION**

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.

Against this backdrop, the workshop investigates the relationships between digital platforms and boundary infrastructures on a media theoretical, empirical, design-oriented and/or methodological level. Bridging topics and questions are:

- *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?

The results of the workshop will be documented in the Collaborative Research Centre's online journal "Media in Action". Participation is free. Please send an email to hendrik.bender@sfb1187.uni-siegen.de to register in advance.

Preliminary Program

Thursday, November 2

14.00 All Things Boundary? Objects, Infrastructures, Publics

- Mundo Yang/Sebastian Gießmann/Wolfgang Reißmann (Siegen):
On Boundary Publics
- Carolin Gerlitz (Siegen):
Response from a Platform Studies Point of View

14.45 Accounting for Value(s): Facebook Revisited

- Elizabeth van Couvering (Karlstad):
*Visual Boundary Infrastructures:
Audience Visualisations as Platform Co-ordination Mechanisms*
- Andreas Birckbak (Copenhagen):
*Re-embedded Participation?
Inquiring the Political Work of Facebook's Algorithmic Standardizations*
- Moderators: Wolfgang Reißmann/Hendrik Bender

16.00 Coffee

16.30 Setting Up Boundary Infrastructures: Practice, Iteration and Reflexivity

- Dave Randall (Siegen):
Moving to the Digital: Some Problems and Pitfalls
- Peter Tolmie (Siegen):
The Situated Crafting of a Platform for Coordination in Breast Cancer Care
- Moderators: Marén Schorch/Claudia Müller

17.45 Intersections Between STS and Platform Studies

- Jean-Christophe Plantin (LSE London):
The Question of Power in Platform Studies and Infrastructure Studies

- Moderator: Carolin Gerlitz

18.45 **Wrapping Up**

19.30 Conference Dinner

Friday, November 3

9.00 **Data Activism and Politics**

- Stefania Milan (Amsterdam): *tba*
- Jonathan Gray (King's College London):
Between the Worlds: Infrastructures, Standards and Platforms of Fiscal Data
- Moderators: Sigrid Baringhorst/Mundo Yang

10.15 Coffee

10.30 **Databases and Platforms**

- Marcus Burkhardt (Siegen):
*Databases as/versus Boundary Infrastructures:
Reflections from the Early Histories of Digital Information Systems*
- Anne Helmond (Amsterdam)/Fernando van der Vlist (Siegen/Amsterdam):
Platform Boundary Resources and Strategic Permeability
- Moderator: Sebastian Gießmann

11.45 **Wrapping Up/Panel Discussion with all Presenters**

13.00 Lunch

WEBSITE

<https://www.mediacoop.uni-siegen.de/de/veranstaltungen/workshop-digital-platforms-and-boundary-infrastructures>

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